

Botswana

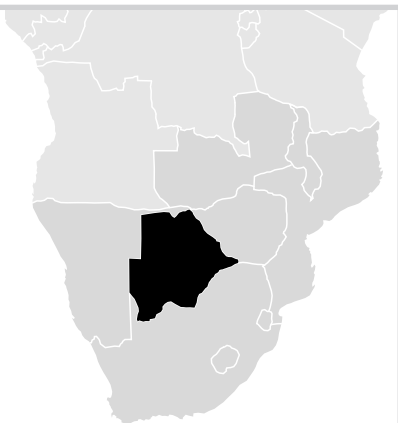
Landlocked Botswana offers extremes of environment and diversity of landscape, the total sum of which is like nothing else in Africa. Roughly the same size as Kenya, France or Texas, Botswana is almost covered with scrub brush and savanna grasslands, which together facilitate vast migrations of wildlife that have become a rare occurrence elsewhere on the continent. The country is also interspersed with pockets of ecological wonderment, from the sunbaked salt pans of the Makgadikgadi superlake, to the emerald-green waterways of the Okavango Delta.

Of course, this is only half the picture, for Botswana is truly an African political and economic success story. After achieving democratic rule in 1966, Botswana was discovered to have three of the world's richest diamond-bearing formations within its borders. Today, the country enjoys economic stability and a high standard of education and health care, which, with the exception of South Africa, is unequalled elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. Botswana is also one of the most predominantly urban societies in the world, and providing vocational and professional jobs has become one of the highest priorities on the government's agenda.

However, this modern veneer belies the fact that much of Botswana remains a country for the intrepid – not to mention relatively wealthy – traveller. A largely roadless wilderness of seemingly endless spaces, Botswana demands time, effort and, above all else, lots of cash to enjoy it to its full. But, Botswana is truly the Africa of your dreams, and with the full complement of predators and prey on display, it never ceases to amaze first-timers and seasoned safari vets alike.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 582,000 sq km
- **Capital** Gaborone
- **Country code** ☎ 267
- **Famous for** Okavango Delta, Chobe National Park, the Kalahari
- **Languages** English, Setswana
- **Money** Pula (P)
- **Phrases** *Dumela?* (How are you?); *dankie* (thank you)
- **Population** 1.64 million



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Okavango Delta** (p98) Glide through the watery expanses in a mokoro, a traditional dugout canoe.
- **Chobe National Park** (p92) Spot the Big Five (lions, leopards, buffalos, elephants, rhinos) at Botswana's premier safari park.
- **Central Kalahari Game Reserve** (p108) Test the limits of your survival instincts on a 4WD camping expedition.
- **Makgadikgadi Pans & Nxai Pan National Park** (p90) Follow the herds of migrating zebras and wildebeests over this baobab-dotted salt-pan complex.
- **Off the beaten track** (p105) Have a rugged and remote safari experience in the Moremi Game Reserve.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Botswana's tourist highlight is the Okavango Delta (p98), and if you have only a few days, this is where you'll want to focus. Choose Maun (p98) or the Okavango Panhandle (p107) as your base and organise a mokoro trip through the wetlands, followed with a wildlife-viewing trip through Moremi Game Reserve (p105).
- **One Week** Combine your visit to the delta with a safari through Chobe National Park (p92), one of the world's top safari experiences. Either go overland through the rugged interior of the park, or cruise (or boat) along the wildlife-rich riverfront.
- **One Month** With a month (and lots of money), you can hire a 4WD or link in with a reputable safari company and see the best of the country: do a mokoro trip in the delta (see the boxed text, p104), safari in Moremi and Chobe, cruise on the Okavango Panhandle and explore the furthest reaches of the Kalahari (p108).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Although it straddles the Tropic of Capricorn, Botswana experiences extremes in both temperature and weather. In the winter (late May to August), days are normally clear, warm and sunny, and nights are cool to cold. Wildlife never wanders far from water sources so sightings are more predictable than in the wetter summer season. This is also the time of European, North American and – most importantly – South African school holidays,

HOW MUCH?

- **One-day mokoro trip** P500
- **Ostrich-eggshell bracelet** P35
- **Stalk of sugar cane** P3-5
- **Foreign newspaper** P10-15
- **Night in a budget hotel** P175

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** P10
- **1L of bottled water** P5
- **Bottle of beer** P7
- **Souvenir T-shirt** P55
- **Snack** P9

so some areas can be busy, especially between mid-July and mid-September. In summer (October to April), wildlife is harder to spot and rains can render sandy roads impassable. This is also the time of the highest humidity and the most stifling heat; daytime temperatures of over 40°C are common. See p745 for more information on the climate in Southern Africa.

HISTORY

For a detailed account of the precolonial history of the whole Southern African region, including Botswana's precolonial history, see p32.

The Boers & the British

In 1836, feeling pressured by the British in the British Cape Colony, about 20,000 Boers set out on the Great Trek across the Vaal River into Botswana and Zulu territory, staking out new farms for themselves and displacing local villagers.

Before establishing trade links with the Dutch and Portuguese, the Boers set up their own free state, ruling the Transvaal Republic – a move ratified by the British in the Sand River Convention of 1852. This effectively placed the Botswana under the rule of the so-called new South African Republic and a period of rebellion and heavy-handed oppression ensued. Following heavy human and territorial losses, the Botswana chiefs petitioned the British government for protection from the Boers.