

# Destination Botswana & Namibia

## FAST FACTS

### Population:

Botswana 1.64 million;

Namibia 2.1 million

### Area:

Botswana 582,000 sq km;

Namibia 825,000 sq km

### Country code:

Botswana ☎ 267;

Namibia ☎ 264

### Capital:

Botswana Gaborone;

Namibia Windhoek

### Languages:

Botswana English,

Tswana;

Namibia English,

Afrikaans, German,

Owambo, Kavango,

Herero, Khoikhoi (Nama/

Damara), San dialects

### Money:

Botswana pula (P);

Namibia Namibian

dollar (NS)

### Phrases:

Botswana *Dumela?*

(How are you?),

*dankie* (thank you);

Namibia *Howzit?*

(How are you?)

### Famous for:

Botswana Okavango

Delta, Chobe National

Park, the Kalahari;

Namibia Namib Desert,

Kalahari, Etosha Pan

Botswana and Namibia are two of Africa's hidden gems, and very much remain frontier realms for intrepid travellers to discover. Here you will find the oldest rust-red desert in the world, quintessential African landscapes teeming with wildlife, preternaturally blue skies stretching above vast open horizons, and silent spaces where emptiness and desolation can quickly become overwhelming. And, unlike more well-trafficked African destinations, tourism in Botswana and Namibia is not the jaded experience of vans packed to the brim with camera-toting tourists, but rather an adrenaline-soaked, hair-raising affair of off-road bush driving amid some of the wildest parks on the continent.

Together, these two countries offer extremes of environment and diversity of landscape, the total sum of which is like nothing else in Africa. From the sun-baked salt pans of the Makgadikgadi super-lake, and the rolling sea of red dunes stretching across the Namib, to the emerald-green waterways of the Okavango Delta, and the stark desolation of the rocky beaches lining the Skeleton Coast, Botswana and Namibia together comprise one of the most ecologically diverse corners of Africa. This defining geography fosters one of the largest animal congregations on the planet, alongside one of the lowest human population densities, a rare combination that yields unequalled opportunities for wildlife watching.

But this is barely half the picture, for Botswana and Namibia are also two of Africa's model nations, no longer fledgling democracies, but modern mineral-rich economies at the vanguard of the continent's future. Four decades of progressive leadership combined with significant mining investment have made Botswana one of the powerhouse economies of Africa. Despite being Africa's youngest nation, having only achieved independence from South Africa in 1990, Namibia isn't too far behind as one of the world's leading exporters of uranium, silver and other semi-precious metals.

Diamonds are a girl's best friend, a fact that has generated enormous sums of wealth for both Botswana and Namibia. Owing to large tracts of alluvial diamond deposits, both governments in partnership with the De Beers diamond company have capitalised on their mineral wealth. However, given fears that the region's diamond seams may run out in the decades to come, the rapidly developing tourism industry is becoming ever more important. As the world turns its eyes to South Africa in 2010 for the continent's first ever hosting of the FIFA World Cup, the hope is that football fans will cross borders, and inject a hefty bit of tourism revenue into neighbouring countries.

To date, the Botswana government has been able to afford a sensitive policy of 'high cost-low volume tourism', and as a result has retained some of Africa's largest tracts of wilderness. However, as economic pressures increase, it remains to be seen how the future of the industry will be managed, especially in regards to the mounting environmental problems facing threatened areas such as the Okavango Delta. For more than twenty years now, local interests have sought to dam up the flowing lifeline of the delta, though the pursuit of irrigated farmland could come at a heavy price.

Namibia too has had its share of environmental roadblocks over the years, most notably the government's failed attempts at damming up Epupa Falls

in the heart of the Himba homelands. However, the country has benefited greatly from the presence of the US Agency for International Development Aid (Usaid), which has long supported Namibia's network of community-based conservancies. A recent audit showed that Namibia's 30-plus registered conservancies earned more than US\$2 million, compared with just US\$100,000 in 1995. The hope is that as more of these conservancies begin to make real money, struggling local communities can finally become self-sufficient.

Unfortunately, good relations are vital to the success of the South African Development Community (SADC), and not everyone is being a good neighbour these days. The political and economic instability in Zimbabwe is negatively impacting every regional issue from tourism to trade, and the fallout is hitting Botswana especially hard. Illegal immigration has spiralled out of control along Zimbabwe's porous border, and rising crime rates and local resentment over competition for limited jobs has turned Botswana into Mugabe's staunchest African critic. Conversely, during San Nujoma's tenure as Namibian president, he sided with Zimbabwe and President Mbeki in South Africa on virtually every issue.

For current Namibian President Hifikepunye Pohamba, Nujoma's hand-picked successor, stepping up the expropriation of white-owned farms in an attempt to narrow the economic divide has been a priority. However, many argue that Namibia's problems do not lie in the redistribution of farming land. As a desert country, more than 50% of the country depends on the agricultural industry for their livelihood, yet it remains the least profitable area of Namibia's largely mining-based economy. It has also been argued that the government's efforts would be better spent investing in manufacturing and light industry, though shortages of skilled workers and qualified personnel make progress in these areas slow going, and the pending energy crisis looms large on the economic horizon.

While Botswana and Namibia both have had their fair share of challenges, the single biggest problem facing sub-Saharan Africa is the catastrophic impact of HIV/AIDS, which threatens to undermine the progress the region has made in the post-colonial era. No longer just a health issue, but an economic obstacle as well, the infection strikes at those in their most productive years, while tackling the virus effectively puts a huge strain on government resources. In response to the epidemic, it has been argued by regional leaders that additional foreign investment is necessary to enable governments to step up public health education and to improve medical infrastructure.

Although Namibia is rated as a middle-income country, and is therefore not eligible for certain financial aid or debt relief, this image is badly skewed as most of the wealth remains in the hands of only 5% of the population. In fact, the majority of its sparse population lives in dire poverty on less than US\$2 per day, and corruption is an unfortunate feature of the political landscape. HIV/AIDS is rapidly cutting a swath through the population.

In Botswana, the government does not take HIV/AIDS lightly, and in 2002 it became the first country in the world to offer antiretroviral treatment free of charge to its citizens. In addition, the government has thrown its weight behind educational programs, and speaks frequently and publicly on the threat infection poses to the general wellbeing of the country. In the country's mission statement, Vision 2016, the government has pledged to halt the further transmission of HIV/AIDS by 2016. It's a lofty goal perhaps, but Botswana's progressive policies have helped to temper the public denial of disease that marked the tenure of South African President Mbeki.

In the years ahead, it will be the young generations of Botswana and Namibia that must rise to the challenge of maintaining their countries'

**'more than 50% of the country depends on the agricultural industry for their livelihood'**

continued economic growth and social development. Already Botswana and Namibia are some of the most predominantly urban societies in the world, and providing vocational and professional jobs is one of the highest priorities on the political agenda. The future will also continue to test the resilience of both Botswana's and Namibia's national unity, a vitally important component of the peace that has typified both countries since independence.

# Getting Started

With a human population of less than two million, most of it concentrated along the far eastern border, vast tracts of landlocked Botswana are occupied by wildlife alone. At the best of times, the country truly seems to stretch for millions of miles, unfurling its natural blessings of endless vistas and vast open spaces with every bend of the road.

Not to be outdone by its neighbour, Namibia is a land of extremes, defined by desolate landscapes and shaped by a harsh climate. The country is also home to some of the world's grandest national parks, ranging from the desert plains of the Namib-Naukluft, to the game-rich salt flats of Etosha.

Romantic and unspoiled Botswana and Namibia may be, but you'll need plenty of time and a little bit of cash to fully enjoy them. Got both? You'll be rewarded with some of the most spectacular wildlife viewing this life has to offer. Fortunately, even if you're lacking one or the other, you can easily customise your trip to focus on just a few of the highlights that define these truly world-class travel destinations. For most travellers to Namibia, pre-planning involves reserving a rental car and booking your first couple of nights accommodation in advance.

## WHEN TO GO Botswana

One of the best times to visit is undoubtedly springtime (September to October), when the migrant bird species start appearing, and the country's thorny flora is in full bloom. Weatherwise, September/October happens to be the hottest and most humid time of the year in most of the country.

The flooding of the Okavango Delta from late December through to March (Botswana's summer time) is a time of plenty, although it's one of the worst times to travel. Prolonged rains can render 4WD tracks impassable, and may

See Botswana Climate Charts (p161) for more information.

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- valid travel insurance (p164 and p371).
- driving licence and car documents if driving, along with appropriate car insurance (p175 and p382).
- sunglasses, sun block and a hat.
- a good tent, warm sleeping bag, air mattress and torch (flashlight) if you're planning on doing your own camping.
- a water bottle, purification tablets and a medical kit (p387).
- insect repellent and anti-malarial tablets (p390).
- sturdy walking boots for trekking and sandals or flip-flops.
- binoculars and a camera with a long lens.
- a long-sleeved jacket or fleece for cold desert nights.
- a Leatherman-style multipurpose tool and a compass.
- a universal washbasin plug and an adaptor for electrical appliances.
- a bathing suit for safari lodge swimming pools.
- GPS (with instructions!) if you're planning a 4WD expedition.
- a few extra memory cards for the digital camera.

**DO-IT-YOURSELF SAFARI**

Travelling independently in Africa is always a challenge, but it's an experience that often makes up a large part of the adventure. First things first, you'll need to consider the variables of the weather – heavy rains and long, dry summers have a big impact on driving conditions and, more importantly, on what animals you'll see and where.

Independent 'self-drive' tours are possible in both Botswana and Namibia (see p32), although these are cheaper and more popular in Namibia where any good travel agency can advise on itineraries and sleeping options. Throughout this book we have provided GPS coordinates to help with navigating remote and inaccessible areas.

For more information on travelling in Africa, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's *Read This First: Africa*. Also see the Top Tens boxed text on opposite for some more DIY ideas.

also force the closure of parts of the Chobe National Park and Moremi Game Reserve. Some lodges operating in and around the Okavango, Moremi and Chobe also shut up shop from December to February.

By autumn (March and April), the flood waters have reached the upper delta. Days are clear, dry and sunny, but nights are cold. This is a great time for viewing wildlife as the animals rarely wander far from water sources. As autumn waxes into winter (May to August), the flood waters pass along the delta, usually reaching Maun some time towards the end of June. In the Kalahari, temperatures below freezing are normal at night time, especially in July and August.

One final thing to keep in mind are the busy school holiday periods: about two weeks in April, one month around July and September and two months in December/January.

**Namibia**

Namibia's desert hinterland is dry and arid, although generally, the mountainous Central Plateau (including Windhoek) is a bit cooler than the rest of the country. With 300 days of sunshine a year, there isn't really a 'best' time to visit Namibia. Having said that, the dry season from May to October is a good time for viewing wildlife. During these months you can expect clear, sunny days averaging around 25°C and cold desert nights. However, between June and August, the coastal towns of Swakopmund and Walvis Bay are subject to warm east winds, which often create miserable sandstorm conditions.

There are two rainy seasons in Namibia, the 'little rains' from October to December and the main rainy period from January to April. The latter is characterised by brief showers and occasional thunderstorms. January temperatures in Windhoek can soar up to 40°C, and from December to March, Namib-Naukluft Park and Etosha National Park become very hot, which means that some of the long hiking trails are closed.

In the north, rainfall steadily increases, reaching its maximum of over 600mm per year along the Okavango River, which enjoys a subtropical climate. From January to March, the northeastern rivers of the Caprivi Strip may flood, making some roads either impassable or hard to negotiate.

School holidays are another busy period, and places such as Swakopmund are booked solid over Christmas and Easter.

**COSTS & MONEY****Botswana**

Travelling around Botswana isn't cheap due to the government's 'high cost-low volume' policy. The absolute cheapest way to get around the country is by using public transport, eating locally, camping and arranging a couple

See Namibia Climate Charts (p367) for more information.

of local tours into the wildlife reserves. On this basis, you could get by on about US\$30 to US\$50 per day. The cheapest safaris, on the other hand, are around US\$100 to US\$150 per person per day (sharing).

For most independent travellers aiming to travel on a midrange budget, your single biggest expense will be the hire of a vehicle. A 4WD will set you back around US\$100 to US\$150 per day, with a tank of petrol costing roughly US\$40 to US\$60. Add to this a sprinkling of midrange hotels, restaurant meals and camp entrance fees (US\$30 per person per day), and you'll probably be looking at a daily budget more like US\$200 to US\$250.

For about US\$250 to US\$400 per person, you could book yourself on a pretty good organised safari. Travelling in low season (October to June) and sharing the cost of vehicle hire with other travellers are two ways of reducing some of the costs.

At the top end of the scale, you'll probably be booking yourself on an all-inclusive mobile or fly-in safari. At this level, you're getting the very best that Africa has to offer, and it will set you back at least US\$400 per person per night. For true high rollers, there is virtually no upper limit to the price and glamour of tour packages available in safari-chic Botswana.

## Namibia

It's easier to get around Namibia on a restricted budget. If you're camping or staying in backpacker hostels, cooking your own meals, and hitching or using local minibuses, you could get by on as little as US\$20 to US\$40 per day.

A plausible midrange budget, which would include car hire and B&B, or double accommodation in a mixture of hotels, rest camps and lodges, would be around US\$75 to US\$125. In the upper range, accommodation at hotels, meals in restaurants, escorted tours and possibly fly-in safaris will cost upwards of US\$300 per person per day. In this case, it may be better to prebook a fly-drive or organised tour overseas.

To reach the most interesting parts of Namibia, you'll have to take an organised tour or hire a vehicle. Car hire may be expensive for budget travellers, but if you can muster a group of four people and share costs, you can squeak by on an additional US\$20 to US\$50 per day – that's assuming a daily average of around 200km in a 2WD/4WD vehicle with the least expensive agency, including petrol, tax and insurance. The plus side of a 4WD is that many vehicles are equipped with camping gear.

## TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

For a detailed discussion of environmental issues affecting Botswana and Namibia, see p75 and p228, respectively.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

To track down hard-to-find books try the following online bookstores: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), [www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk), [www.thetravelbookshop.co.uk](http://www.thetravelbookshop.co.uk) and [www.africabookcentre.com](http://www.africabookcentre.com).

**Africa: A Biography of the Continent** (John Reader) Any understanding of modern Botswana and Namibia will be greatly enhanced by reading Reader's well-regarded continental tome. A sweeping and highly readable overview of the continent covering history, environment and anthropology, it is absolutely crammed with well-researched detail, which helps to dispel many a stereotype.

**Cry of the Kalahari** (Mark and Delia Owens) An absorbing adventure story of two young American zoologists who set off for the Kalahari with little more than a change of clothes. What results is a seven-year sojourn, and a unique insight into the amazing animals of the Kalahari.

**Histories of Namibia: Living Through the Liberation Struggle** (told to Colin Leys and Susan Brown) A fascinating insight into the horrific and sometimes hilarious experiences of Namibian activists who engaged wholeheartedly in the bitter war for independence.

## BOTSWANA HOW MUCH?

One day <i>mokoro</i> trip	P500
Ostrich egg shell bracelet	P35
Stalk of sugar cane	P35
Foreign newspaper	P10-15
Night in a budget hotel	P175

## NAMIBIA HOW MUCH?

Dune surfing	N\$180
1L bottle water	N\$2
Bottled beer	N\$6
Snack	N\$5
Foreign newspaper	N\$12
Night in a budget hotel	N\$90

# TOP 10

NAMIBIA  
BOTSWANA  
Gaborone

## COMMUNITY & CONSERVATION PROJECTS

- 1 AfriCat** ([www.africat.org](http://www.africat.org)) Helps to ensure the continued survival of Namibia's big cats; stop by their guest farm in Otjiwarongo (p255) for an up-close encounter.
- 2 Birdlife International** or **Birdlife Botswana** ([www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org) or [www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw](http://www.birdlifebotswana.org.bw)) Your membership dues help preserve Botswana's diverse avian life, and you'll be able to tap into the knowledge of an avid birding community.
- 3 Children in the Wilderness** ([www.childreninthewilderness.com](http://www.childreninthewilderness.com)) A charity that can use your donation to help host vulnerable children for week-long wilderness retreats.
- 4 Conservation International** ([www.conservation.org](http://www.conservation.org)) One of the world's most respected conservation organisations, CI is committed to protecting the planet's most vulnerable spaces.
- 5 Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation** ([www.irdnc.org.na](http://www.irdnc.org.na)) A well-established NPO that links wildlife conservation to rural development and democratic initiatives.
- 6 Kalahari Conservation Society** ([www.kcs.org.bw](http://www.kcs.org.bw)) Become a member and help protect the Kalahari and all of its inhabitants, from man to mongoose.
- 7 Khama Rhino Sanctuary** ([www.khamarhino-sanctuary.com](http://www.khamarhino-sanctuary.com)) A small but vitally important sanctuary, Khama protects the last remaining rhinos in Botswana.
- 8 Raleigh International** ([www.raleighinternational.org](http://www.raleighinternational.org)) One of the leaders in providing overseas volunteer projects for people on gap years or career breaks.
- 9 Save the Rhino** ([www.savetherhino.org](http://www.savetherhino.org)) A wonderful charity worth your support, Save the Rhino is leading the fight in preserving one of Africa's most endangered animals.
- 10 Working Group for Indigenous Minorities of Southern Africa** (WIMSA; [www.san.org.za](http://www.san.org.za)) A community-based organisation that advocates on behalf of San communities across the region.

## DO-IT-YOURSELF IDEAS

- 1 Drive yourself through **Etosha National Park** (p264).
- 2 Go overland from the Chobe Riverfront to **Maun** (p114).
- 3 Book your own *mokoro* (dugout canoe) trip (sans tour operator) in the **Okavango Panhandle** (p137).
- 4 Do some serious spelunking in **Gcwihaba (Drotsky's) Cave** (p142).
- 5 Put your GPS skills to the test in the **Kaokoveld** (p298).
- 6 Explore the **Makgadikgadi Pans** (p103) without a guide (not for the faint of heart).
- 7 Climb to the top of the **Spitzkoppe** (p292) or the **Brandberg** (p293).
- 8 Hike from one end of **Fish River Canyon** (p358) to the other.
- 9 Find the hottest new bars and clubs in **Windhoek** (p244).
- 10 Hike through the dunes near **Swakopmund** (p316) – bring lots of water!

## ANIMALS TO WATCH OUT FOR

- 1 White rhinos and black rhinos
- 2 Lions
- 3 Leopards
- 4 Cheetahs
- 5 Spotted and striped hyenas
- 6 Desert elephants
- 7 Ostriches
- 8 Cape fur seals
- 9 African buffalo
- 10 Warthogs

**The Healing Land: A Kalahari Journey** (Rupert Isaacson) A moving account of Isaacson's personal journey of discovery and the unfolding tragedy of the displaced San. Most of all, it highlights the confusion and corruption of a people who have lost what is most meaningful to them, their *n!oresi* (literally 'lands where one's heart is').

**The Lost World of the Kalahari** (Laurens van der Post) An anthropological classic depicting in almost mystical terms the traditional lifestyles of the San. The author's quest for an understanding of the San's religion and folklore is continued in his subsequent works, *Heart of the Hunter* and *The Voice of Thunder*.

**The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency Collection** (Alexander McCall Smith) Set in Mma Ramotswa's beloved Botswana, these gentle detective stories are a refreshing change to how life in Africa is usually portrayed. McCall Smith captures his characters and their traditional codes of behaviour effortlessly.

Other suggestions:

**Born of the Sun: A Namibian Novel** (Joseph Diescho and Celeste Wallin)

**Botswana: The Road to Independence** (Peter Fawcus and Alan Tilbury)

**Nervous Conditions** (Tsitsi Dangarembga)

**On the Run** (Kapoche Victor)

**Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold: Europe's Conflict with Tribal Peoples** (Mark Cocker)

**Place of Reeds** (Caitlin Davies)

**Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind** (Bessie Head)

**Sheltering Desert** (Henno Martin)

**The Purple Violet of Oshaantu** (Neshani Andreas)

**The Lion Children** (Angus, Maisie and Travers McNeice)

**Whatever You Do, Don't Run** (Peter Allison)

## INTERNET RESOURCES

There's no better place to start your web explorations than the **Lonely Planet website** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)), with up-to-date news and the Thorn Tree forum, where you can post questions.

**All Africa** ([www.allafrica.com](http://www.allafrica.com)) A gateway to all things African, this website posts around 1000 articles a day, collated from over 125 different news organisations.

**The Botswana Gazette** ([www.gazettebw.com](http://www.gazettebw.com)) Website of Botswana's leading independent newspaper.

**Government of Botswana** ([www.gov.bw](http://www.gov.bw)) Official government site with current news and links to businesses and government departments.

**Namibian Tourism Board** ([www.namibiatourism.com.na](http://www.namibiatourism.com.na)) A good-looking, user-friendly site providing a wide range of general travel information on Namibia.

**The Namibian** ([www.namibian.com.na](http://www.namibian.com.na)) For up-to-date news, log on to Namibia's main English-language newspaper.



# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### BEST OF BOTSWANA & VICTORIA FALLS

Two to Three Weeks /  
Maun to Victoria Falls

Starting in **Maun** (p120), the classic staging point for all Botswanan safaris, you can stock up on supplies before heading out to the **Okavango Delta** (p119), either by *mokoro* (dugout canoe) or charter plane. If you're pinching your pennies, there's no shortage of budget camping trips to choose from, though it's certainly worth stretching your budget to allow for a few nights in one of the safari-chic tented camps in the wildlife-rich **Moremi Game Reserve** (p132).

The next stage of your bush travel is a 4WD expedition through **Chobe National Park** (p109), with stops at **Savuti** (p116), **Linyanti Marshes** (p117) and the **Chobe Riverfront** (p114). Whether you travel by private vehicle or tour bus, the overland route through Chobe is one of the country's most spectacular and wildlife-rich journeys.

After another supply stop in the border town of **Kasane** (p109), it's time to cross the border into either Zimbabwe or Zambia to visit the world-famous **Victoria Falls** (p182). Whether you base yourself in **Livingstone, Zambia** (p186) or **Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe** (p194), it's worth exploring life on both sides of the Zambezi River. And of course, if you've got a bit of cash burning a hole in your pocket, there's no shortage of pulse-raising **activities** (p183) to help you get a quick adrenaline fix.

For the majority of the trip, you will have to be completely self-sufficient and fully confident in your navigation and survival skills. For the less adventurous, tour operators in Maun are happy to help you organise a custom safari.



## BEST OF NAMIBIA

Three to Four Weeks / Windhoek to Noordoewer

Before striking off into the desert, spend a couple of days getting your bearings in the lovely capital of **Windhoek** (p231), which still bears architectural traces of its German colonial history. Ideally, with a rental car loaded with plenty of supplies and a few friends, make a beeline north for **Etosha National Park** (p264), one of the finest safari parks on the continent.

Although you're going to have to backtrack, you can quickly bypass Windhoek en route to seaside **Swakopmund** (p311), where you can take your holiday up a notch in a flurry of exciting activities including dune boarding and quad-biking. Back on the main road south, keep the heart beating during a scramble up the massive barchan dunefields of **Sossusvlei** (p336) and/or a trek through **Sesriem Canyon** (p336).

Continuing the canyon theme, head south for **Fish River Canyon** (p358), a geological wonder of monumental proportions that is one of Africa's hidden highlights. From Fish River Canyon, detour west to marvel at the German anachronism that is **Lüderitz** (p348). Nearby, you can stop off at the diamond-mining ghost town of **Kolmanskop** (p355), and explore the overwhelming emptiness of the **Sperrgebiet**, (p354), Namibia's newest national park.

Finish things off in **Noordoewer** (p362), which sits astride the Orange River, and is the jumping off point for white-water rafting through some wild canyon country. Alternatively, head across the South African border to cosmopolitan Cape Town, which you can enjoy for a week or a weekend before setting off on the next adventure.



This enormous itinerary means more than 2500km, from dusty bushveld to dramatic canyons. It combines a good dose of culture with death-defying activities, and all of it is accessible with a 2WD vehicle. There are also decent, if slow, public transport links.

## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

### SECRETS OF THE KALAHARI

If you're looking to leave the khaki-clad tourist crowds behind, this off-the-beaten-track option in Botswana takes you straight through the heart of the Kalahari. If starting in Johannesburg, head north for the border where you can cross at Bokspits to enter the enormous **Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park** (p152). The park is one of the only spots in the Kalahari where you can see shifting sand dunes, though the undisputed highlight is its pristine wilderness and low tourist volume.

From here, head east towards Gaborone, and then loop back on yourself to enter the southern gates of the utterly wild **Khutse Game Reserve** (p154). From here, traverse north through some exciting 4WD territory into the adjoining **Central Kalahari Game Reserve** (p155), where you can navigate one of the continent's most prominent topographical features. Before leaving, spend a night or two in **Deception (Letiahau) Valley** (p157), renowned for its rare brown hyenas.

Heading north, you'll pass through **D'kar** (p150), where you can pick up some beautiful San crafts. Then press on for the remote **Gcwihaba (Drotsky's) Cave** (p142), renowned for its 10m-long stalagmites and stalactites, as well as Commerson's leaf-nosed bats. Finally, at the furthestmost tip of the country, you'll come to the mystical **Tsodilo Hills** (p144), which are a treasure chest of painted rock art, and continue to be revered by local communities.

Two to Three Weeks /

**Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park to Tsodilo Hills**

This route is only accessible by 4WD vehicle. Throughout the trip, you will have to be completely self-sufficient and fully confident in your navigation and survival skills. For the less adventurous, tour operators in Maun can help you organise a custom safari.



## CAPRIVI TO KAOKOVELD

**Two to Three Weeks /  
Kasane to the Kaokoveld**

Many places in Namibia give you a vague sense that you've reached the end of the earth, but some of the destinations in this itinerary really are other-worldly. Getting to them, too, presents a major challenge that definitely requires determination as well as a fair bit of cash.

To do this trip as a continuous journey, you're best off starting from **Kasane** (p109) in Botswana. From here, you can charter a plane or boat to **Mpalila Island** (p282), a luxuriously remote retreat stranded in the middle of the Zambezi. From here, head into Namibia's **Caprivi Strip** (p278), and visit the mini-Okavango of the **Mamili National Park** (p283) before plunging into the untamed wilderness that is **Khaudom Game Reserve** (p277).

From Khaudom the road will take you south through **Grootfontein** (p259), from where it's worth making a short detour to the **Waterberg Plateau Park** (p256). The park is famous as a haven of endangered species like sables, roans and white and black rhinos, some of which you may be lucky enough to spot along one of the well-marked hiking trails.

North of Grootfontein the road takes you into Namibia's cultural heartland, the Owambo region, from where you can access the remote and mysterious **Kaokoveld** (p298), homeland to the Himba and one of the most inaccessible areas of the country.



**This is not an itinerary for the faint-hearted. You'll need either a plane or a boat to get to Mpalila Island, where you'll have to be booked into one of the lodges. Other than that you'll need a 4WD, and you can just about forget public transport.**

## TAILORED TRIPS

### WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS

Top of everyone's list has to be the amazingly varied protected areas in Botswana and Namibia, which represent some of the continent's most pristine environments, and contain a bewildering array of bird and animal life.

For classic images of wildlife herds and predators, head straight for **Etosha National Park** (p264), or cross the border into Botswana and be spoilt for choice between the **Moremi Game Reserve** (p132), **Savuti** (p116) or **Chobe National Park** (p109). All of these parks protect an absolute abundance of animal life that is sheltered and protected by classic African safari country.

Birding enthusiasts should head straight for the **Okavango Delta** (p119) when it is in full flush in September and October. Similarly, **Mamili National Park** (p283) in northeast Namibia is a lush riverine environment full of hippos, buffaloes and birds.

For a more off-the-beaten-track experience head for the **Makgadikgadi & Nxai Pans National Park** (p106), which sees some of the largest wildlife migrations in Africa. Or seek out Deception (Letiahau) Valley in the **Central Kalahari Game Reserve** (p155) and the **Khama Rhino Sanctuary** (p96) in eastern Botswana for specialty sightings of brown hyenas and white rhinos, respectively.



### ADRENALINE JUNKIE

Namibia and Botswana provide a picture-perfect backdrop for some nerve-racking activities. The two activity capitals of the region are undoubtedly Namibia's **Swakopmund** (p311) and, in the far east and across the eastern border, the dramatic arena of **Victoria Falls** (p183). In the former you can indulge in sandboarding, quadbiking, camel and horse riding and even skydiving. At the latter, go microlighting over the falls, white-water rafting, or do one of the most spectacular bungee jumps in the world, straight off the Victoria Falls railway bridge.

If that all seems a bit too extreme, opt for some straightforward trekking. **Fish River Canyon National Park** (p358), Africa's equivalent of the Grand Canyon, is hard to beat. There are also fantastic treks into the **Tsodilo Hills** (p144) in Botswana to view San rock art, or down the ephemeral river valleys of **Damaraland** (p292) in northern Namibia.

For trekking with a different spin, try some rhino tracking at **Palmwag** (p297), accompany a San guide into the salty deserts of the **Makgadikgadi Pans** (p103), or join one of the bird-watching trails from camps in the **Okavango Delta** (p130), where you can even take scenic flights over the watery green wonderland.

There aren't many opportunities for rock climbers despite the fantastic rocky arena of Namibia, but you can summit the stunning **Spitzkoppe** (p292) if you're equipped for a technical scramble to the top. Skilled equestrians can also gallop through **Sesriem Canyon** (p336) and/or **Tuli Block** (p100), either of which brings the thrill of the safari to horseback.



## DESERT TO DELTA

One of the joys of travelling overland between Namibia and Botswana is the startling contrast between a pure desert environment and some lush and verdant wetlands.

In Namibia, much of the beauty is in the detail. The **Namib-Naukluft Park** (p330) is an amphitheatre of sand where unique desert mammals and insects struggle to survive. Even more ghostly is the **Skeleton Coast National Park** (p307) in the far northwest of the country, advertising itself as the world's largest graveyard of shipwrecked vessels. And finally, the secret desert hinterland of the **Sperrgebiet** (p354), one of the most pristine desert ecosystems in the world, is open to the general public for the first time in the history of the country.

A stark contrast to the shifting sands, the **Okavango Delta** (p119) is awash with water between December and March, and is a veritable paradise of birds, animals, insects and fish. Other watery havens are the remote **Linyanti Marshes** (p117), the swampy environs of **Savuti** (p116) and Namibia's mini-Okavango, **Mamili National Park** (p283). Together, these vitally important aquatic ecosystems harbour some of the highest concentrations of bird and animal life in Africa.

And of course, in this far northeastern corner of Botswana, it's a mere hop, skip and jump across the border to gaze at one of the most majestic natural wonders of the world, the smoke that thunders, namely **Victoria Falls** (p182).



## OFF-ROADING

If you're fortunate enough to have a sturdy and well-outfitted rental vehicle, as well as a significant amount of 4WD experience in extreme environments, off-roading in Botswana and Namibia will truly test your limits. Before you leave the road, it is important to stress that back country driving in this part of the world is more of an expedition than a casual detour – you will have to be completely self-sufficient, and it's recommended that you travel with at least one other vehicle.

If the notion of exploring 12,000 sq km of disorientating salt pans is your idea of an adventure, then calibrate your GPS and head straight to the **Makgadikgadi Pans** (p103). For a true sense of the breadth and scope of the Kalahari, be sure to explore the **Central Kalahari Game Reserve** (p155), the continent's largest protected area. Or, navigate the apricot-coloured dune fields and the camelthorn-dotted grasslands of the **Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park** (p152).

On the Namibian side of the fence, head to the northwestern corner of the country to journey through the **Kaokoveld** (p298), a rugged terrain of desert mountains that is crisscrossed by slowly vanishing sandy tracks. Alternatively, brave the treacherous fog-covered and sand-blown salt roads of the famous **Skeleton Coast** (p304), one of the world's most inhospitable stretches of coastline.



# The Authors



## MATTHEW D FIRESTONE

**Coordinating Author, Namibia**

Matt is a trained biological anthropologist and epidemiologist who is particularly interested in the health and nutrition of indigenous populations. His first visit to Botswana and Namibia in 2001 brought him deep into the Kalahari, where he performed a field study on the traditional diet of the San. Unfortunately, Matt's promising academic career was postponed due to a severe case of wanderlust, though he has relentlessly travelled to more than 50 different countries in search of a cure. Matt is hoping that this book will help ease the pain of other individuals bitten by the travel bug, though he fears that there is a growing epidemic on the horizon.



## ADAM KARLIN

**Botswana**

On this trip, his third Africa expedition for Lonely Planet, Adam was charged by elephants, watched hippos dance to Creedence Clearwater Revival, got drunk with a mad South African lion chaser, was lost in the desert where he almost froze to death until a dog fell asleep on him, and went on a road trip with Botswana's only licensed hypnotherapist. All in a day's work. Botswana, like everywhere else in Africa, shocked Adam with its beauty. He can't wait to go back.

## CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

**David Lukas** teaches and writes about the natural world from his home on the edge of Yosemite National Park. He has contributed Environment and Wildlife chapters to more than 25 Lonely Planet guides, including *Tanzania, East Africa, South Africa, Botswana & Namibia*, and *Ethiopia & Eritrea*.

**Nicola Simmonds** has worked in and backpacked around Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Europe, Japan, and Central and South America. Having then lived in Angola and Zimbabwe for seven years (with her husband and, eventually, three kids), mastering water shortages, African bureaucracy and out-of-control economies, covering Zimbabwe post 'dollarisation' was nothing but joy. She has just spent a year in Sri Lanka and is currently figuring out where to go next.

### LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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