



Botswana

POP 2.183 MILLION / 27

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Best Places to Eat

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- ➔ Hilary's (p102)
- ➔ French Connection (p102)
- ➔ Caravela Portuguese Restaurant (p50)

Best Places to Sleep

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Why Go?

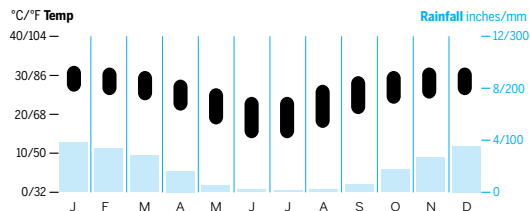
Blessed with some of the greatest wildlife spectacles on earth, Botswana is one of the great safari destinations in Africa. There are more elephants in Botswana than any other country on earth, the big cats roam free and there's everything from endangered African wild dogs to aquatic antelope, and from rhinos making a comeback to abundant birdlife at every turn.

This is also the land of the Okavango Delta and the Kalahari Desert, at once iconic African landscapes and vast stretches of wilderness. Put these landscapes together with the wildlife that inhabits them, and it's difficult to escape the conclusion that this is wild Africa at its best.

Botswana may rank among Africa's most exclusive destinations – accommodation prices at most lodges are once-in-a-lifetime propositions – but self-drive expeditions are also possible. And whichever way you visit, Botswana is a truly extraordinary place.

When to Go

Gaborone



High Season (Jun or Jul–Oct)

Warm days and mild nights, October can be oppressively hot.

Shoulder (Apr, May & Nov)

A lovely, cheaper time to visit. May nights can be cold.

Low Season (Dec–Mar)

Rains can disrupt travel, making off-road driving difficult.

GABORONE

POP 234,500

Depending on your perspective, low-key Gaborone (or Gabs to its friends) is either terribly unexciting or one of Africa's more tranquil capital cities. There aren't that many concrete reasons to come here – it's a world of government ministries, shopping malls and a seemingly endless urban sprawl – and most travellers can fly to Maun or cross overland elsewhere. Yet, it can be an interesting place to take the pulse of the nation.

The city is largely a modern creation, with little sense of history to provide interest. Indeed, ask Batswana who were born and raised in Gaborone where they're from, and they may well tell you the name of a family village or cattle post they've never seen. So while the local Batswana may not see Gaborone as a traditional family 'home', they do see it as the place where their future, and that of their nation, is forged.

History

Archaeological evidence suggests that the banks of the nearby Notwane River have been continuously occupied since at least the middle Stone Age. However, the first modern settlement, Moshaweng, was established in the late 1880s by Chief Gaborone of the Tlokwa clan. Early European explorers and missionaries named the settlement Gaborone's Village, which was then inevitably shortened to 'Gaborones' (the 's' was dropped in 1968).

In 1895 the South African diamond magnate Cecil Rhodes used Gaborone to launch the Jameson Raid, an unsuccessful rebellion against the Boers who controlled the gold mines near Johannesburg. Rhodes was forced to resign his post as prime minister of Cape Colony, and the raid served as the catalyst for the second Boer War (1899–1902).

In 1897 the railway between South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) passed 4km to the west of the village, and a tiny settlement known as Gaborone's Station soon appeared alongside the railway line. As late as 1966 the greater Gaborone area was still home to fewer than 4000 inhabitants, but it was selected as the capital of independent Botswana due to its proximity to the railway line and its large water supply.

Although urban migration from elsewhere in Botswana has characterised much of Gabs' recent history, economic turmoil in Zimbabwe has sparked a wave of illegal

immigration to Botswana's capital, further increasing the city's growth.

Sights

Although there's little in the way of sights, the confluence of motivated embassy staff, NGO types and ambitious Batswana makes for a fairly full calendar of events that focuses on cultural and arts-related activities.

Gaborone Game Reserve WILDLIFE RESERVE
(☎318 4492; adult/child/vehicle P10/5/10; ☀6.30am–6.30pm) This reserve was established in 1988 by the Kalahari Conservation Society to give the Gaborone public an opportunity to view Botswana's wildlife in a natural and accessible location. It seems to be working: although the reserve is only 5 sq km, it's the third busiest in the country and boasts wildebeest, elands, gemsboks, kudus, ostriches and warthogs. The birdlife, which includes kingfishers and hornbills, is particularly plentiful and easy to spot from observation areas.

The reserve also has a few picnic sites, a game hide and a small visitor-education centre. All roads in the reserve are accessible by 2WD; guided drives are not offered. The reserve is about 1km east of Broadhurst Mall and can be accessed from Limpopo Dr.

National Museum & Art Gallery MUSEUM
(Map p52; ☎397 4616; 331 Independence Ave)
FREE Botswana's National Museum closed in mid-2016 for a much-needed overhaul. Prior to the closure, the collection itself was fairly modest, with plenty of stuffed animals alongside sections on the country's precolonial and colonial history, while the art-gallery section had a similarly unremarkable portfolio of traditional and modern African and European art.

Three Dikgosi Monument MONUMENT
(Map p49; ☎367 4616; btwn Eastern & Western Commercial Sts; ☀9am–6pm Tue–Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun) It's an interesting kind of history when your nationalist heroes are three guys who argued your country should *continue* to be a protectorate of Africa's biggest imperialist power, but welcome to Botswana. The *dikgosi* (chiefs) are memorialised in imposing form at this large, badly placed (in the shadow of an office block) monument, which also includes panels featuring carvings of national virtues, including 'Botshabelo' (refuge), 'Bog-aka' (heroism), 'Boitshoko' (endurance), 'Maitshabelo' (global responsibility) and 'Boipuso' (independence).