



Botswana

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Why Go?

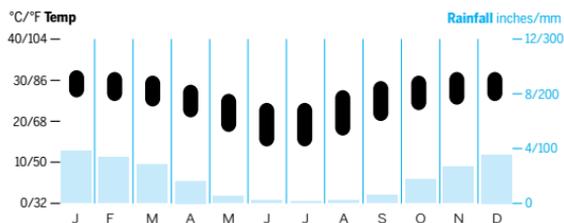
Blessed with some of the greatest wildlife spectacles on earth, Botswana is one of the great safari destinations in Africa. There are more elephants in Botswana than any other country on earth, the big cats roam free and there's everything from endangered African wild dogs to aquatic antelopes, and from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



Jun or Jul–Oct

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

Apr, May & Nov

May nights can be cold, but otherwise a lovely, cheaper time to visit.

Dec–Mar

Cheaper rates and high availability, except over Christmas/New Year.

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.

Sights

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.

Tours

Africa Insight TOURS
( 316 0180, 72 654 323; www.africainsight.com; half-/full-day tours P545/1198) This outfit offers half- and full-day *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* tours endorsed by author Alexander McCall-Smith himself, with more wide-ranging excursions around Gaborone and beyond also possible. Among the latter are 'Predator Weekends' – weekend safaris to Khutse Game Reserve.

Garcin Safaris TOURS
( 71 668 193, 393 6773; garcinsafaris@info.bw; half-/full-day tours from US\$140/220) Resident and Gaborone expert Marilyn Garcin does great tours of the city, including a *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*-focused jaunt. She also offers recommended safaris around Botswana.

Festivals & Events

Maitisong Festival PERFORMING ARTS
( 397 1809; www.maitisong.org;  Mar-Apr) Botswana's largest performing-arts festival has been running since 1987 and is held over seven days in late March or early April. It

features an outdoor program of music, theatre, film and dance, as well as an indoor program at the Maitisong Cultural Centre and the Memorable Order of Tin Hats (MOTH) Hall. Highlights include top performing artists from around Africa.

Sleeping

★ **Mokolodi Backpackers** HOSTEL \$
( 74 111 164; www.backpackers.co.bw; camping/dm/s P135/235/325, 2-person units/chalets P550/645, 3-person rondavels P750;  ) This great place, around 14km south of the city centre, is the only accommodation with a real backpacker vibe around Gaborone. It has everything from comfortable rondavels (round huts with conical roofs) and attractive chalets to good campsites (you can use your own tent or rent one) and four-bed dorms.

★ **Metcourt Inn** HOTEL \$\$
( 363 7907; www.peermont.com; r P620-1060;  ) Located within the Grand Palm Resort complex, this affordable business hotel has classy if smallish rooms with a hint of Afro-chic in the decor. If this is your first stop in Africa, you'll wonder what all the fuss is about, but if you've been out in the bush, it's heaven on a midrange budget.

Capital Guesthouse GUESTHOUSE \$\$
( 391 5905; www.thecapitalguesthouse.co.bw; 28492 Batsadi Rd, Block 3; r P950-1500;  ) One of a number of newer, more personal guesthouses and B&Bs opening up around Gabs, the Capital is quietly elegant and reasonably central. It's on a quiet street and already has something of a following among business people, expats and travellers.

Eating

Gabs has numerous good restaurants aimed at an expat market. The upmarket hotels are another good place to try. For cheap African food, stalls near the bus station (and on the Mall during lunchtime) sell plates of traditional food, such as *mealie pap* (maize-meal porridge) and stew. For self-caterers, there are well-stocked supermarkets across the city.

★ **Cafe Dijo** CAFE \$\$
( 318 0575; Kgale Hill Shopping Mall, Lobatse Rd; mains from P79;  7am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat; ) This classy but casual place is one of our favourite haunts in Gabs. The lunch specials