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Botswana Practical Information

Botswana, officially the Republic of Botswana, is a country in the centre of Southern Africa. Formerly the British protectorate of Bechuanaland, Botswana adopted its new name after becoming independent within the Commonwealth on the 30th of September in 1966. Within its borders, Botswana boasts a rich variety of wildlife, including many species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish.



Documentation



Canadian/USA Passports are required for visitors to travel to Botswana and must be valid for at least six months beyond the date of expected return from Botswana. A visa is not required for stays up to 90 days.

Airports – Sir Seretse Khama International Airport

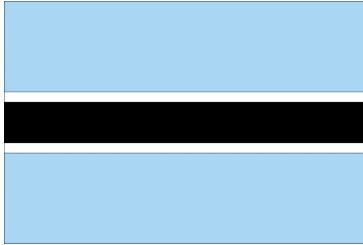
The international airport in Botswana is located 15 kilometres north of Gaborone. It is named after the first president of Botswana. There are 15 other airports that serve the various places in Botswana, such as Maun and Kasana, which are more likely to be your entry and exit points for Botswana.

Location and Geography

Botswana is bordered by Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The country consists mainly of a sand-filled basin, with gently rising plains to the highlands in neighbouring countries. The highest point is in the southeastern part of the country and the lowest point is in the Limpopo Valley in the easternmost point.



There are rocky hill ranges, ancient lake beds and the deep Kalahari Desert. And then, there is the marshes of the Okavango Delta, a place where the fourth longest river system in southern Africa, the Okavango River, terminates. Most rivers in Botswana are temporary channels, usually not flowing above ground except in the rainy season. Two exceptions are the Okavango River above its delta and the Chobe River flowing through marshes along the northern border to meet up with the Zambezi River above Victoria Falls.



Population

Botswana is a mid-sized country with just over 2-million people. It is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. Around 10% of the population lives in the capital and largest city, Gaborone. Formerly one of the poorest countries in the world, it has now transformed into one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

People and Culture

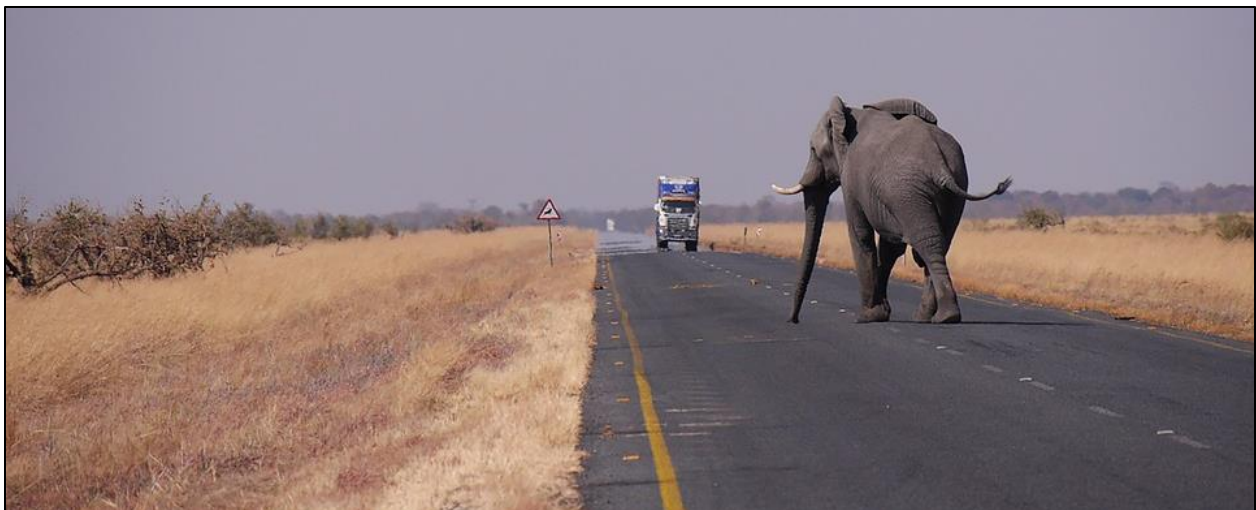
The dominant ethnicity in Botswana is Tswana, which is about two-thirds of the population. There are many other ethnic groups within the borders of the country as well. About two-fifths of the population is rural and lives in settlements that range from small scattered sites that are sparsely populated to villages of more than 1000 people.

Language

The official language of Botswana is English, while the national language, Tswana (Setswana, Sechuana) is widely spoken. There are several other languages spoken in the country in smaller communities.

Economy

Botswana is traditionally seen as cattle country; very little of the land is suitable for productive cultivation. Diamonds, the major economic resource of the country, have been exploited on a large scale since 1970. They are mined from some of the world's largest diamond pipes. Tourism has increased as people are attracted to Botswana's relatively unpopulated and remote wetland environments as well as the Kalahari Desert. The government has limited the density and environmental impact of tourism through licensing a limited number of safari companies.



Climate and Weather

The annual climate ranges from months of dry temperate weather during the winter months to humid subtropical weather intermingled with drier periods of hot weather during the summer. Summer is from October to March and winter is from April to September. Summer is usually the windy season, carrying dust from the Kalahari, from about late August to early October. Annual rainfall averages about 460mm (18in). The rains are almost entirely limited to summer downpours between December and March.

Temperature

In the summer months, temperatures rise to about 34°C (93°F) in the extreme north and southwest, the warmest parts of the country. In winter there is frequent frost at night and temperatures may fall to near freezing in some high-altitude areas during the day.

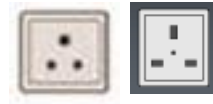
Clothing

Lightweight clothes with a warm cover-up for the evenings are advised. Take a pair of good walking shoes and long-sleeved, loose-fitting tops and long pants to protect against mosquitoes. Wear light, neutral colours (khaki, green and brown), but not white as it will get dusty quickly. Avoid camouflage or military-type clothing. Don't forget a wide-brimmed hat and your sunglasses. A warm hat, scarf, gloves and layers are handy for those early morning game drives.



Electricity

Voltage is 230V. Frequency is 50Hz and power sockets are types D/ G.



Currency

The local currency is the Botswana pula and is rated as one of the strongest currencies in Africa. Zimbabwe also uses this currency. Full banking services are available in most major towns.

Credit Cards

All major credit cards are accepted, although usage is not advised as the service fees are generally very high.

Business and Banking Hours



Banking hours in major towns are from 9:00am to 2:30 pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Wednesdays, banks are open from 8:30am to noon. Shops are open Monday – Friday 9:00am – 6:00pm, Saturday 9:00am – 3:00pm, and Sunday 9:00am – 1:00pm. Government offices are open 7:30am – 12:45 and 1:45pm to 4:30pm.

To claim 12% VAT refund for total value of goods purchased, the amount spent should be more than P5,000. In such cases, the following is required: a tax invoice stating VAT paid, your passport number and you bank account details. You should always keep a copy of the VAT form as a record. VAT claims can usually be made at all major border posts and airports.

Tipping

In Botswana, while on Safari, tip once at the end of your stay at each safari lodge or camp. A tip of US\$45-US\$10 per day per person is a fairly good start. Your guide, however, since they are with you the majority of the time you're at the camp, should be tipped separately, when he/she drops you off at the airstrip to say good-bye. A tip of US\$10-US\$15 per person per day is fair.

Telephone and Emergency

The International Dialling Code is 011 followed by the area code of 267. To dial to Canada or the United States, you dial 00 1 (area code) (phone number).

The **emergency phone** number for ambulance is 997, the police is 999, the fire brigade is 998 and medical rescue is 911.

Health Information

Hospitals in Botswana offer a wide range of health services. The Ministry of Health operates three types of hospitals: Primary hospitals, Districts hospitals and Referral hospitals. Hospitals operate weekdays from 7:30am to 4:30pm with doctors available on call for emergencies after hours, weekends and holidays.

Public Holidays & Events

January:

New Year's Day – This is a public holiday and almost everything is closed.

26 January - Liberation Day – This is a public holiday and is a day off for the general population, schools and most businesses are closed.

April - May:

Good Friday - This is a public holiday and is a day off for the general population, schools and most businesses are closed.

Easter Monday - This is a public holiday and is a day off for the general population, schools and most businesses are closed.

01 May – Labour Day - This is a public holiday and is a day off for the general population, schools and most businesses are closed.

July:

01 July – Sir Seretse Khama Day – This is a public holiday to celebrate the life and achievements of Botswana's first president. This day is his birth date.

Third Monday in July – President's Day - This is a public holiday and is observed over two days.

Tuesday after President's Day – This is a public holiday and a continuation of the celebrations from the day before.

September - October:

30 September – Botswana Day – This is a public holiday and is a day off for the general population, schools and most businesses are closed. It is observed over two days.

01 October – Botswana Day – This is a public holiday and a continuation of the celebrations from the day before.

December:

25 December – Christmas Day - This is a public holiday and is a day off for the general population, schools and most businesses are closed.

26 December – Boxing Day - This is a public holiday and is a day off for the general population, schools and most businesses are closed.

Tourist Information Centre

Botswana Tourism Organisation

Plot 50676, Fairgrounds Office Park

Block B, Ground Floor

Gaborone, Botswana

Tel: +267 391 3111

www.botswanatourism.co.bw