

BOTSWANA PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION



Time Zone

GMT + 2 Hours

One hour ahead of Central European Winter Time

Seven hours ahead of Eastern Standard Winter Time, USA

Situation

Botswana is a land-locked country dominated in geographical terms by the Kalahari Desert - a sand-filled basin averaging 1,100 meters above sea level. The country lies between longitudes 20 and 30 degrees east of Greenwich and between the latitudes 18 and 27 degrees approximately south of the Equator. Botswana is surrounded by Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Slightly larger than France and almost the size of Texas, the landmass covers 581 730 square kilometres (224 607 square miles).

Languages

English is the official language, while Setswana is the most widely spoken African language.

Religion

Early tribal religions were primarily cults. The supreme being and creator was known as the Modimo. Religious rites included the bogwera and bojale (male and female initiation ceremonies) and gofethla pula or rain-making rites. Today, Christianity is the prevailing belief system (well over 60% of the population). Christianity was brought to Botswana by David Livingstone in the 19th Century. The main denominations are Roman Catholic, Anglican, Zion, Lutheran and the Methodist Christian Church.

The People

The population of Botswana is made up of people from approximately 20 different tribes, some of which came originally from Botswana's neighbouring countries: South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Angola and Namibia. Ethnic groups in Botswana are predominately made up of Tswana people (79 %) and split up among eight tribes. The others include Bamangwato, Bakwena, Bangwaketse, Bakgatla, Barolong, Bamalete, and Batlokwa. The next largest single group of indigenous peoples is the Kalanga, which accounts for about 11% of the population and there are approximately 3% Basarwa (Bushmen). Kgalagadi and whites account for about 7%. Through the centuries, as people of the different tribes joined, they shared many of their customs.

Today, all of these different customs and beliefs help make up the culture of Botswana, as well as influences from non-African places because Botswana today is a modern country. The people of Tswana origin and also the citizens of the country are called Bastswana or Motswana. The language of Botswana is Setswana, and the word is also used to describe the way of life.

Climate

Botswana's climate is semi-arid. Though it is hot and dry for much of the year, there is a rainy season, which runs through the summer months. Rainfall tends to be erratic, unpredictable and highly regional. Often a heavy downpour may occur in one area while 10 or 15 kilometres away there is no rain at all. Rain typically falls in short thundershowers in the late afternoon. Showers are often followed by strong sunshine so that a good deal of the rainfall does not penetrate the ground but is lost to evaporation and transpiration. Rainfall is low (approximately 470 mm / 18.5 in) per year and phrases like “rainy season” should be seen in context.

Weather in Botswana

Seasons

Spring: September – October

Summer: November – March

Autumn: April – May

Winter: June - August

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Temperature (Fahrenheit)												
High	90	89	88	87	82	77	77	83	91	95	94	91
Low	66	66	63	58	49	42	42	47	55	64	66	66
Temperature (Celsius)												
High	90	89	88	87	82	77	77	83	91	95	94	91
Low	66	66	63	58	49	42	42	47	55	64	66	66
Rainfall												
mm	110	80	70	25	7	3	0	0	0	30	50	95
Humidity												
Percent	60	60	61	52	49	49	45	39	33	36	43	52



Public Holidays

The dates of certain public holidays change from year to year. Generally, if a public holiday falls on a Sunday, the Monday is also declared a holiday.

01 January	New Year's Day
Varies	Good Friday
Varies	Easter Monday
01 May	Labour Day
25 May	Ascension day
01 July	Sir Seretse Khama Day
17 July	President's Day (this date is subject to change)
30 September	Botswana day
25 December	Christmas Day
26 December	Boxing Day

Visas

Visas are issued free of charge at point of entry for stays of less than 90 days. All visitors to Botswana must hold a passport that is valid for at least 6 months except those with United Nations travel documents. Visitors must also have outgoing travel documents and sufficient funds to finance their stay. It is the responsibility of each individual to confirm with their respective Consulates concerning visa entry requirements. Please ensure that you have all the necessary visas prior to departure (unless available upon entry). Journey Beyond, nor any of its agents, can be held responsible for any errors in this regard.

Important – Passport Requirement

Please note visitors travelling to Africa must have a MINIMUM of two blank/empty (non-endorsement) VISA pages in your passport per each country visited. Passports must be valid for six months after intended departure. Foreign passport holders who do not comply with these requirements will either be stopped from boarding the aircraft at point of departure or risk deportation on arrival in Africa.

Check-In Baggage for Departure Out of O.R. Tambo International Airport

In order to increase operational efficiency and on-time performance for luggage processing, O.R. Tambo International Airport has embarked on an awareness campaign through a soft launch to enable departing passengers to comply with acceptable baggage restrictions.

Round bags, bags with long hanging straps and those without flat surfaces are the largest sources of jams in the baggage handling system, causing shutdowns, delays and inconvenience to passengers and airlines.



The acceptable baggage rules are:

1. Only regular-shaped bags will be allowed at check-in counters.
2. Bags must have at least one flat surface to be accepted.
3. Bags with long hanging straps will not be accepted for check-in. Passengers will be requested to secure or remove straps before checking in.
4. Round bags will not be allowed at check-in counters.

To comply:

- Passengers may visit a baggage-wrapping station at O.R Tambo International Airport to wrap their bags at a standard cost per bag.
- All costs required to make an irregular bag compliant to the requirements will be for the passenger's account.

*Note: This rule only applies to passengers departing out of O.R. Tambo International Airport. The normal rules for hand luggage are still applicable.

Minors travelling through Botswana

An Unabridged Birth Certificate is a birth certificate containing information on both biological parents or legal guardians.

ALL minors (children under 18) travelling through the borders of Botswana and/or Namibia and/or South Africa must produce either original versions, or certified / notarised copies of unabridged birth certificates in addition to their valid passports.

If one parent is not travelling with the child, a certified / notarised affidavit (signed by both parents) consenting to such travel should be presented. Alternatively, a certified copy of the parent's death certificate will be required if applicable.

Where an Unabridged Birth Certificate is in any language other than English, it must be accompanied by a certified / notarised translation issued by a competent authority in the home country.

It is the responsibility of the traveller to ensure that all children under the age of 18 have the correct documents. This law is being enforced by airlines and immigration officials and noncompliance will result in travellers being denied boarding of the aircraft in their home country.

Drones in Africa

In many African countries, a drone permit as well as approval to operate the drone from the local Aviation Authority is required for recreational drone use.



The use of drones or camera drones are strictly prohibited in the following areas:

- within 3km of airports or in areas where aircraft are operating,
- over wildlife reserves or national parks,
- hotels, lodges and campsites,
- over people or large crowds,
- and moving traffic,
- any sensitive areas including government or military facilities.

Currency

Botswana's unit of currency is the Pula (P), which is divided into 100 Thebe (t). The word 'Pula' means rain and 'thebe' means shield. The shield appears on the national coat of arms. Bank notes come in denominations of P10, 20, 50 and 100, and coins in denominations of 5t, 10t, 25t, 50t, P1, P2 and P5. Botswana banks will only accept Pula, US Dollars, Pounds Sterling, Euro and South African Rand in cash. Traveller's cheques are also acceptable.

Credit Cards and Debit Cards

MasterCard and Visa are accepted in most tourist hotels, lodges, travel agencies and gift shops. The cards need to have raised credit card numbers so that an imprint may be taken. American Express is rarely accepted and then only in some places. Diners Club is not accepted by the banks and therefore rarely at any of the camps / lodges. Cultural sites and community art and craft outlets usually only accept cash.

Debit cards are not accepted as a form of payment.

Banks

Full banking services are available in major towns, although ATM's are sprouting up all over the country. Banking options are: Barclays Bank of Botswana, First National Bank of Botswana, Stanbic, Standard Chartered Botswana Limited, Union Bank of Botswana and Zimbank of Botswana.

Banking hours:

09h00 to 15h00 Monday to Friday

08h30 to 10h45 Saturday

Value Added Tax

Botswana has value added taxes of 12%

Shopping

The main focus of shopping is on arts and crafts and, especially, basket ware.

Electricity

Most lodges are situated in remote areas and operate on either solar lighting (backed up by batteries) or on generators for approximately 6 - 7 hours per day (usually while guests are out on safari activities). Depending on the choice of lodge / camp, plug points can be found in the rooms. The plug points can be used to charge batteries and sleep apnoea machines, however, are not suitable for hairdryers. Where there are no plug points in the rooms, facilities for charging batteries are available in the main area of the lodge / camp. It is advisable to always bring a spare battery.

South African large three prong plugs are generally used. Electrical sockets (outlets) in Botswana usually supply electricity at between 220- and 240-volts AC. If you're plugging in an appliance that was built for 220-240-volt electrical input, or an appliance that is compatible with multiple voltages, then an adapter is all you need.

Travel plug adapters do not change the voltage, so the electricity coming through the adapter will still be the same 220-240 volts the socket is supplying. If you need to use appliances that are not compatible with 220-240-volt electrical input, you will need a voltage converter.

Mobile Phones/Telecommunications

Mobile phones do not operate in the remote areas of Botswana; however, all Botswana camps are linked with VHF radio with a backup HF radio system. Mobile reception is available in the main centres and along major roads as well as in Kasane and Maun. Wi-Fi is becoming popular in the camps / lodges. Depending on the accommodation chosen, Wi-Fi can sometimes be found either in the rooms or in designated areas.

Tipping

Service staff in Africa depends on tips as part of their livelihood. However, we recommend that tipping be based on the quality of service provided. As a guideline, hotel porters get about USD 1.00 per bag carried each way. Restaurant staff and bar waiters might be tipped at 10% - 15% of the value of the meals or beverages purchased.

A guideline to voluntary tipping at lodges in Botswana is as follows:

Guides: USD 12.00 per guest per night

Tracker: 8.00 per guest per night (not all camps have a guide / tracker team)

Butler: USD 8.00 per guest per night (not all camps have butlers)

General staff: USD 12.00 per guest per day, and this should be handed into the communal tipping box, usually found in the Reception area.

Safety Precautions/Drinking Water

Botswana is a safe country. However, as in most countries in the world, travellers are advised to take the necessary safety precautions. Do not walk alone in unpopulated streets after dark or draw unnecessary attention to money or jewellery on your person.



Tap water is safe to drink in Botswana, although outside main cities and towns, visitors are advised to check first and sterilize water if in any doubt. Bottled water is available in most tourist centres. Filtered water is available at most camps / lodges and shops offer bottled water. We would like to stress the importance of drinking at least 2 to 3 litres of water per day whilst on safari as dehydration can occur quickly, especially in the summer months.

Health Precautions

Botswana is not a risky place to visit from a health perspective. Despite this, there are certain precautions visitors should take although there are no legal requirements for taking these precautions. Please consult your physician or travel advisory centre. Botswana requires no inoculations other than for visitors from Yellow Fever areas. Botswana is however a malaria area - please consult your Doctor prior to your safari for information and advice on the use of anti-malaria medication. There are many types of prophylactics available on the market and your Medical Practitioner will assist in finding one that is right for you. Remember to complete your prophylactic course – especially after leaving a malaria area

Medical Care

Medical facilities in Gaborone and Francistown are adequate to good, but available facilities in other areas are limited. Malaria is only a problem if one is traveling in the north of the country. Malaria prophylaxis is not required in Gaborone. For advanced care most guests often choose to travel to South Africa. Most prescription drugs are available.

Insurance

All guests must take out comprehensive travel insurance covering them for personal effects, accident, medical and emergency travel expenses, cancellation and curtailment. As most safari lodges consist only of 6 to 12 rooms, cancellation fees are strictly applied, and you need to be covered for cancellation and possible curtailment.

Driving in Botswana

Public transport in Botswana is geared towards the needs of the local populace and is confined to main roads between major population centres. Although cheap and reliable, it is of little use to the traveller as most of Botswana's tourist attractions lie off the beaten track.

Driving off the main roads in Botswana is only recommended in 4x4 vehicles that are equipped correctly. The driver or any authorised co-driver must produce a valid driver's license. The license needs to be in English with a photograph. If not, an International driver's license will be required. Driving is on the left side of the road. The speed limit is usually 60 km/h in urban areas, 70 km/h on gravel roads and 120 km/h on major tar roads. Safety belts / seatbelts must be used at all times and children under 5 years must be in a child safety seat.

Be sure to watch out for wild animals on the roads!

HAVE A SAFE JOURNEY!!