

Botswana

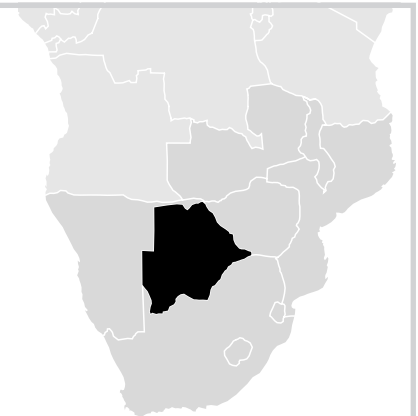
Botswana is an African success story. After achieving democratic rule in 1966, three of the world's richest diamond-bearing formations were discovered within its borders. Today, the country enjoys a high standard of economic stability, education and health care, which, with the exception of South Africa, is unequalled elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa. Its modern veneer, however, belies the fact that much of Botswana remains a country for the intrepid (not to mention relatively wealthy) traveller. This largely roadless wilderness of vast spaces requires time, effort and, above all else, lots of cash to enjoy it to its fullest.

Landlocked Botswana extends 1100km from north to south and 960km from east to west, making it roughly the same size as Kenya, France or Texas. Most of the country is covered with scrub brush and savanna grassland, although small areas of deciduous forest thrive near the Zimbabwean border. With vast open savannas teeming with free-ranging wildlife, Botswana is truly the Africa of your dreams.

Because the Okavango Delta and the Chobe River provide a year-round water supply, nearly all Southern African mammal species are present in the Moremi Game Reserve and in Chobe National Park. In the Makgadikgadi & Nxai Pan National Park, however, herds of wildebeest, zebra and other hoofed mammals migrate annually in search of permanent water and stable food supplies.

FAST FACTS

- **Area:** 582,000 sq km
- **Capital:** Gaborone
- **Country code:** ☎ 267
- **Famous for:** Okavango Delta, Chobe National Park, the Kalahari
- **Languages:** English, Setswana
- **Money:** Pula (P)
- **Phrases:** *Dumela?* (How are you?); *dankie* (thank you)
- **Population:** 1.61 million



HOW MUCH?

- **One-day mokoro trip** US\$66
- **Ostrich egg-shell bracelet** \$5
- **Stalk of sugar cane** \$0.25
- **Foreign newspaper** US\$1.65
- **Night in a budget hotel** US\$24.75

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** US\$0.75
- **1L of bottled water** US\$0.50-1
- **Bottle of beer** US\$1
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$5-10
- **Snack** US\$1-2

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Okavango Delta** (p106) Glide through the watery expanses in a mokoro, a traditional dugout canoe.
- **Chobe National Park** (p101) Spot the Big Five at Botswana's premier safari park.
- **Central Kalahari Game Reserve** (p119) Test the limits of your survival instincts on a 4WD camping expedition.
- **Makgadikgadi Pans & Nxai Pan National Park** (p100) Follow the herds of migrating zebras and wildebeests in this baobab-dotted salt-pan complex.
- **Off the beaten track** (p117) Wander through the 'Wilderness Louvre' of ancient San paintings at Tsodilo Hills.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Botswana's tourist highlight is the **Okavango Delta** (p106), and if you have only a few days, this is where you'll want to focus. Choose **Maun** (p106) or the **Okavango Panhandle** (p116) as your base and organise a mokoro trip through the

TRAVEL TIPS

Travelling cheaply in Botswana isn't impossible, but if you can't afford a flight into the Okavango, a day or two at Moremi Game Reserve or Chobe National Park, or a 4WD trip through the Kalahari, you may want to think twice before visiting. Safari lodges – especially those in the Okavango Delta and Chobe National Park – are for the most part exclusive haunts of the wealthy, and you'll rarely find anything for less than US\$300 for a double. Hotels, camping, car hire, domestic air flights, meals, alcohol and self-catering prices are comparable to those in Europe, North America and Australasia, and although buses and trains are quite economical (US\$1 per hour of journey time), they won't take you to the most interesting parts of the country.

wetlands, followed by a wildlife-viewing trip through **Moremi Game Reserve** (p114).

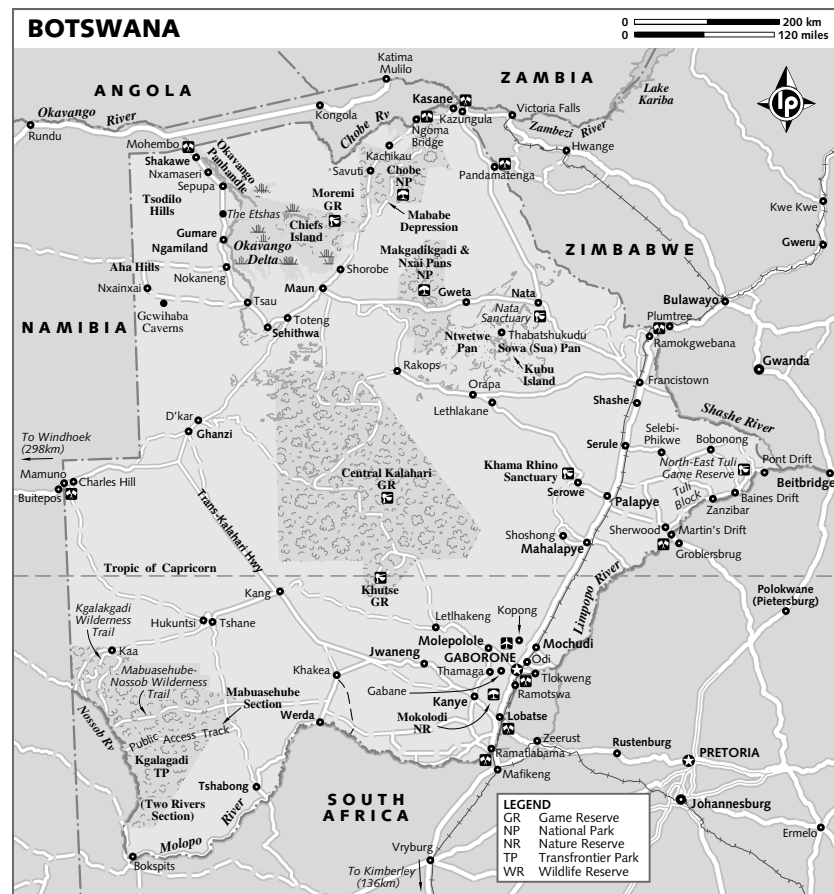
- **One Week** Combine your visit to the delta with a safari through **Chobe National Park** (p101), one of the world's top safari experiences. Either go overland through the rugged interior of the park, or cruise (or boat) along the wildlife-rich waterfront.
- **One Month** With a month (and lots of money), you can hire a 4WD or use a reputable safari company and see the best of the country: do a mokoro trip in the Delta (see the boxed text, p112); safari in Moremi and Chobe; camp and hike in the **Tsodilo Hills** (p117); cruise on the Okavango Panhandle; and explore the furthest reaches of the **Kalahari** (p118).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Although it straddles the Tropic of Capricorn, Botswana experiences extremes in both temperature and weather. In the winter (late May to August), days are normally clear, warm and sunny, and nights are cool to cold. Wildlife never wanders far from water sources so sightings are more predictable than in the wetter summer season. This is also the time of European, North American and – most importantly – South African school holidays, so some areas can be busy, especially between mid-July and mid-September. In summer (October to April), wildlife is harder to spot and rains can render sandy roads impassable. This is also the time of the highest humidity and the most stifling heat; daytime temperatures of over 40°C are common. See p742 for more information on the climate in Southern Africa.

HISTORY

For a detailed account of the pre-colonial history of the whole Southern African region, including Botswana's precolonial history, see p37.



The Boers & the British

In 1836, feeling pressured by the British in the Cape, about 20,000 Boers set out on the Great Trek across the Vaal River into Botswana and Zulu territory, staking out new farms for themselves and displacing local villagers.

Bent on establishing trade links with the Dutch and Portuguese, the Boers set up their own free state ruling the Transvaal – a move ratified by the British in the Sand River Convention of 1852. This effectively placed the Botswana under the rule of the so-called new South African Republic and a period of rebellion and heavy-handed oppression ensued. Following heavy human and territorial losses, the Botswana chiefs petitioned the British government for protection from the Boers.

Britain, though, already had its hands full in Southern Africa and was in no hurry to take on and support a country of dubious profitability. Instead, it offered to act as arbitrator in the dispute. By 1877, however, animosity against the Boers had escalated to such a dangerous level that the British conceded and annexed the Transvaal – thereby starting the first Anglo-Boer War. The war continued until the Pretoria Convention of 1881, when the British withdrew from the Transvaal in exchange for Boer allegiance to the British Crown.

With the British out of their way, the Boers once again looked northwards into Botswana territory and pushed westwards into the Molopo Basin. In 1882, the Boers managed to subdue the towns of Taung and

Mafikeng and proclaimed them the republics of Stellaland and Goshen. They may have gone much further if it wasn't for a significant event that was to change regional politics radically. This was the annexation of South West Africa (modern-day Namibia) by the Germans in the 1890s.

With the potential threat of a German-Boer alliance across the Kalahari, cutting them off from their expansionist dreams into mineral-rich Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), the British started to look seriously at the Batswana petitions for protection. And in 1885 they proclaimed a protectorate over their Tswana allies, known as the British Crown Colony of Bechuanaland.

Cecil John Rhodes

To alleviate them of the heavy burden of colonial expense, British expansion in Southern Africa came in the form of a private venture under the auspices of the British South Africa Company (BSAC), owned by millionaire businessman Cecil John Rhodes.

By 1889 Rhodes already had a hand in the diamond-mining industry in Kimberley, South Africa, and he was convinced that other African countries had similar mineral deposits just waiting to be exploited. He aimed to do this through the system of land concessions that companies could obtain privately in order to colonise new land for the Crown. The system was easily exploited by the unscrupulous Rhodes, who fraudulently obtained large tracts of land from local chiefs by passing off contracts as treaties. For their part, the British turned a blind eye as they eventually hoped to transfer the entire Bechuanaland Protectorate to the BSAC and relieve themselves of the expense of colonial administration.

Realising the implications of Rhodes' aspirations, three Batswana chiefs, Bathoen, Khama III and Sebele, accompanied by a sympathetic missionary, WC Willoughby, sailed to England to appeal directly to the British parliament for continued government control of Bechuanaland. Instead of taking action, Colonial Minister Joseph Chamberlain advised them to contact Rhodes directly and work things out among themselves. Chamberlain then conveniently forgot the matter and went on holiday.

Naturally, Rhodes was immovable, so the delegation turned to the London Missionary Society (LMS) who in turn took the matter

to the British public. Fearing that the BSAC would allow alcohol in Bechuanaland, the LMS and other Christian groups backed the devoutly Christian Khama and his entourage. The British public in general felt that the Crown should be administering the empire, rather than the controversial Cecil Rhodes. When Chamberlain returned from holiday, public pressure had mounted to such a level that the government was forced to concede to the chiefs. Chamberlain agreed to continue British administration of Bechuanaland, ceding only a small strip of the southeast (now known as the Tuli Block) to the BSAC for the construction of a railway line to Rhodesia.

Colonial Years

By 1899, Britain had decided it was time to consolidate the Southern African states and declared war on the Transvaal. The Boers were overcome in 1902, and in 1910 the Union of South Africa was created, comprising Natal, the Cape Colony, Transvaal and the Free State – with provisions for the future incorporation of Bechuanaland and Rhodesia.

By selling cattle, draught oxen and grain to the Europeans streaming north in search of farming land and minerals, Bechuanaland enjoyed an initial degree of economic independence. However, the construction of a railway through Bechuanaland to Rhodesia, and a serious outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the 1890s, destroyed the transit trade. This new economic vulnerability, combined with a series of droughts and the need to raise cash to pay British taxes, sent many Batswana to South Africa to look for work on farms and in mines; as many as 25% of Botswana's male population was abroad at any one time. This accelerated the breakdown of traditional land-use patterns and eroded the chiefs' powers.

The British government continued to regard the protectorate as a temporary expedient, until it could be handed over to Rhodesia or the new Union of South Africa. Hence investment and administrative development within the territory were kept to a bare minimum. Even when there were moves in the 1930s to reform administration or initiate agricultural and mining development, these were hotly disputed by leading Tswana chiefs, on the grounds that they would only enhance colonial control. So the territory remained divided into eight largely self-administering 'tribal' reserves, five white settler farm blocks with

THE SAN

The Past

Traditionally, the San were nomadic hunter-gatherers who travelled in small family bands (usually between 25 and 35 people) within well-defined territories. During the driest parts of the year these groups camped together at seasonal water holes; then in the wet season they'd scatter over the country. They had no chiefs or hierarchy of leadership, and decisions were reached by group consensus. With no animals, crops or possessions the San were highly mobile. Everything that they needed for their daily existence they carried with them.

Initially, the San's social flexibility enabled them to evade conquest and control. But as powerful tribes with big herds of livestock and farming ambitions moved into the area an inevitable conflict arose over the land. The San's wide-ranging, nomadic lifestyle (some territories extended over 1000 sq km) was utterly at odds with the settled world of the farmers and soon became a source of bitter conflict between the two groups. It was a trend widely accelerated by European colonists who arrived in the mid-17th century. The early Boers hatched an extermination campaign that lasted 200 years and killed as many as 200,000 indigenous people. Such territorial disputes, combined with modern policies on wildlife conservation, have seen the San increasingly disenfranchised and dispossessed. What's more, in the modern world their disparate social structure has made it exceedingly difficult for them to organise pressure groups to defend their rights and land as other tribes have done.

The Present

Unlike most other African countries, where the San have perished or disappeared through war and interbreeding, Botswana and Namibia are privileged to retain the remnants of their San communities, barely 55,000 individuals in total. Of these around 60% live in Botswana (the !Kung, G//ana, G//wi and !xo being the largest groups) and 35% in Namibia (the Naro, !Xukwe, Hei//kom and Ju//hoansi), with the remainder scattered throughout South Africa, Angola, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Today, the San are unequivocally impoverished. Many work on farms and cattle-posts or languish in squalid, handout-dependent and alcohol-plagued settlements centred around boreholes in western Botswana and northeastern Namibia, as debate rages around them as to their 'place' in modern African society and the practicality of their lifestyle.

Nearly all of Botswana's and Namibia's San have now been relocated from their ancestral lands to new government settlements such as New Xade in the central Kalahari. It's the biggest political hot-potato that the Botswana government currently faces (see the boxed text, p119). In March 2006 this resettlement programme earned the government a stinging reprimand from the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, who advised them 'to pay particular attention to the close cultural ties that bind the San to their ancestral land'. The Botswana government maintains that their relocation policies have the San's best interests at heart (see the section 'Relocation of Basarwa' on the government website, www.gov.bw). Development, education and modernisation are their buzz-words. The trouble is, many San actively reject the government's version of modernisation if it means giving up their ancestral lands and traditions.

The Future

The outlook for the San people is uncertain, whatever happens. One of Africa's greatest dilemmas in the 21st century is how to preserve old cultures and traditions while accepting and adapting to the new.

Historical precedents like Native Americans, the Innu of Canada and Australian Aboriginals certainly don't bode well. But the groundswell of protest generated by grass-roots organisations like **WIMSA** (Working Group for Indigenous Minorities of Southern Africa; www.san.org.za) is gaining ever more international attention, increasingly so now that **Survival International** (www.survival-international.org) has joined the campaign of Botswana's First Peoples of the Kalahari (FPK) for the restitution of their land rights in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR). The High Court of Botswana ruled in favour of the San in December 2006, but the government appears to be obstructing their return to the CKGR.

the remainder classified as 'crown' (ie state) lands. Similarly, the administrative capital, Mafikeng, which was actually situated outside the protectorates' border in South Africa, remained where it was until 1964.

Independence

The extent of Botswana's subordination to the interests of South Africa during this period became clear in 1950. In a case that caused political controversy in Britain and across the Empire, the British government banned Seretse Khama from the chieftainship of the Ngwato and exiled him for six years. This, as secret documents have since revealed, was in order to appease the South African government which objected to Seretse's marriage to a British woman at a time when racial segregation was enforced in South Africa.

Such meddling only increased growing political agitation and throughout the 1950s and '60s Botswana political parties started to surface and promote the idea of independence. Following the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, South African refugees Motsamai Mpho of the African National Congress (ANC), and Philip Matante, a Johannesburg preacher affiliated with the Pan-Africanist Congress, joined with KT Motsete, a teacher from Malawi, to form the Bechuanaland People's Party (BPP). Its immediate goal was independence.

In 1962, Seretse Khama and Kanye farmer Ketumile 'Quett' Masire formed the moderate Bechuanaland Democratic Party (BDP). The BDP formulated a schedule for independence, drawing on support from local chiefs such as Bathoen II of the Bangwaketse, and traditional Batswana. The BDP also called for the transfer of the capital into Botswana (ie from Mafikeng to Gaborone) and a new nonracial constitution.

The British gratefully accepted the BDP's peaceful plan for a transfer of power, and Khama was elected president when general elections were held in 1965. On 30 September 1966, the country – now called the Republic of Botswana – was granted full independence.

With a steady hand, Seretse Khama steered Botswana through its first 14 years of independence. He guaranteed continued freehold over land held by white ranchers and adopted a strictly neutral stance (at least until near the end of his presidency) towards South Africa and Rhodesia. The reason, of course, was Botswana's economic dependence on

the giant to the south, from where they imported the majority of their foodstuffs and where many Batswana worked in the diamond mines. Nevertheless, Khama refused to exchange ambassadors with South Africa and officially disapproved of apartheid in international circles.

Modern Politics

Sir Seretse Khama died in 1980 (not long after Zimbabwean independence), but his Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), formerly the Bechuanaland Democratic Party, continues to command a substantial majority in the Botswana parliament. Sir Ketumile 'Quett' Masire, who succeeded Khama as president (1980–98), followed the path laid down by his predecessor, and continued to cautiously follow pro-Western policies.

Over the last 35 years the BDP have also managed the country's diamond windfall wisely. Diamond dollars have been ploughed into infrastructure, education and health. Private business has been allowed to grow and foreign investment has been welcomed. From 1966 to 2005, Botswana's economy has grown faster than any other in world. Yet cabinet ministers have not awarded themselves mansions and helicopters, and even the current president, Festus Mogae, has been seen doing his own shopping. All in all, it is an impressive record.

Diamond Dementia

Following independence, Botswana ranked as one of the world's poorest countries with a shocking GDP per capita below US\$200. Educational facilities were minimal, with less than 2% of the population having completed primary school and fewer than 100 students enrolled in university. And in the entire country there was only one 12km-long paved road. Hardly surprising then that the country played no role in either regional or continental politics.

Then, in 1967, Botswana effectively won the jackpot with the discovery of diamonds at Orapa. Two other major mines followed at Letlhakane in 1977 and Jwaneng in 1982, making Botswana the world's leading producer of gem-quality stones and catapulting the country from a poor, provincial backwater to a regional player of some substance, able to form the Southern African Development Community (SADC), whose function it is

to coordinate the disparate economies of the region.

But the diamond boon also has its dark side and with a lifespan estimated at only 35 years, the Botswana government is looking at a bleak future if they fail to find alternative revenue streams. With diminishing reserves the mining of diamonds is set to become increasingly contentious, as the court case brought by the First Peoples of the Kalahari against the government has proved (see the boxed text, p119). One of the allegations against the government is that the San were resettled to free the way for a Debswana mining concession. In her evidence, Pelonomi Venson, Minister for Wildlife & Tourism in 2002, stated, 'That development may take place...I cannot say conclusively. Should the state discover minerals anywhere, they will be mined for the benefit of Botswana'.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Proud, conservative, resourceful and respectful, the Batswana have an ingrained feeling of national identity and an impressive belief in their government and country. Their history – a series of clever manoeuvres that meant they avoided the worst aspects of colonisation – does them proud and lends them a confidence in themselves, their government

and the future that is rare in post-colonial Africa. Admittedly this faith in government and progress has been facilitated by Botswana's incredible diamond wealth, which has allowed for significant investment in education, health and infrastructure.

Daily Life

Traditional culture also acts as a sort of societal glue. Respect for one's elders, firmly held religious beliefs, traditional gender roles and the tradition of the *kgotla* (a specially designated meeting place in each village where grievances can be aired in an atmosphere of mutual respect) create a well-defined social structure with some stiff mores at its core. But despite some heavyweight social responsibilities the Batswana have an easy-going and unhurried approach to life, and the emotional framework of the extended family generally makes for an inclusive network. As the pace and demands of modern life increase this support is becoming ever more vital as men and women migrate to cities to work in more lucrative jobs, usually leaving children behind to be cared for by other family members.

Population

Botswana's population in 2006 was estimated at 1,640,000 people, a figure that takes into

MOVERS & SHAKERS: SERETSE KHAMA

When Bangwato chief (*kgosi* in Setswana) Khama III died in 1923, he was succeeded by his son, Sekgoma, who died only two years later. Because the next heir to the throne, Seretse Khama, was only four years old, the job of regent went to his 21-year-old uncle, Tshekedi Khama, who left his studies in South Africa to return to Serowe.

Uproar in the Khama dynasty occurred in 1948 when Seretse married an Englishwoman, Ruth Williams, while studying law in London. As a royal, Seretse was expected – and required – to take a wife from a Batswana royal family. Indignant at such a breach of tribal custom, Tshekedi stripped his nephew of his inheritance. Seretse was exiled from Serowe by Bangwato leaders, and from the protectorate by the British, who assured him that he'd be better off in London.

However, Tshekedi lost his regency when an overwhelming majority of the Bangwato backed Seretse over his uncle, forcing Tshekedi to gather his followers and settle elsewhere. Subsequent breakdowns in Bangwato tribal structure prompted Tshekedi to return to Serowe in 1952 with a change of heart. Seretse was still being detained in Britain though, and it wasn't until 1956, when he renounced his claim to the Bangwato throne, that he was permitted to return to Serowe with his English wife.

While in Serowe, Seretse and his wife began campaigning for Botswana's independence. Eventually, Seretse was knighted for his efforts, and became the country's first president, a post he held until his death 14 years later. In a final act of reconciliation, Sir Seretse Khama was buried in the Royal Cemetery in Serowe. His son, Ian, is still chief of the Bangwato and currently vice president of Botswana.

account the fact that Botswana has one of the highest rates of HIV infection in the world. Since the early 1990s, the annual birth rate has dropped from 3.5% to about 2.3% and in 2006 the annual population growth rate was estimated at -0.04%. Officially, life expectancy soared from 49 years at the time of independence (1966) to about 70 years by the mid-1990s, and it's thought that without the scourge of AIDS life expectancy in Botswana would now be around 74 years, on a par with the USA. Instead, today's figure is a depressing 33 years of age and this is expected to decrease even further by 2010 to a devastating 27 years.

Immigration & Emigration

Due to the political and economic instability that swept through Zimbabwe in recent years, the volume of illegal immigrants crossing into Botswana in search of work is on the rise. According to Botswana's Department of Immigration, over 25,000 Zimbabwean illegal immigrants were apprehended and repatriated from Botswana in 2005 alone. When interviewed, immigrants claimed that their motivation for fleeing Zimbabwe was the lack of opportunities for stable employment. Furthermore, many Zimbabwean families survive on remittances from family members working abroad, especially considering that the value of the Zimbabwean dollar is undergoing hyperinflation. However, although most Botswana empathise with the plight of Zimbabweans, the situation is threatening to spiral out of control.

ARTS Arts & Crafts

The original Botswana artists managed to convey individuality, aesthetics and aspects of Botswana life in their utilitarian implements. Baskets, pottery, fabrics and tools were decorated with meaningful designs derived from tradition. Europeans introduced a new form of art, some of which was integrated and adapted to local interpretation, particularly in weavings and tapestries. The result is some of the finest and most meticulously executed work in Southern Africa.

Literature

As indigenous languages have only been written since the coming of the Christian missionaries, Botswana lacks an extensive literary tradition. What survives of the ancient myths

and poetry of the San, Tswana, Herero and other groups has been handed down orally and only recently written down.

Botswana's most famous modern literary figure was Bessie Head, who settled in Sir Seretse Khama's village of Serowe and wrote works that reflected the harshness and beauty of African village life and the Botswanan landscape. Her most widely read works include *Serowe – Village of the Rain Wind*, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru*, *A Question of Power*, *The Cardinals*, *A Bewitched Crossroad* and *The Collector of Treasures*; the last is an anthology of short stories. Head died in 1988.

Welcome recent additions to Botswana's national literature are the works of Norman Rush, which include the novel *Mating*, set in a remote village, and *Whites*, which deals with the country's growing number of expatriates and apologists from South Africa and elsewhere.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

With an area of 582,000 sq km, landlocked Botswana extends 1100km from north to south and 960km from east to west, making it about the same size as Kenya or France.

Most of the country lies at an average elevation of 1000m and consists of a vast and nearly level sand-filled basin characterised by scrub-covered savanna. The Kalahari (Kgalagadi), a semi-arid expanse of wind-blown sand deposits and long, sandy valleys, covers nearly 85% of Botswana, including the entire central and southwestern regions. In the northwest the Okavango River flows in from Namibia and soaks into the sands, forming the Okavango Delta, which covers an area of 15,000 sq km. In the northeast are the great salty clay deserts of the Makgadikgadi Pans.

Wildlife

Most of the country is covered with scrub brush and savanna grassland, although small areas of deciduous forest (mopane, msasa and Zambezi teak) thrive on the Zimbabwean border. The Okavango and Linyanti wetlands of the northwest are characterised by riverbank and swamp vegetation, which includes reeds, papyrus and water lilies as well as larger trees such as acacia, jackalberry, leadwood and sausage trees.

Because the Okavango Delta and the Chobe River provide an incongruous water supply in

the otherwise dry savanna, nearly all Southern African mammal species, including such rarities as pukus, red lechwes, sitatungas and wild dogs, are present in Moremi Game Reserve, parts of Chobe National Park and the Linyanti Marshes. In the Makgadikgadi & Nxai Pan National Park, herds of wildebeests, zebras and other hoofed mammals migrate between their winter range on the Makgadikgadi plains and the summer lushness of the Nxai Pan region.

National Parks

Botswana's national parks are among Africa's wildest, characterised by open spaces where nature still reigns supreme, and although they do support a few private safari concessions, there's next to no infrastructure and few amenities.

The major parks include the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Chobe National Park, Khutse Game Reserve, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (an amalgamation of Botswana's former Mabuasehube-Gemsbok National Park and South Africa's Kalahari-Gemsbok National Park), Makgadikgadi & Nxai Pan National Park and Moremi Game Reserve. The North-East Tuli Game Reserve is not a national park, but rather is cobbled together from several private reserves.

Fees for parks (except for Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park) for nonresidents are US\$22/13 (P133/79) per day for individual travellers/licensed safari participants, plus US\$5.50 (P33) per person for camping; foreign/Botswana-registered vehicles pay US\$10/2 per day. Children and Botswana residents and citizens get substantial discounts (residents of Botswana pay US\$6/4 per day to enter/camp and citizens pay US\$2/1). At Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, everyone pays US\$4 per day to enter and nonresidents pay US\$6 to camp plus US\$37 per day to use the wilderness 4WD tracks (see p118).

You can book accommodation in the national parks by post, phone; fax, email or in person up to one year prior to your intended visit. Contact the reservation office of the **Department of Wildlife & National Parks** (DWNP; Map pp88-9; ☎ 318 0774; fax 318 0775; dwnp@gov.bw; PO Box 131, Government Enclave, Khama Cres, Gaborone; 📍 7.30am-12.45pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Fri). You can also book through the **Maun office** (☎ 686 1265; fax 686 1264; PO Box 20364, Beseja, Maun), beside the police station. Chobe National Park bookings are also available from the **Kasane office** (☎ 625 0235; fax 625 1623).

When booking, include the name of the park, the camping ground, the dates of arrival and departure, the total number of campers and whether they are citizens, residents or nonresidents of Botswana. Payment in Botswana pula or by credit card must be received within one month or you forfeit the booking.

Environmental Issues

While much of Botswana is largely wide open and pristine, it does face several ecological challenges. The main one revolves around its 3000km of 1.5m-high 'buffalo fence', officially called the 'veterinary cordon fence' – a series of high-tensile steel wire barriers that cross some of the country's wildest terrain. The fences were first erected in 1954 to segregate wild buffalo herds from domestic free-range cattle and thwart the spread of foot-and-mouth disease. However, it hasn't been proven that the disease is passed from species to species and the fences not only prevent contact between wild and domestic bovine species, but also prevent other wild animals from migrating to water sources along age-old seasonal routes. While Botswana has set aside large areas for wildlife protection, they don't constitute independent ecosystems, and migratory wildlife numbers (particularly wildebeests, giraffes and zebras) continue to decline. Cattle ranching is a source of wealth and a major export industry, but all exported beef must be disease-free, so understandably ranchers have reacted positively to the fences, and the government tends to side with the ranchers.

Botswana also has water issues. From the time of the first European colonists, both settlers and developers have been eyeing the Okavango Delta as a source of water to transform northwestern Botswana into lush, green farmland. Nowadays, pressure from population growth, mining interests and increased tourism – particularly around Maun – are straining resources and placing the delta at the crux of a debate between the government, ranchers, engineers, developers, tour operators, rural people and conservationists.

See p26 for information on what you can do to travel responsibly in Botswana.

FOOD & DRINK Food

Although eating out isn't particularly exciting – Botswana has no great national cuisine to knock

TRADITIONAL FOODS IN BOTSWANA

Traditionally, the Tswana staple was beef, the Yei depended on fish, and the Kalanga ate mainly sorghum, millet and maize; while the Herero subsisted on thickened, soured milk. Nowadays, most people get their food from agriculture or the supermarket, but before South African imports arrived, people herded animals and looked to the desert, which dished up a diverse array of wild edibles to augment their staple foods.

Historically, Batswana men were responsible for fishing or tending the herds, and lived mainly on meat and milk, while women were left to gather and eat wild fruits and vegetables. In remote areas, people still supplement their diets with these items. A useful desert plant is the *morama*, an immense underground tuber that contains liquid and is a source of water. Above ground, the *morama* grows leguminous pods that contain edible beans. Other desert delectables include marula fruit, plums, berries, tubers and roots, tsama melons, wild cucumbers and honey.

A fungus that grows on the *Grewia flavia* bush is related to the European truffle. In San mythology, these so-called Kalahari truffles are thought to be the eggs of the lightning bird because their presence is revealed by rings of cracked soil around the bush after electrical storms. The bush itself produces a small shrivelled berry, used locally to make *kgadi* wine. The nutritious and protein-rich mongongo nut, similar to the cashew, is eaten raw or roasted, and has historically been a staple for some San groups.

Traditional people – mainly the San – still gather wild animal products, such as birds and their eggs, small mammals and reptiles and even ant eggs. Mopane worms, caterpillar-like inhabitants of mopane trees, are normally gutted and cooked in hot ash for about 15 minutes. Alternatively, they're boiled in salt water or dried in the sun to be later deep-fried in fat, roasted or eaten raw.

your socks off – self-caterers will find the pickings among the best in Africa. Restaurants normally serve up decent, if unimaginative, fare. Vegetarian and international cuisines haven't really caught on, but in Gaborone, Francistown and Maun, you'll find Chinese, Indian, French and Italian options. In smaller towns, expect little menu variation: chicken, chips, beef and greasy fried snacks are the norm.

Forming the basis of most traditional Batswana meals are *mabele* (sorghum) or *bogobe* (sorghum porridge), or the increasingly popular imported *mielies* (maize) and *mielie pap* (maize porridge). All of these are typically served with some sort of meat relish and eaten with the fingers.

Open markets aren't as prevalent here as in neighbouring countries, but Gaborone, Francistown and Maun do have growing informal markets where you'll find inexpensive produce and other staples.

Drinks

A range of 100% natural fruit juices from South Africa are sold in casks in supermarkets in the major cities and towns. You'll also find a variety of tea, coffee and soft drinks.

Botswana's main domestic drop is the very light St Louis Special Light lager (you can't

drink it fast enough to feel it). You'll also find Castle, Lion and Windhoek Lager (from Namibia), as well as a growing range of spirit coolers. Some of the more popular traditional alcoholic drinks are less than legal, including mokolane wine, a potent still made from distilled palm sap. Another is *kgadi*, made from a distilled brew of brown sugar and berries or fungus. Other home brews include the common *bojalwa*, an inexpensive, sprouted sorghum beer that is also brewed commercially; a wine made from fermented marula fruit; light and nonintoxicating *mageu*, made from *mielies* or sorghum mash; and *madila*, a thickened sour milk.

GABORONE

pop 250,000

Botswana's diminutive capital, Gaborone (normally affectionately shortened to Gabs), is little more than a rambling village suffering from growing pains, drabness and a lack of definition. For most international travellers flying into Botswana, the bustling town of Maun (p106), located on the banks of the Okavango Delta, serves as the principal port of entry. However, Gaborone serves as a con-

venient gateway to overland travellers arriving from South Africa, and it's a good supply stop before heading out to the national parks.

HISTORY

In 1964, when the village of Gaborone (named for an early Tlokwa chief) was designated as the future capital of independent Botswana, the task of designing the new city was assigned to the Department of Public Works, which never envisaged a population of more than 20,000. By 1990, however, the population was six times that, and Gaborone is now amongst the fastest-growing cities in Southern Africa.

ORIENTATION

Although it now has a distinct skyline, Gaborone lacks any real central business district, and the action focuses on its shopping malls. Most government ministries and offices are concentrated around the Government Enclave along Khama Cres, at the head of the main mall. While several shopping centres serve local neighbourhoods, the enormous Kgale Centre and Riverwalk Malls provide the widest range of retail outlets and restaurants.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Exclusive Books (Riverwalk Mall) This reader-recommended bookshop has a wide range of literature, nonfiction and travel books.

Kingston's Bookshop (Broadhurst Mall) Has a huge array of novels, postcards, books and maps about Botswana and the region.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 997)

Central Police Station (☎ 355 1161; Botswana Rd) Opposite the Cresta President Hotel.

Fire (☎ 998)

Police (☎ 999)

Internet Access

Aim Internet (Botswana Rd; per hr US\$3) Next to the Cresta President Hotel.

Sakeng Internet Access Point (The Mall; US\$3 per hour) In the Gaborone Hardware Building.

Medical Services

Gaborone Hospital Dental Clinic (☎ 395 3777) Part of the Gaborone Private Hospital.

Gaborone Private Hospital (☎ 360 1999; Segoditshane Way) For anything more serious, head to

this considerably more modern, but expensive, hospital, opposite Broadhurst Mall.

Money

Major branches of Standard Chartered and Barclays Banks have foreign-exchange facilities and ATMs, and offer cash advances. The few bureaux de change around the city offer quick service at better rates than the banks, but charge up to 2.75% commission.

Barclays Bank (☎ 355 3411; Khama Cres)

Edcom Bureau de Change (☎ 361 1123) Near the train station.

Post

In addition to the **central post office** (The Mall), there is also a post office located across the road from Broadhurst Mall.

Tourist Information

Department of Tourism (☎ 355 3024; www.gov.bw/tourism; 2nd fl, Standard Chartered Bank Bldg, the Mall; ☎ 7.30am-12.30pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Has greatly improved over recent years.

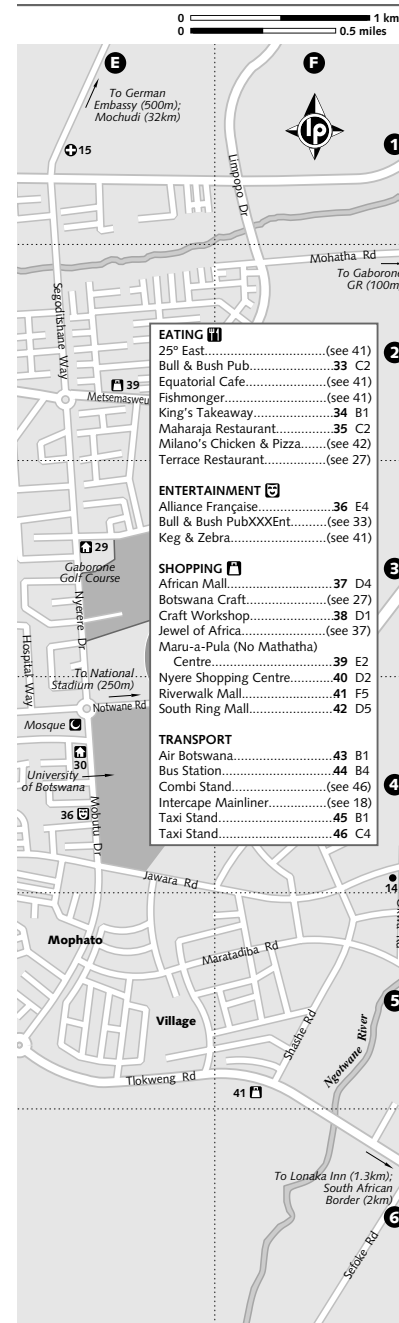
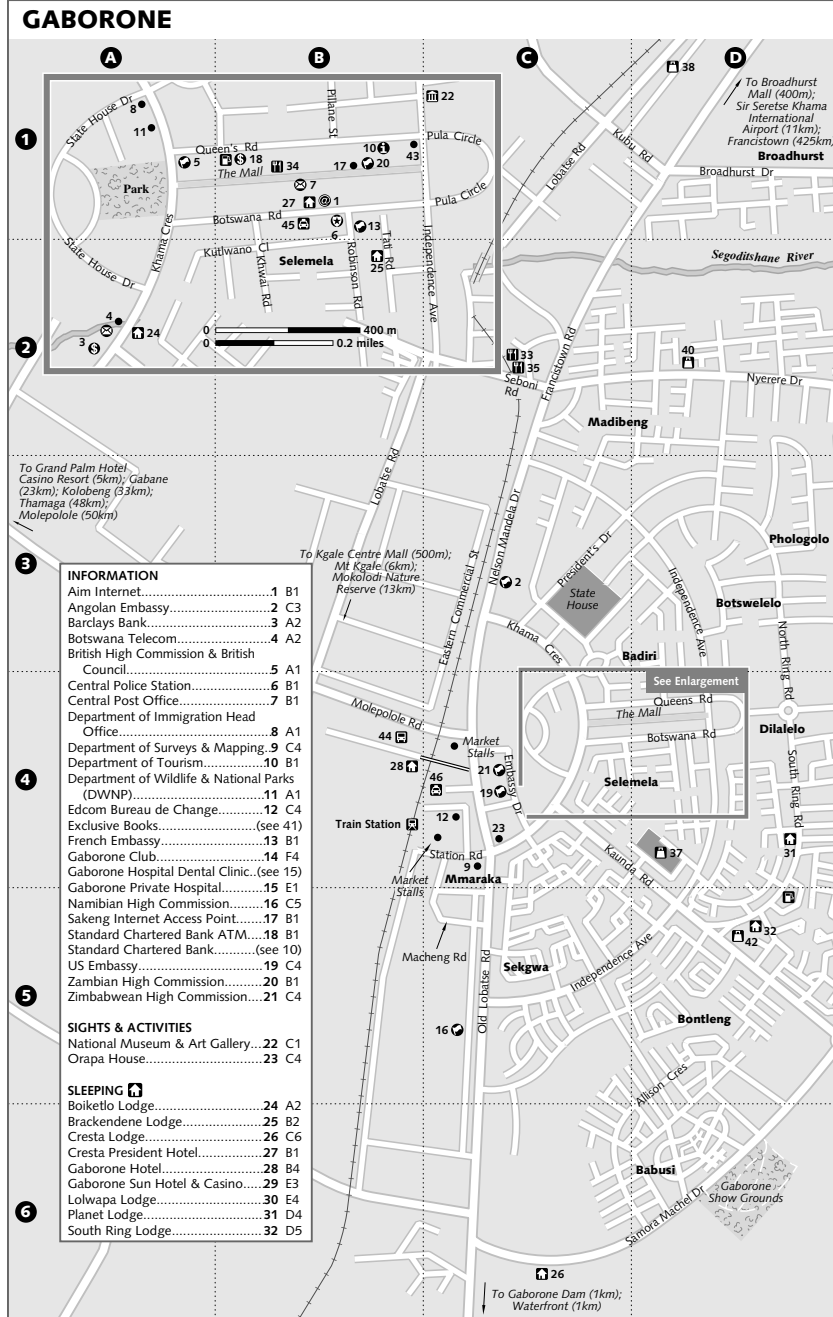
Department of Wildlife & National Parks (DWNP; ☎ 318 0774; dwnp@gov.bw; Government Enclave, Khama Cres, Gaborone; ☎ reservations 7.30am-12.45pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Fri) One of the two accommodation booking offices (the other is in Maun; see p107) for national parks and reserves run by the DWNP.

SIGHTS

The **National Museum & Art Gallery** (☎ 397 4616; Independence Ave; Private Bag 0014; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) is a repository of stuffed wildlife and cultural artefacts, including displays on San crafts, material culture and hunting techniques, traditional and modern African and European art, and ethnographic and cultural exhibits.

The **Gaborone Game Reserve** (☎ 358 4492; admission US\$0.25, plus per vehicle US\$0.50; ☎ 6.30am-6.30pm), 1km east of Broadhurst, is accessible only by private vehicle (no bikes or motorcycles), and is home to a variety of grazers and browsers. Access is from Limpopo Dr; turn east immediately south of the Segoditshane River.

Orapa House (☎ 395 1131; nr Nelson Mandela Dr & Khama Cres), owned by Debswana, is designed to make use of natural daylight – without direct sunlight – for the purpose of sorting and grading diamonds from the world's largest diamond mine at Jwaneng. If you have time and aren't put off by red tape, you can muster a group and arrange a tour.



ACTIVITIES

Visitors are welcome at the 18-hole **Gaborone Golf Course** (☎ 361 2262; Chuma Dr; ☹ closed Mon). Temporary membership, which includes use of the swimming pool, bars and restaurants, costs US\$10 per day. Green fees for 9/18 holes are an extra US\$3/6, and equipment is available for rental at the pro shop. The **National Stadium** (☎ 395 3449; Notwane Rd; tickets from US\$1) plays host to matches between teams in the countrywide Super League as well as the occasional international game. Matches start at 4pm on Saturdays and Sundays, and are usually advertised and publicised in the local English-language newspapers.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The national holidays of **Sir Seretse Khama Day**, **President's Day** and **Botswana/Independence Day** (see p125) are always cause for celebration in the capital. Details about these events are advertised in local English-language newspapers and in the 'What's On' column of the *Botswana Advertiser*. Gaborone also plays host to a number of local festivals and events: **Maitisong Festival** Established in 1987, the Maitisong Festival is the largest performing arts festival in Botswana, and is held annually for seven days during the last week of March or the first week of April.

Traditional Dance Competition Late March.

Industry & Technology Fair Held at the Gaborone Show Grounds in May.

International Trade Fair Also held at the Gaborone Show Grounds, in August.

SLEEPING Budget

The best camping in the Gaborone area is at the nearby Mokolodi Nature Reserve (p93).

Boiketlo Lodge (☎ 355 2347; Khama Cres; s/d with shared bathroom US\$18/30; (P)) The most affordable hotel in town is dirt cheap and centrally located, though grungy rooms and questionable security are serious drawbacks. Boiketlo is poorly signed, though it can be found opposite the Botswana Post building.

our pick Brackendene Lodge (☎ 361 2886; Tati Rd; s/d from US\$24/45; (P) ☹) Although there are a few recently renovated rooms located in the main building, the Brackendene is more a collection of small houses than an organised lodge. The main building is a good choice if you want to be centrally located, though the houses do feature full kitchens.

Midrange

Lolwapa Lodge (☎ 318 4865; 2873 Mobotu Dr; s/d with shared bathroom US\$27/34, s/d US\$36/45; (P) (♿)) Although basic and decidedly lacking in character, carpeted rooms are clean and well furnished. Unfortunately, Lolwapa is on a noisy road and convenient to nothing except the university.

South Ring Lodge (☎ 318 5550; 3487 South Ring Rd; s/d with shared bathroom US\$30/35, s/d US\$37/42, suite US\$42/47; (P) (♿)) Shabby rooms are offset by the convenient location (right next to the South Ring Mall). Splurge for the 'suite', which is highlighted by a massive bathtub (a rarity in these parts).

Planet Lodge (☎ 390 3295; 514 South Ring Rd; s/d from US\$36/43; (P) (♿)) A short walk from the city centre brings you to this relaxed lodge, which offers attractive rooms featuring TVs, stereos, air-con and fridges. Rooms are priced according to size, and kitchen facilities are available to guests.

our pick Gaborone Hotel (☎ 362 2777; gabhot@info.bw; s/d US\$45/60; (P) (♿)) This large and modern complex will never win any awards for beauty, but it's conveniently located next to the bus and train stations. The rooms are large, surprisingly quiet and well furnished with cable TV and air-con.

Top End

Cresta President Hotel (☎ 355 3631; www.cresta-hospitality.com; The Mall; s/d US\$107/133; (P) (♿) (♿)) The first luxury hotel in the city is located smack-dab in the middle of the Mall, which pretty much justifies the heavy price tag.

Gaborone Sun Hotel & Casino (☎ 355 1111; www.suninternational.com/resorts/gaborone; Chuma Dr; standard/luxury d US\$115/140; (P) (♿) (♿)) Once known for its highbrow atmosphere, the seemingly abandoned Gaborone Sun fails to compete with its upmarket rivals. Still, it's not a bad choice, especially since guests can take advantage of on-site restaurants, a casino, swimming pool and golf course.

Cresta Lodge (☎ 367 5375; www.cresta-hospitality.com; Samora Machel Dr; s/d US\$119/139; (P) (♿) (♿)) Located 2km outside the city centre, the attractively landscaped Cresta Lodge is a good choice if you're looking for a quiet night's rest in a three-star setting outside the urban sprawl.

our pick Grand Palm Hotel Casino Resort (☎ 361 2999; www.grandpalm.bw; Molepolole Rd; d from US\$120; (P) (♿) (♿)) Located 5km west of the city centre,

this Las Vegas-inspired resort complex boasts a mini-city complete with restaurants, bars, a casino, cinema and spa. You'll pay to stay, but it's the swishest accommodation in town.

EATING

Equatorial Cafe (Riverwalk Mall; mains from US\$2) The best espressos in town are served here, along with fruit smoothies, falafel and gourmet sandwiches. They even have real bagels.

King's Takeaway (The Mall; meals US\$2-4) This local favourite serves up inexpensive burgers, chips and snacks to hungry office workers.

25° East (Riverwalk Mall; sushi US\$2-4, mains US\$5-10) If you can believe it, there is in fact a sushi restaurant on the edge of the Kalahari. Asian-inspired mains are probably a safer bet, though it's hard to say no to *nigiri-zushi*.

our pick Kgotla Restaurant & Coffee Shop (Broadhurst Mall; meals US\$4-6; (♿) closed Monday) This deservedly popular expat hang out above Woolworth's is renowned for its hearty breakfasts, vegetarian fare and coffee specialities.

Caffe Prego (Broadhurst Mall; mains US\$4-6) This charming little café specialises in healthy breakfasts and homemade pastas.

Milano's Chicken & Pizza (South Ring Mall; mains US\$4-7) This popular chain of Italian restaurants is your top spot for, well, chicken and pizza. There's also an outlet at Broadhurst Mall.

Maharaja Restaurant (☎ 393 1870; Seboni Rd; mains US\$4-8) The 'stylish' décor is a bit dated, though the large selection of Indian dishes (including vegetarian options) is perfect if you're looking for relief from pap and stew.

our pick Bull & Bush Pub (☎ 397 5070; mains US\$5-10) This long-standing Gaborone institution is popular with expats, tourists and locals alike. There's something on the menu for everyone, but the Bull & Bush is renowned for its thick steaks and cold beers. On any given night of the week, the outdoor beer garden is buzzing with activity, and you can bet there's always some sporting event worth watching on the tube.

Fishmonger (Riverwalk Mall; mains US\$5-10) So long as you don't think about where the nearest ocean is, you're going to enjoy the fish here.

our pick Terrace Restaurant (☎ 395 3631; The Mall; mains US\$6-10) On the terrace of the Cresta President Hotel, this eclectic restaurant is a good spot for surveying the passing Mall scene below. The Terrace serves up a variety of dishes including curries, grilled meats, continental cuisine and a few local specialities.

ENTERTAINMENT

Bull & Bush Pub (☎ 397 5070) This popular restaurant is also the centre for expat nightlife. There's a good selection of cold beers on tap, and if the conversation is lacking, you can always turn your attention to the international sports telecasts on satellite TV.

Keg & Zebra (Riverwalk Mall) This popular bar packs in the crowds for its Sunday-night sing-along jam sessions, though there's fun to be had here most nights of the week.

Nightspark (Broadhurst Mall; weekend admission US\$2) Features all sorts of musical acts and is popular with middle-class Batswana youth.

Waterfront (Gaborone Dam) South of the city, it occasionally hosts live performances.

Alliance Française (☎ 395 1650; Pudulogo Way) Frequently screens classic films.

SHOPPING

For shoppers, Gaborone is a series of shopping malls, headed up by the lovely Riverwalk Mall and the enormous Kgale Centre. Lesser options include Broadhurst/Kagiso Centre, the Mall and the increasingly seedy Maru-a-Pula (No Mathatha), Nyerere Shopping Centre and African Malls.

Botswana Craft (www.botswanacraft.bw; Warehouse ☎ 362 4471; The Mall ☎ 355 3577; Airport ☎ 361 2209) Botswana's largest craft emporium sells traditional souvenirs from all over the country, including weavings from Oodi and pottery from Gabane and Thamaga. If you're deficient at bargaining, fear not – prices are fixed.

Jewel of Africa (☎ 361 4359; jewel@global.bw; African Mall) This attractive shop offers an eclectic range of carvings, sketches, shawls and other assorted African knick-knacks. Although not everything is made in Botswana, prices here are reasonable (and fixed).

Craft Workshop (☎ 355 6364; 5648 Nakedi Rd, Broadhurst Industrial Estate) This small complex of shops sells crafts and souvenirs, and also plays host to a flea market on the morning of the last Sunday of each month. To get there take the 'Broadhurst Route 3' combi.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

From Sir Seretse Khama International Airport, 14km from the centre of town, **Air Botswana** (☎ 390 5500; Botswana Insurance Company House, The Mall) operates scheduled domestic flights to and from Francistown (US\$100), Maun (US\$155)

and Kasane (US\$155). The office also serves as an agent for other regional airlines.

For information about international flights to/from Gaborone, see p127.

Bus

Intercity buses and minibuses to Johannesburg (US\$12, seven hours), Francistown (US\$5, six hours), Selebi-Phikwe (US\$6, six hours), Ghanzi (US\$10, 11 hours), Lobatse (US\$1.50, 1½ hours), Mahalapye (US\$2.50, three hours), Palapye (US\$4, four hours) and Serowe (US\$4, five hours) depart from the main bus terminal. The main bus terminal also offers local services to Kanye (US\$1.50, two hours), Jwaneng (US\$4, three hours), Manyana (US\$0.80, 1½ hours), Mochudi (US\$1, one hour), Thamaga (US\$0.80, one hour) and Molepolole (US\$1.25, one hour).

To reach Maun or Kasane, you'll need to change in Francistown. Buses operate according to roughly fixed schedules and minibuses leave when full.

The Intercap Mainliner to Johannesburg (US\$25, 6½ hours) runs from the Kudu Shell petrol station beside The Mall. For more information, see p128).

Hitching

To hitch north, catch the Broadhurst 4 minibus from any shopping centre along the main city loop and get off at the standard hitching spot at the northern end of town. There's no need to wave down a vehicle – anyone with space will stop for passengers. Plan on around US\$6 to Francistown, where you can look for onward lifts to Nata, Maun and Kasane.

Train

The day train departs for Francistown daily at 10am (club/economy class US\$4/8, 6½ hours). The night train departs nightly at 9pm (economy/1st-class sleeper/2nd-class sleeper/US\$5/20/25, 8½ hours). Coming from Francistown, the overnight service continues to Lobatse (US\$1, 1½ hours) early in the morning, with only economy-class seats available from Gaborone. For current information, contact **Botswana Railways** (☎ 395 1401).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Taxis rarely turn up at the airport; if you do find one, you'll pay between US\$4 and US\$10 per person to the centre. The only reliable

transport between the airport and town is the courtesy minibuses operated by the top-end hotels for their guests. If there's space, nonguests may talk the driver into a lift, but you'll have to pay about US\$8.

Combis

Packed white combis, recognisable by their blue number plates, circulate according to set routes and cost US\$0.50. They pick up and drop off only at designated lay-bys marked 'bus/taxi stop'. The main city loop passes all the main shopping centres except the new Riverwalk Mall and the Kgale Centre, which are on the Tlokweng and Kgale routes, respectively. Combis can be hailed either along major roads or from the combi stand.

Taxi

Taxis, which can also be easily identified by their blue numberplates, are surprisingly difficult to come by in Gabs. Very few cruise the streets looking for fares, and most are parked either in front of the train station or on Botswana Rd. If you manage to get a hold of one, fares (negotiable) are generally US\$3 to US\$5 per trip around the city.

AROUND GABORONE

Kopong

Country Horse Safaris (☎ 721 34567; Lentsweletau Rd) is a friendly, Swedish-run ranch specialising in horse riding, though it also offers cheap and tranquil accommodation. Camping costs US\$5 per person, while double rooms with private bathrooms in the rustic guesthouse costs US\$20. Take the road from Gaborone towards Molepolole, then head to Kopong and follow the signs.

Odi

This small village (pronounced *Oo-dee*) is best known for its internationally acclaimed **Odi Weavers** (☎ 339 2268; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat & Sun), which produces and sells a range of locally made weavings, tapestries, bedspreads and cushions. Take a northbound minibus from Gaborone and get off at Odi Junction; from here, you'll probably have to hitch the final 7km to the workshop.

Mochudi

Mochudi, one of Botswana's most fascinating villages, was first settled by the Kwena in the mid-1500s, as evidenced by ruined stone walls

in the hills. In 1871 came the Kgatla people, who had been forced from their lands by northward-trekking Boers. The Cape Dutch-style **Phuthadikobo Museum** (☎ 577 7238; fax 574 8920; admission free, donations suggested; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 2-5pm Sat & Sun), established in 1976, is one of Botswana's best, with displays on the village and its Kgatla history. After visiting the museum, it's worth spending an hour appreciating the variety of designs in the town's mud-walled architecture.

Buses to Mochudi depart from Gaborone when full. By car, head north to Pilane and turn east; after 6km, turn left at the T-junction and then right just before the hospital, into the historic village centre.

Thamaga

The delightful but unexciting village of Thamaga is home to the **Botswelole Centre** (☎ 499 9220; Molepolole Rd; tours US\$0.50; ☎ 8am-5pm), also called Thamaga Pottery. This nonprofit community project was started by missionaries in the 1970s and now sells a wide range of creations for good prices. Tours must be booked in advance. Buses run frequently from the main bus terminal in Gaborone (US\$0.80, one hour).

Molepolole

The tongue-twisting name of this hillside village (pronounced *mo-lay-po-lo-lay*) is often sensibly shortened to 'Moleps'. The main attraction, the **Kgosi Sechele 1 Museum** (☎ 592 0917; Gaborone Rd; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-4pm Tue-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat), is housed in the 1902 police station and features traditional housing, paintings, historic photos and David Livingstone memorabilia. It's reputed that Chief Sechele was the only person the missionary Livingstone ever managed to convert to Christianity. This was accomplished after Livingstone visited the Kobokwe Cave (5km from town along the Thamaga road) and survived, despite dire warnings from local shamans that to approach the cave would bring about a speedy death.

You may also want to visit the **Schacter & Namder Diamond Factory** (☎ 592 0815; Thamaga Rd), which is Botswana's only diamond-cutting facility.

Mafeny-Thala Hotel (☎ 595 0522; ciaron@mega.bw; Gaborone Rd; s/d US\$37/48) offers comfortable and well-decorated rooms. Camping is also sporadically possible and the attached restaurant serves up classy meals.

Minibuses run frequently from the main bus terminal in Gaborone (US\$1, 1½ hours).

Mt Kgale

The 'sleeping giant', Mt Kgale, overlooks Gaborone, and you can easily hike to the summit for a sweeping view over the capital. Take any Lobatse bus or head out along the new Lobatse road to the car park (opposite an obvious satellite dish, just beyond the Kgale Centre Mall). Cross the white concrete stile and follow the track through a shallow gully to the trail of whitewashed stones that lead to the summit. Due to recent robberies, it's wise not to walk alone or carry anything of value.

Mokolodi Nature Reserve

This 3000 hectare private reserve (☎ 316 1955; www.mokolodi.com; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) was established in 1991, and is home to giraffes, elephants, zebras, baboons, warthogs, hippos, kudus, impalas, waterbucks and klipspringers. The reserve also protects a few retired cheetahs, leopards, honey badgers, jackals and hyenas, as well as over 300 different species of birds. Park entry fees are US\$2 per person per day and US\$4 per vehicle per day. If you're not self-driving, two-hour day or night wildlife drives cost US\$28 per person. There is a number of other activities on offer including guided walks (US\$12), rhino tracking (US\$80), cheetah petting (US\$48), horse safaris (US\$24) and a visit to the popular elephant baths (US\$3).

Though pricey, the **camp sites** (2 people US\$24) at Mokolodi are secluded and well groomed, and feature braai (barbecue) pits and thatched bush showers (with steaming hot water) and toilets. If you want to safari in style, there are also 3-person **chalets** (US\$120) and 8-person **A-frames** (US\$198) situated in the middle of the reserve. Advance bookings are recommended. If you don't have a vehicle, staff can drive you to the camp site and accommodation areas for a nominal charge.

The entrance to the reserve is located 12km south of Gaborone. By public transport, take a bus to Lobatse-bound combi to the signed turn-off. From there, it's a 1.5km walk to the entrance. You can also phone ahead for transfers from the city centre/airport (US\$28/44 for four people).

Kanye

Built around the base of Kanye Hill, the capital of the Bangwaketse people is home to the

Kanye Gorge, where the entire population of the town once hid during a Ndebele raid in the 1880s. A short, 1.5km walk along the cliff face from the eastern end of Kanye Gorge will take you to **Kanye Ruins**, the remains of an early 18th-century stone-walled village. Buses regularly travel between Gaborone and Kanye via Thamaga (US\$1.50, two hours). The bus station is 1.5km west of the main shopping centre.

EASTERN BOTSWANA

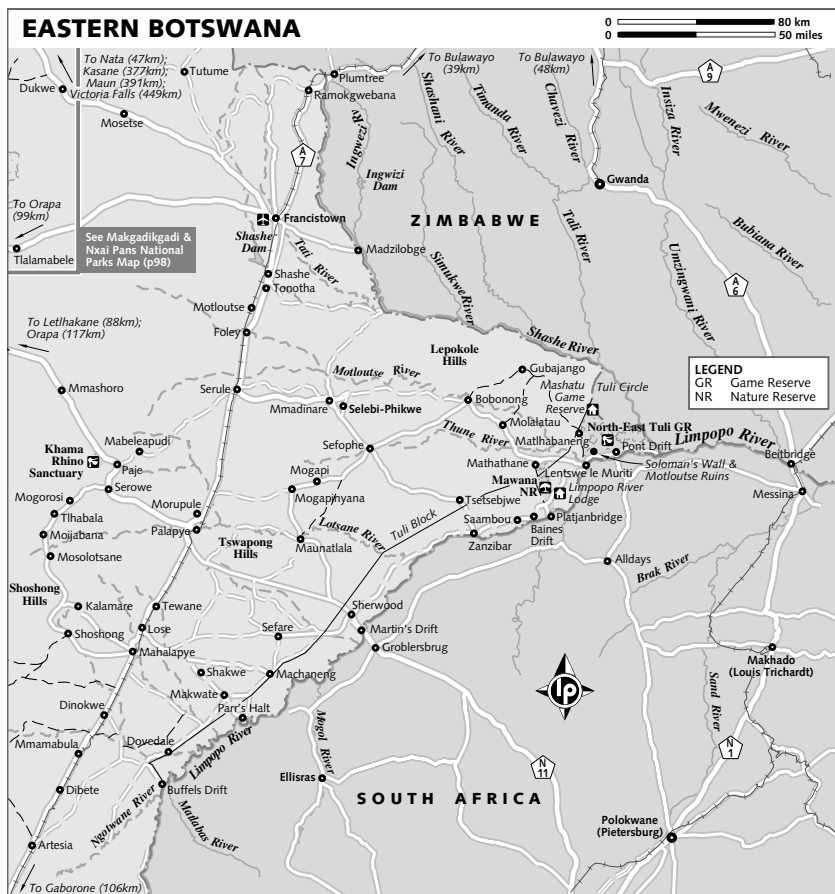
Eastern Botswana is largely comprised of granite-strewn scrubland that is amenable to agriculture and human habitation. Along the borders with South Africa and Zimbabwe, there are a number of large towns that subsist primarily on seasonal farming and ranching. Although the majority of these population centres are of little interest to tourists, the region is also home to a number of private game reserves that serve as a refreshing alternative to the heavily trafficked national parks.

SEROWE

In 1902, Chief Khama III abandoned the Bangwato capital in Phalatswe, and built Serowe on the ruins of an 11th-century village at the base of Thathaganyana Hill. Serowe was later immortalised by South African writer Bessie Head, who included the village in several of her works, including renowned *Serowe – Village of the Rain Wind*.

Although the modern town centre is drab and of little interest to travellers, it's worth visiting the **Khama III Memorial Museum** (☎ 463 0519; admission free but donations welcome; ☎ 8am-5pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4.30pm Sat), which was opened in 1985 and outlines the history of the Khama family. The museum includes the personal effects of Chief Khama III and his descendants as well as various artefacts illustrating Serowe's history. The museum is about 800m from the central shopping area on the road towards Orapa.

Before leaving town, hike up to the top of Thathaganyana Hill where you'll find the **Royal Cemetery**, which contains the grave of Sir Seretse Khama (see the boxed text, p83) and Khama III; the latter is marked by a bronze duiker (a small antelope), which is the Bangwato totem. Be advised that police consider this area to be sensitive, so visitors need to



seek permission (and possibly obtain a guide) from the police station in the barracks house. To reach the station, follow the road opposite the Dennis petrol station until you reach the *kgotla* and the surrounding barracks; one of the buildings houses the police station.

The small but quaint **Tshwaragano Hotel** (☎ 463 0377; s/d US\$26/30; P) is built on the slopes of Thathaganyana Hill, and boasts great views of the town. The attached bar-restaurant is usually the most hopping place in town. Tshwaragano is located above the shopping area on the road to Orapa.

Buses travel between Serowe and Gaborone (US\$4, four hours) about every hour. Alternatively, from Gabs catch a Francistown-bound bus, disembark at the turn-off to Serowe just

north of Palapye, and catch a shared taxi or combi to Serowe. Combi and shared taxis also depart for Orapa (US\$7, 4 hours) when full (this combi passes by the entrance to the Khama Rhino Sanctuary). Most buses, combis and taxis leave from a spot near Elleries furniture shop in the central shopping area, while the mammoth bus station nearby remains empty.

KHAMA RHINO SANCTUARY

In response to declining rhinoceros populations in Botswana, the residents of Serowe banded together in 1989 to establish the 4300-hectare **Khama Rhino Sanctuary** (☎ 463 0713; fax 463 5808; krst@botsnet.bw; per person US\$2, per vehicle US\$3; ☎ 8am-6.30pm). Today, the sanctu-

ary protects the country's last remaining population of rhinos – thirty-two white and one black rhino currently reside in Khama. The sanctuary is also home to zebras, giraffes, wildebeests, impalas, kudus, elands, ostriches, hyenas, leopards and over 230 species of birds.

The main roads within the sanctuary are normally accessible by 2WD in the dry season, though 4WD vehicles are necessary in the rainy season. However, all vehicles can reach the camp site and accommodation areas in any weather. The office at the entrance sells useful maps of the sanctuary as well as basic nonperishable foods, cold drinks and firewood.

Park entry fees are US\$2 per person per day and US\$3 per vehicle per day. If you're not self-driving, two-hour day/night wildlife drives cost US\$55/80, and can accommodate up to four people. Nature walks (US\$8 per person) and rhino tracking (US\$20 per adult) can also be arranged.

Shady **camp sites** (per person US\$9) with braai pits are adjacent to clean toilets and steaming hot showers. If you're looking to splurge for a night or two, rustic 4-person **chalets** (US\$50) and 6-person **A-frames** (US\$85) have basic kitchen facilities and private bathrooms. If you don't have a vehicle, staff can drive you to the camp site and accommodation areas for a nominal charge.

The entrance gate to the sanctuary is about 26km from Serowe on the road to Orapa (turn left at the unsigned T-junction about 5km northwest of Serowe). Khama is accessible by any bus or combi heading towards Orapa, and is not hard to reach by hitching (see p131 for information on hitching in Botswana).

FRANCISTOWN

pop 95,000

Although the second-largest city in Botswana is known primarily for its wholesale shopping, it's a useful (and often necessary) stopover on the way to/from Kasane, Nata, Maun or Victoria Falls.

Information

The Barclays and First National Banks along Blue Jacket St, among other banks, have ATMs and foreign exchange facilities.

Copy Shop (☎ 241 0177; Northgate Centre, Blue Jacket St; per hr US\$2; ☎ 8am-8pm) For internet and email access.

Ebrahim Store (☎ 241 4762; Francis Ave) The place to buy camping gear.

Nyangabgwe Hospital (☎ 241 1000, emergency ☎ 997)

Police (☎ 241 2221, emergency ☎ 999; Haskins St)

Polina Laundromat (Blue Jacket St)

Post office (Blue Jacket St)

Sights

The main site of tourist interest is the cultural and historical **Supa-Ngwao Museum** (☎ /fax 240 3088; snm@info.bw; off New Maun Rd; admission free but donations suggested; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat). It's housed in a 100-year-old Government Camp, which includes a prison and a police canteen. Displays include local and regional culture and history, as well as visiting art exhibitions.

Sleeping

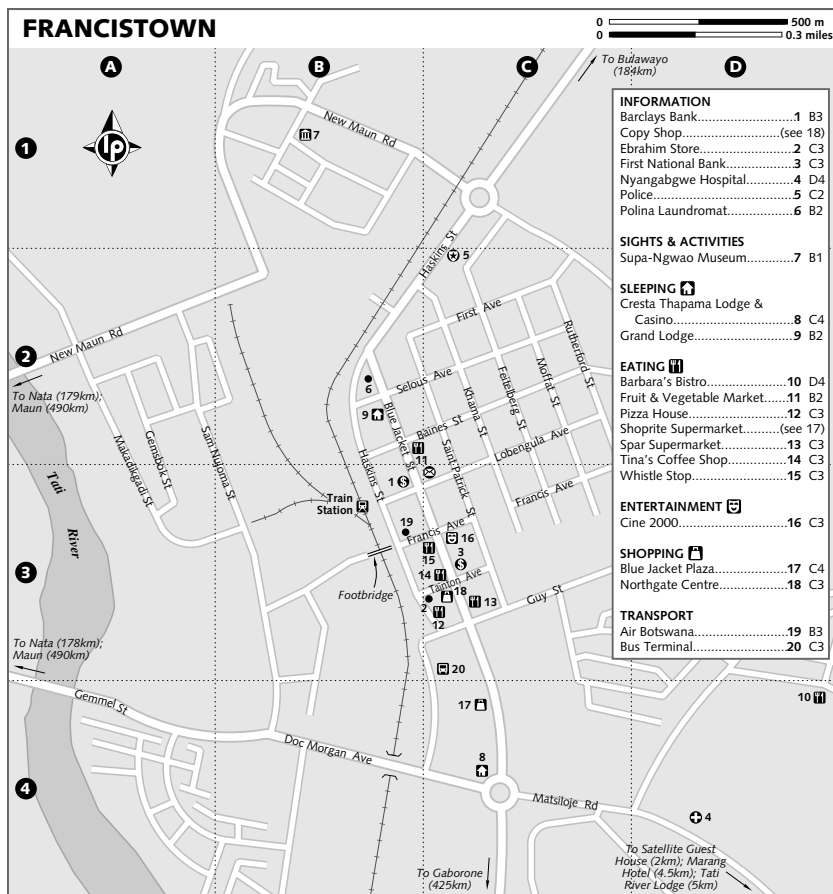
Marang Hotel (☎ 241 3991; marang@info.bw; Matsiloje Rd; camping per person US\$5, 2-person rondavel US\$40, s/d US\$80/95; P) Superbly situated on the banks of the Tati River, the Marang Hotel is a long-standing favourite among travellers. The serene setting and relaxed ambience make this an excellent choice, regardless of your budget. From the Cresta Thapama roundabout, Marang Hotel is about 3.5km along Matsiloje Rd.

Tati River Lodge (☎ 240 6000; trl@info.bw; camping per person US\$5, s/d from US\$70/85; P) On the other side of the Tati River from the Marang Hotel, this newer place lacks the character of its rival, though it's perfectly acceptable if you're just looking for a place to crash.

Satellite Guest House (☎ 241 4665; s/d US\$28/36; P) This walled compound of motel-style units is uninspiring, though it's certainly cheap if you're counting every pula. Unfortunately, it's located out in the suburbs, and can get noisy if there are a lot of guests.

Grand Lodge (☎ 241 2300; s/d US\$35/40; P) This is an excellent choice if you want to stay in the city centre. Standard rooms become something special when you add air-con, cable TV, a fridge and a hotplate.

Cresta Thapama Lodge (☎ 241 3872; www.cresta-hospitality.com; Thapama roundabout, cnr Blue Jacket St & Doc Morgan Ave; s/d with breakfast from US\$132/166; P) Francistown's most upmarket hotel boasts a 4-star rating, though the overall ambience is bit stuffy. But, if you're fan of luxury and formality, you'll revel in the colonial-inspired rooms, and unwind in the casino or on the squash and tennis courts.



Eating

Self-caterers have a choice of several well-stocked supermarkets (including Shoprite and Spar Supermarkets), as well as the fruit and vegetable market on the corner of Blue Jacket and Baines Sts.

Barbara's Bistro (Francistown Sports Club; US\$2-4) This quaint, leafy spot is a good choice for inexpensive local specialities.

Tina's Coffee Shop (Blue Jacket St; meals US\$2-5) Whether you're here for a cuppa with cake or a heavy plate of chicken and rice, you'll enjoy the cosy atmosphere at this popular local shop.

Whistle Stop (Blue Jacket St; mains US\$2-5) Start your day right with a hearty breakfast from the Whistle Stop. If you're not an early riser,

they also serve a good variety of grilled meats, fish, burgers and desserts.

Pizza House (Haskins St; pizzas from US\$4) If you're getting ready to head out to the wilds, savour every last bite of the wood-fired pizzas served here.

Entertainment

To find out what's going on, check the notice board at the museum and the 'What's On' column in the *Northern Advertiser*.

Cine 2000 (Blue Jacket St; US\$2) If you need your Western-culture fix, this small cinema shows recent English-language films.

Cresta Thapama Hotel & Casino (Blue Jacket St) The bar here attracts mostly business travellers, though there's a good selection of hard spirits here.

Marang Hotel (Old Gaborone Rd) Even if you're not staying here, it's worth the trip to the Marang for a drink in their popular garden bar overlooking the Tati River.

Getting There & Away

Air Botswana (☎ 241 2393; Francis Ave) flies between Francistown and Gaborone (US\$100) at least once daily, except Sunday.

From the main bus terminal, between the train line and the Blue Jacket Plaza, bus and minibus services connect Francistown with Nata (US\$3, two hours), Maun (US\$7.50, five hours), Gaborone (US\$6.50, six hours), Serowe (US\$3, 2½ hours), Selebi-Phikwe (US\$2, two hours) and Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (US\$2.80 to US\$3.50, two hours).

The overnight train to Gaborone (US\$24/20/5 1st/2nd/economy, 8¼ hours) leaves at 9pm and the day train (US\$7/3.50 club/economy, 6½ hours) leaves at 10am.

NORTH-EAST TULI GAME RESERVE

The Tuli Block is a 10km- to 20km-wide swathe of freehold farmland extending over 300km along the northern bank of the Limpopo River. Once owned by British South Africa Company (BSAC), the land was ceded to white settlers after the railway route was shifted to the northwest. However, much of the land proved to be unsuitable for agriculture, and has since been developed for tourism.

The main attraction of Tuli Block is the North-East Tuli Game Reserve, which is a collection of private game reserves. This area is rich in wildlife, and is home to elephants, hippos, kudus, wildebeests and impalas as well as small numbers of lions, cheetahs and leopards. More than 350 species of birds have also been recorded in the North-East Tuli Game Reserve.

The landscape in Tuli Block is defined by its unusual rock formations. The most famous feature is **Solomon's Wall**, a 30m-high dolerite dyke cut naturally through the landscape on either side of the river bed. Nearby are the **Motloutse Ruins**, a Great Zimbabwe-era stone village that belonged to the kingdom of Mwene Mutapa.

Sleeping

Advance bookings are recommended for all of these options.

Limpopo River Lodge (☎ 72-106098; www.limpopo-riverlodge.co.za; camping per person US\$12, chalet/rondeval

per person from US\$48; (P)) This lovely riverside retreat is the most affordable accommodation option in Tuli Block, though the wildlife along the river can be as rich as anywhere else. The lodge is located 12km northeast of Baines Drift.

Tuli Game Reserve (☎ 264 5303; www.tulilodge.com; tent camp per person with full board & game drives US\$57, standard/executive/luxury per person with full board & game drives US\$210/255/299; (P) (♿) (♿)) The Tuli Game Reserve is situated in a riverine oasis, and surrounded by red rock country that teems with wildlife. Advance reservations are strongly recommended. Rates include transfer from the Limpopo Valley Airfield or the Pont Drift Border Post. The game reserve is located just beyond the Pont Drift Border Post.

Mashatu Game Reserve (☎ 27-11 442 2267; www.mashatu.com; luxury tent/chalet with full board & game drives US\$180/300; (P) (♿) (♿)) The largest private wildlife reserve in Southern Africa is renowned for its big cats and frighteningly large elephant population (current estimates are well over a thousand). The main camp is one of Botswana's most exclusive resorts, though those with lighter wallets can still indulge in luxury at the tent camp. Rates include transfer from the Limpopo Valley Airfield or the Pont Drift Border Post. The game reserve is located just beyond the Pont Drift Border Post.

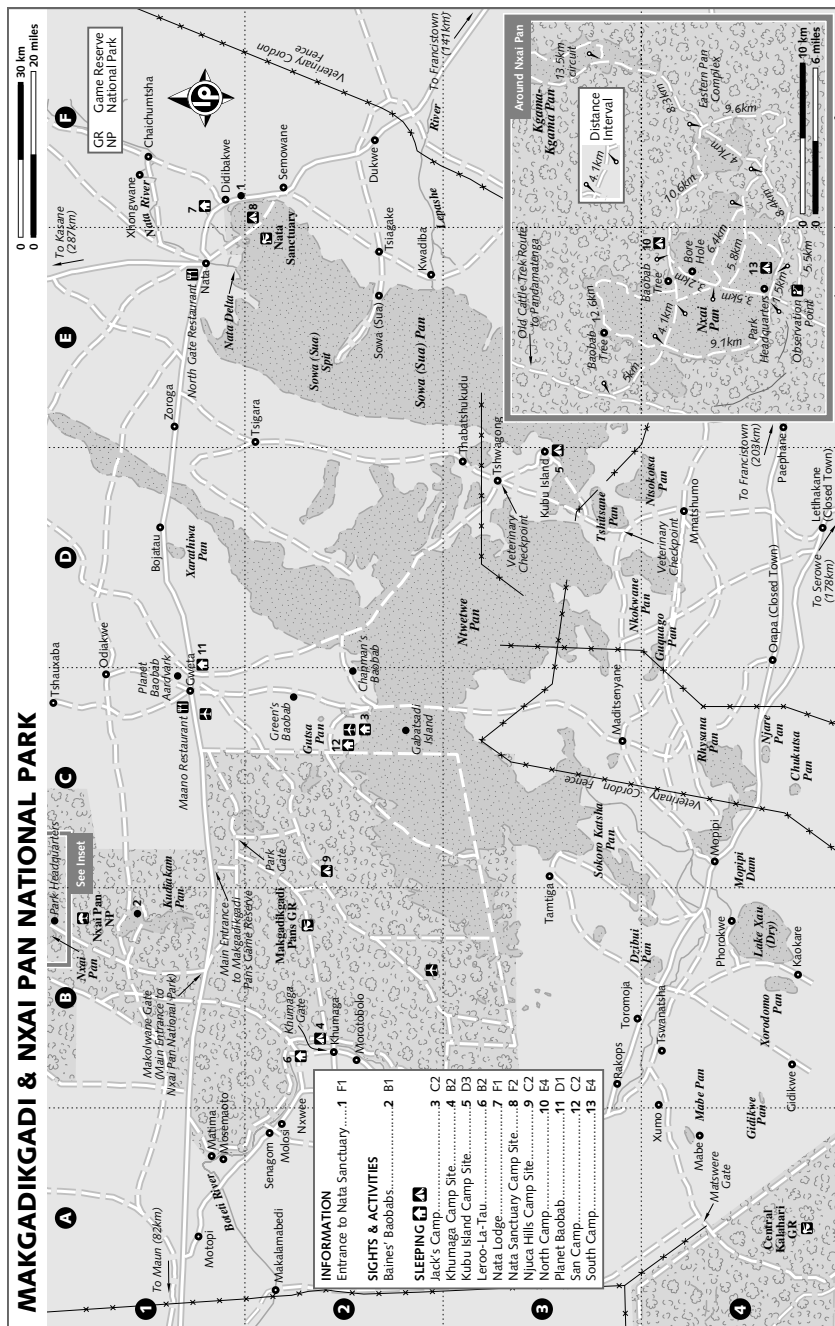
Getting There & Away

Mashatu and Tuli support a scheduled Air Botswana flight between Johannesburg, Kasane and the Limpopo Valley Airfield, which is usually booked as part of a package with either of the reserves.

Most roads in Tuli Block are negotiable by 2WD, though it can get rough in places over creek beds, which occasionally flood during the rainy season. If you're coming from South Africa, note that the border crossing at Pont Drift usually requires a 4WD, and can even be closed when the river is too high.

MAKGADIKGADI PANS

The Sowa (Sua), Nxai and Ntwetwe Pans collectively make up the 12,000 sq km Makgadikgadi Pans. In the sizzling heat of late winter, the stark pans take on a disorienting and ethereal austerity. Heat mirages destroy the senses as imaginary lakes shimmer and disappear, ostriches take flight and stones turn to mountains



EXPLORING THE MAKGADIKGADI PANS

It is important to stress that to explore the pans properly and independently requires more of a 4WD expedition than a casual drive. Lost travellers are frequently rescued from the pans, and there have been a number of fatalities over the years. Prospective drivers should keep in mind that salt pans can have a mesmerising effect, and even create a sense of unfettered freedom. Once you drive out onto the salt, remember that direction, connection, reason and common sense appear to dissolve. You should be aware of where you are at all times by using a map and compass (remember, GPS units are not foolproof).

It's often safer (and sometimes cheaper in the long run) to explore the pans on an organised tour with a knowledgeable guide. The pans can be visited on day trips or overnight trips offered by the lodges listed in this region, or on an overnight trip from lodges in Maun (p109).

and float in mid-air. But, as the annual rains begin to fall in the late spring, depressions in the pans form temporary lakes and fringing grasses turn green with life. Herd animals arrive to partake of the bounty, while water birds flock to feed on algae and tiny crustaceans.

NATA

The dust-bowl town of Nata serves as the gateway to the Makgadikgadi Pans, as well as an obligatory fuel stop if you're heading to Kasane or Maun. Be aware that elephants graze alongside the highway in this region, so take care during the day and avoid driving at night.

10km southeast of Nata is the **Nata Lodge** (☎ 621 1210; www.natalodge.com; camping per person US\$10, d luxury tent US\$105, d chalet US\$120; 🚗) a verdant oasis of monkey thorn, marula and mokolane palms. Luxury tents and chalets are safari chic, and the open-air bar-restaurant and shady pool are perfect for unwinding after touring the nearby pans.

Hourly combis (minibuses) between Kasane (US\$7.50, five hours) and Francistown (US\$3, two hours), and Maun (US\$5.50, five hours) and Francistown (US\$2, two hours), pass by the North Gate Restaurant.

SOWA (SUA) PAN

Sowa (also spelt Sua) Pan is mostly a single sheet of salt-encrusted mud stretching across the lowest basin in northeastern Botswana. Sowa means 'salt' in the language of the San, who once mined the pan to sell salt to the Bakalanga. Today, it is mined by the Sua Pan Soda Ash Company, which sells sodium carbonate for industrial manufacturing.

Nata Delta

During the rainy season, huge flocks of water birds congregate at the Nata Delta, which is

formed when the Nata River flows into the northern end of the Sowa Pan. When the rains are at their heaviest from December to February, the pan is covered with a thin film of water that reflects the sky and obliterates the horizon. Access is via a 4WD track from the village of Nata.

Nata Sanctuary

This 230 sq km community-run **wildlife sanctuary** (☎ 71-656969; admission per person per day US\$4, per vehicle US\$2; 🕒 7am-7pm) was proposed in 1988 by the Nata Conservation Committee, and established four years later with the help of several local and international nongovernmental organisations (NGOs).

Nata Sanctuary offers several serene and isolated **camp sites** with clean pit toilets, braai pits and cold showers. Camping here costs US\$5 per person, and all sites are accessible by 2WD if it hasn't been raining heavily. From the camp sites, it's possible to access the pan on foot (7km), though you should bring a compass with you, even if you're only walking a few hundred metres into the pan.

The entrance to the sanctuary is located 7km southeast of Nata.

Sowa (Sua) Spit

This long, slender protrusion extends into the heart of the pan, and is the nexus of Botswana's lucrative soda ash industry. Although security measures prevent public access to the plant, private vehicles can proceed as far as Sowa (Sua) village on the pan's edge. Views of the pan from the village are limited, though it's ideal if you're travelling through the area in a 2WD.

Kubu Island

Along the southwestern edge of Sowa Pan is this ghostly, baobab-laden rock, which

is entirely surrounded by a sea of salt. In Setswana, *kubu* means 'hippopotamus', and as unlikely as it may seem given the current environment and climate, this desolate area may have been inhabited by people as recently as 500 years ago. On one shore lies an ancient crescent-shaped stone wall of unknown origin, which has yielded numerous artefacts. Kubu Island is now protected as a national **monument** (admission per person US\$4.50, per vehicle US\$5.50) with proceeds going to the local community. There is also a small **camp site** (☎ 297 9612; per person US\$5.50) with pit toilets, though you will have to carry in your own water.

Access to Kubu Island (GPS coordinates: S20°53'740 & E25°49'426) involves negotiating a maze of grassy islets and salty bays. Increased traffic has now made the route considerably more obvious, but drivers still need a 4WD and a compass or GPS equipment

GWETA

The dusty town of Gweta serves as another gateway to the Makgadikgadi Pans, and stop here for fuel if you're heading to either Kasane or Maun. The name of the village is derived from the croaking sound made by large bullfrogs, which incredibly bury themselves in the sand until the rains provide sufficient water for them to emerge and mate.

About 4km east of Gweta, you'll see a huge concrete aardvark (no, you're not hallucinating) that marks the turn-off for **Planet Baobab** (☎ 72-338-344, camping per person US\$8, s/d grass huts with shared bathroom US\$34/52, s/d mud huts US\$75/100; 📍 🚰), one of the most bizarre lodges in the country. Campers can pitch a tent beneath the shade of a baobab tree while others can choose between Bakalanga-style 'mud huts' or San-style 'grass huts' (both are much plusher than they sound). The highlight of the lodge, however, is the funky open-air bar, complete with vaulted wooden ceilings, cowhide barstools, beer-bottle chandeliers and framed memorabilia celebrating the glory days of African travel.

Hourly combis travelling between Kasane (US\$6.50, four hours) and Francistown (US\$4, three hours), and Maun (US\$4.50, four hours) and Francistown (US\$3, three hours), pass by the Maano Restaurant.

NTWETWE PAN

Although the Ntvetwe Pan was once fed by the Boteti River, it was left permanently dry following the construction of the Mopipi

Dam, which provides water for the diamond mines in Orapa. Ironically, Ntvetwe is now famous for its extraordinary lunar landscape, particularly the rocky outcrops, dunes, islets, channels and spits found along the western shore.

If you've got some serious cash to burn, the highly recommended **San Camp** (s/d US\$500/840; 📍) and **Jack's Camp** (s/d US\$625/930) are among the most luxurious lodges in the whole of Africa. Accommodation at either camp is in classic 1940s East African-style canvas tents furnished with regal linen and romantically lit by paraffin lanterns. The central 'mess tent' operates as a field museum where local guides and world-renowned experts deliver lectures and lead discussions on the area's flora and fauna. Rates include full board, wildlife drives, bush walks and a range of activities. Air fares cost US\$150 per person one way from Maun. Road transfer from Gweta costs US\$110 per person one way, and escorts (with your own 4WD) from Gweta cost US\$165 per vehicle.

MAKGADIKGADI & NXAI PAN NATIONAL PARK

West of Gweta, the main road between Nata and Maun slices through Makgadikgadi Reserve and Nxai Pan National Park, which protects large tracts of salt pans, palm forests, grasslands and savannas. Since both parks compliment one another in enabling wildlife migrations, Makgadikgadi Pans Game Reserve and Nxai Pan National Park were established concurrently in the early 1970s, and combined into a single park in the mid 1990s.

Makgadikgadi Pans Game Reserve

This 3900 sq km park extends from the Boteti River in the west to the Ntvetwe Pan in the east. Although the Boteti River only flows after good rains, wildlife congregates along the river during the dry season when the flow is reduced to a series of shallow pools, which are the only source of permanent water in the reserve. During years of average to low rainfall, the Boteti experiences one of Southern Africa's most spectacular wildebeest and zebra migrations between May and October.

The DWNP runs two camp sites in the reserve. The Khumaga Camp Site (GPS: S:20°27'350 & E24°46'136) is well developed with sit-down flush toilets, cold showers and running water (nondrinkable). The Njuca Hills Camp Site (GPS: S:20°25'807 & E24°52'395) is

less developed with pit latrines and no running water, but the surrounding hills boast staggering views of migrating wildlife.

Leroo-La-Tau (☎ 686 8407; www.kalahari-desert.com/Leroo_La_Tau_Bush_Camp_Kalahari_desert.asp; s/d US\$200/275; 📍 🚰) This recommended safari lodge is comprised of several East African-style canvas tents with private verandas overlooking the Boteti River bed. Although the atmosphere is luxurious and the price is affordable (at least compared to other top-end lodges), Leroo-La-Tau is not as well known as other luxury lodges in Botswana. However, wildlife viewing in the surrounding reserve is an awesome spectacle, and readers consistently rave about the spotless rooms, wonderful facilities and professional service. Rates include full board, game drives, bush walks and a range of activities. Transfers from Maun cost US\$100 per vehicle (with six passengers).

The main entrance to the national park is 141km west of Nata and 164km east of Maun. Another gate is located at Khumaga to the west. A 4WD is needed to drive around the park, though the camp sites and lodge are accessible by 2WD.

Nxai Pan National Park

This 2578 sq km park lies on the old **Pandamatenga Trail**, which connected a series of boreholes and was used until the 1960s for overland cattle drives. The grassy expanse of the park is most interesting during the rains when large animal herds migrate from the south, and predators arrive to take advantage of the bounty. The region is speckled with umbrella acacias, and resembles the Serengeti in Tanzania (but without all the safari vehicles).

In the south of the park are the famous **Baines' Baobabs** (GPS: S:20°06'726 & E24°46'136), which were immortalised in paintings by the artist and adventurer Thomas Baines in 1862. Today, a comparison with Baines' paintings reveals that in almost 150 years, only one branch has broken off.

The DWNP runs two camp sites in the reserve. South Camp (GPS: S:19°56'159 & E24°46'598) is located about 1.5km east of the Park Headquarters, while North Camp (GPS: S:19°52'797 & E24°47'358) is 6.5km north of the Park Headquarters. Both have sit-down flush toilets, running (nondrinkable) water and braai pits (though firewood is scarce).

The entrance to the park is at Makolwane Gate, which is about 140km east of Maun and

60km west of Gweta. The Park Headquarters is another 35.5km north along a terrible sandy track. A 4WD is required to get around the national park.

CHOBE NATIONAL PARK

Chobe National Park, which encompasses 11,000 sq km, is home to Botswana's most varied wildlife. The riverfront strip along the northern tier, with its perennial water supply, supports the greatest wildlife concentrations, but when they contain water, the lovely Savuti Marshes of the Mababe Depression in western Chobe also provide prime wildlife habitat and attract myriad water birds. Rarely visited Ngwezumba River, with its pans and mopane forests, is the park's third major region, and Chobe's northwestern corner just touches the beautiful Linyanti Marshes.

The northern park entrance lies immediately west of Kasane and is accessible to conventional vehicles. However, to proceed through the park or approach from Maun, you need a high-clearance 4WD. Due to mud and flooding, Savuti may be inaccessible from January to March.

KASANE & KAZUNGULA

Kasane sits in a riverine woodland at the meeting of four countries – Botswana, Zambia, Namibia and Zimbabwe – and the confluence of the Chobe and Zambezi Rivers. It's also the gateway to Chobe National Park and, as such, this town of just a few thousand people is a focus of activity in northern Botswana. Immediately to the east, the tiny settlement of Kazungula serves as the border crossing between Botswana and Zimbabwe, and the landing for the Kazungula ferry, which connects Botswana with Zambia.

Information

EMERGENCY

Chobe Private Clinic (☎ 625 1555; President Ave)

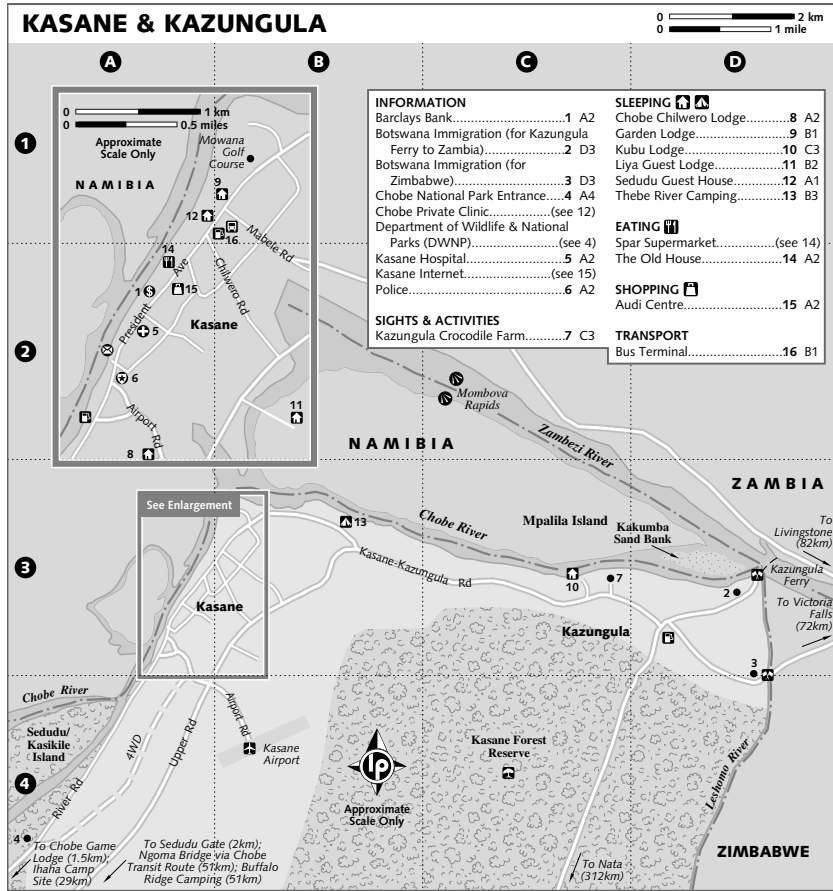
24-hour emergency service.

Kasane Hospital (☎ 625 0333; President Ave) Public hospital on the main road.

Police (☎ 625 0335) Along the main road.

INTERNET ACCESS

Kasane Internet (☎ 625 0736; Audi Centre; per hr US\$4; 📶: 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Internet in Kasane is dead slow and unreliable.



MONEY

Barclays Bank (President Ave) Offers better exchange rates than the bureaux de change. Be sure to stock up on US dollars (post-1996) if you're heading to Zimbabwe.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Department of Wildlife & National Parks (DWNP); ☎ 625 0235; Sedudu Gate) This is the booking office for camp sites within Chobe National Park.

Sights

If you're unsuccessful in spotting crocs along the Chobe Riverfront, you can get up close and personal with these scaly beasts at the **Kazungula Crocodile Farm** (admission US\$4), located about 1km north of Kazungula.

Sleeping

All of the following places can organise Chobe wildlife drives and cruises, as well as other excursions.

Thebe River Camping (☎ 625 0314; Kazungula Rd; camping per person US\$8; 📞) Provides a green riverside setting, along with a bar, meals and Chobe wildlife drives and cruises (US\$15).

Sedudu Guest House (☎ 625 1748; Sedudu@botsnet.bw; President Ave; s/d from US\$38/50; 📞) This is a budget-oriented hotel offering a variety of different rooms and featuring varying amenities.

Liya Guest Lodge (☎ 71-756903; liyaglo@botsnet.bw; 1198 Tholo Cres; s/d from US\$38/56; 📞) This warm and friendly family-run lodge is a very economical option on the hillside.

INFORMATION		SLEEPING	
Barclays Bank.....1	A2	Chobe Chilwero Lodge.....8	A2
Botswana Immigration (for Kazungula Ferry to Zambia).....2	D3	Garden Lodge.....9	B1
Botswana Immigration (for Zimbabwe).....3	D3	Kubu Lodge.....10	C3
Chobe National Park Entrance.....4	A4	Liya Guest Lodge.....11	B2
Chobe Private Clinic.....(see 12)		Sedudu Guest House.....12	A1
Department of Wildlife & National Parks (DWNP).....(see 4)		Thebe River Camping.....13	B3
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Kasane Internet.....(see 15)		Spar Supermarket.....(see 14)	
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SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		SHOPPING	
Kazungula Crocodile Farm.....7	C3	Audi Centre.....15	A2
TRANSPORT			
		Bus Terminal.....16	B1

Garden Lodge (☎ 625 0051; www.thegardenlodge.com; President Ave; s/d US\$70/90; 📞) The simple but charming lodge is built around a tropical garden, and features a number of well-furnished rooms that exude a homey atmosphere.

Kubu Lodge (☎ 625 0312; kubu@botsnet.bw; Kasane-Kazungula Rd; s/d/tr US\$130/170/198; 📞) Located 9km west of Kasane, this riverside lodge lacks the stuffiness and formality found in most other top-end lodges. Rustic wooden chalets are lovingly adorned with thick rugs and wicker furniture, and scattered around an impeccably manicured lawn dotted with fig trees.

Chobe Chilwero Lodge (☎ 625 1362; www.sancuarylodges.com; low/high season per person US\$385/560; 📞) Chilwero means 'place of high view' in Setswana, and indeed this exclusive lodge boasts panoramic views across the Chobe River. Accommodation is in one of fifteen elegant bungalows that feature romantic indoor and outdoor showers, private terraced gardens and colonial fixtures adorned with plush linen.

For further options see also p344.

Eating

Kasane is decidedly lacking in eating options, though all of the restaurants in the upmarket lodges are open to the public. If you're self catering, there's a **Spar** near Barclays.

The Old House (mains US\$5-10; closed Mon) Kasane's only true restaurant has a relaxed atmosphere and a varied menu. There are a number of excellent beef, chicken and fish dishes on order here, though there are also several vegetarian options.

Getting There & Away

Air Botswana connects Kasane's airport to Maun (US\$100) and Gaborone (US\$157).

Minibuses to Nata (US\$8, three hours), with connections to Maun and Francistown, run when full from the Shell petrol station bus terminal. Thebe River Camping, Mowana Lodge and Chobe Safari Lodge run Victoria Falls transfers (US\$40, two hours). All these options usually pick up booked passengers at hotels and guest houses between 9.30am and 10am.

CHOBE RIVERFRONT

The Chobe riverfront is packed with wildlife, and for most visitors, appreciation of this natural wonderland will entail a river cruise

or a wildlife drive. The most obvious feature of the landscape is the damage done by the area's massive elephant herds, but virtually every Southern African mammal species, except the rhino, is represented here. You can also see pukus, a rare antelope species. In addition, the abundance and variety of bird life in this zone of permanent water is astonishing.

Activities

A great way to enjoy Chobe is on a **river trip** or **wildlife drive**. The best time to cruise is late afternoon, when hippos amble onto dry land and the riverfront fills with elephants heading down for a drink and a romp in the water. All hotels and lodges arrange 2½- to three-hour wildlife drives and cruises in the morning and afternoon for US\$14 to US\$22, plus safari discounted park fees. Note that if you take a morning wildlife drive you can also do an afternoon 'booze cruise' and pay park fees for only one day.

Sleeping

Ihaha Camp site (Map p102) is the closest DWNP camp site to Kasane, located along the riverfront about 27km from the Sedudu Gate.

Buffalo Ridge Camping (Map p102; ☎ 625 0430; camping per person US\$5.50; 📞) This basic camping area is located immediately uphill from the Ngoma Bridge border crossing near the western end of the Chobe transit route. Unlike Ihaha, Buffalo Ridge is privately owned, so you do not need a reservation with the DWNP to camp here.

Chobe Game Lodge (Map p102; ☎ 625 0340; www.chobegamelodge.com; low/high season per person US\$250/325; 📞) This highly praised safari lodge is one of Botswana's pinnacles of luxury. The lodge itself is constructed in the Moorish style, and flaunts high arches, barrel-vaulted ceilings and tiled floors. Individually decorated rooms are elegant yet soothing, and some have views of the Chobe River and Namibian flood plains. Service is attentive and professional, and there's a good chance you'll spot herds of elephants along the riverfront as you walk around hotel grounds. The lodge is located about 9km from the Sedudu Gate.

Getting There & Away

The northern park entrance lies 5km west of Kasane and is accessible by conventional vehicle (some Chobe Riverfront drives require

4WD), but to reach Savuti or other places in the interior of the park requires 4WD and high clearance. To transit between Kasane and the Namibian border at Ngoma Bridge is free of charge.

SAVUTI

Savuti's flat expanses make an obligatory stop for safaris and overland trips between Kasane and Maun. Gobabis Hill, south of the Savuti game near the Savuti Channel, bears several sets of 4000-year-old rock art, which are probably of San origin. The wildlife populations, particularly elephants and antelopes, can seem overwhelming, especially after heavy rains. Due to potential high water, Savuti is normally closed (and inaccessible) between January and March.

Sleeping

Savuti Camp Site (Map p102) is a new DWNP camp site, with sit-down flush toilets, braai pits, (hot!) showers and plenty of shade.

Savute Safari Lodge (Map p102; ☎ Bookings through Desert & Delta Safaris, Maun 686 1243; www.desertdelta.com; low/high season per person US\$250/325; (P)) Located next to the former site of the legendary Lloyd's Camp, this relatively new upmarket retreat consists of 12 contemporary thatched chalets that are simple yet functional in design. The main safari lodge is home to a sitting room, an elegant dining room, a small library and cocktail bar. There is also a viewing deck where you can watch the breathtaking sunset over the bush.

Savute Elephant Camp (Map p102; ☎ Bookings through Orient Express Safaris, Maun 686 0153; www.game trackers.orient-express.com; low/high season per person US\$500/575; (P) (♿)) The premier camp in Savuti is comprised of 12 lavishly appointed East African-style tents, complete with replica antique furniture. The main tent houses a dining room, lounge and bar, and is located next to a swimming pool that overlooks a pumped water hole.

Getting There & Away

Under optimum conditions, it's a four- to six-hour drive from Kasane to Savuti. The road is passable by 2WD as far as Kachikau, but after it turns south into the Chobe Forest Reserve, the road deteriorates into parallel sand ruts that require high-clearance 4WD. Coming from Maun, you'll need 4WD to proceed north of Shorobe.

LINYANTI MARSHES

West of Chobe, on the Botswana–Namibia border, lies the Kwando area, which is dominated by the 900 sq km Linyanti Marshes. The area may be reminiscent of the Okavango Delta, but it's just a broad, flooded plain along the Linyanti River, which is home to large herds of elephants and buffaloes. As yet, there's no easy access, but several concessionaires run luxury camps.

Sleeping

Linyati Camp Site (Map p102) is a DWNP-operated camp site, with sit-down flush toilets, braai pits, (hot!) showers and, in the dry season, lots of elephants – be careful.

King's Pool Camp (Map p102; ☎ Bookings through Wilderness Safaris, Johannesburg 27-11 807 1800; www.wilderness-safaris.com; low/high season US\$550/875; (P)) Occupying a magical setting on a Linyanti River oxbow overlooking a lagoon, this 10-person camp is the most luxurious of the two properties. Accommodation at King's Pool is in private thatched chalets featuring indoor and outdoor showers.

Getting There & Away

With a 4WD vehicle, you can reach Chobe's Linyanti Camp along a very rough track from Savuti. Otherwise, air transfers are organised by individual lodges; Kwando Lagoon Camp is also accessible by river from Lianshulu Lodge in Namibia.

OKAVANGO DELTA

The 1430km Okavango River rises in central Angola, then flows southeast across Namibia's Caprivi Strip before entering Botswana east of Shakawe. There, 18.5 billion cubic metres of water annually spread like an open palm across the flat landscape as they're consumed by the thirsty air and swallowed by the Kalahari sands. Eventually, the river loses itself in a 16,000 sq km maze of lagoons, channels and islands. In this desert country, the incongruous waters of the resulting wetland – known as the Okavango Delta – attract myriad birds and other wildlife, as well as most of Botswana's tourists.

MAUN

A schizophrenic apparition of donkey-drawn carts and flash 4WDs, Maun (pronounced 'mau-UUnn') is the self-proclaimed gateway to the Okavango Delta. Although it was once

a rough-and-tumble outpost for graziers, hunters and poachers, the sealing of the road in from Nata lead to the burgeoning safari industry that now drives the town's economy. Although Maun is anything but inspiring, it is the obvious start and/or finish for most trips into the delta, and it's by far the most tourist-friendly town in Botswana.

Orientation

Central Maun contains most of the restaurants, shops and travel agencies, while the village of Matlapaneng, 10km northeast of the centre, has most of the budget lodges and camp sites. In between are the Sedia Hotel and several other tourist-oriented businesses.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Afro-Trek I-Café (Sedia Hotel; per hr US\$6)

PostNet (Score Centre; per hr US\$6; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3pm Sat)

MONEY

The Mall has branches of Barclays Bank and Standard Chartered Bank, which have foreign-exchange facilities and offer better rates than the bureaux de change.

POST

Post office (☎ 8.15am-1pm & 2.15-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-11.30am Sat) Near The Mall.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Department of Wildlife & National Parks (DWNP; ☎ 686 1265; fax 686 1264; ☎ 7.30am-12.30pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 7.30am-noon Sun) To book national park camp sites, you need to go to the reservations office, which is housed in a caravan behind the main building.

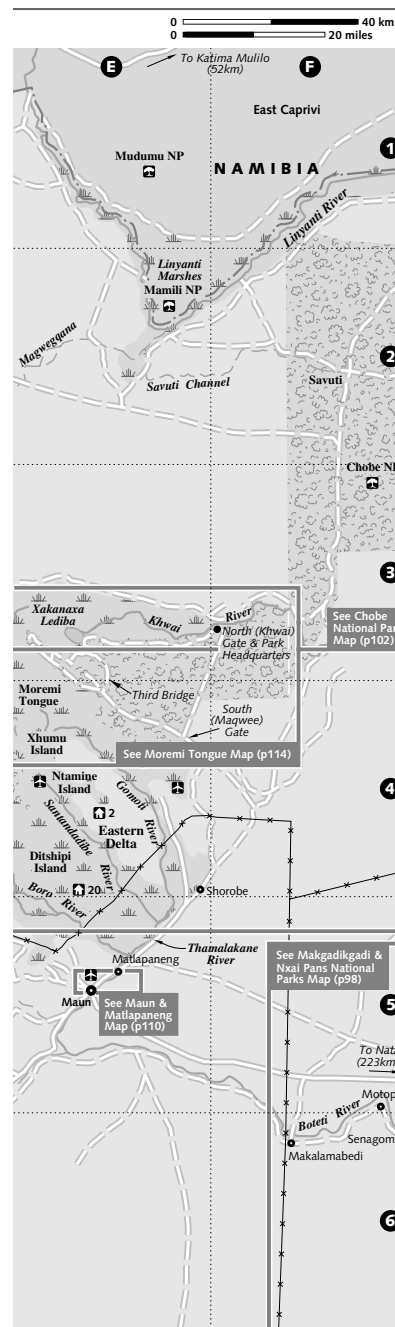
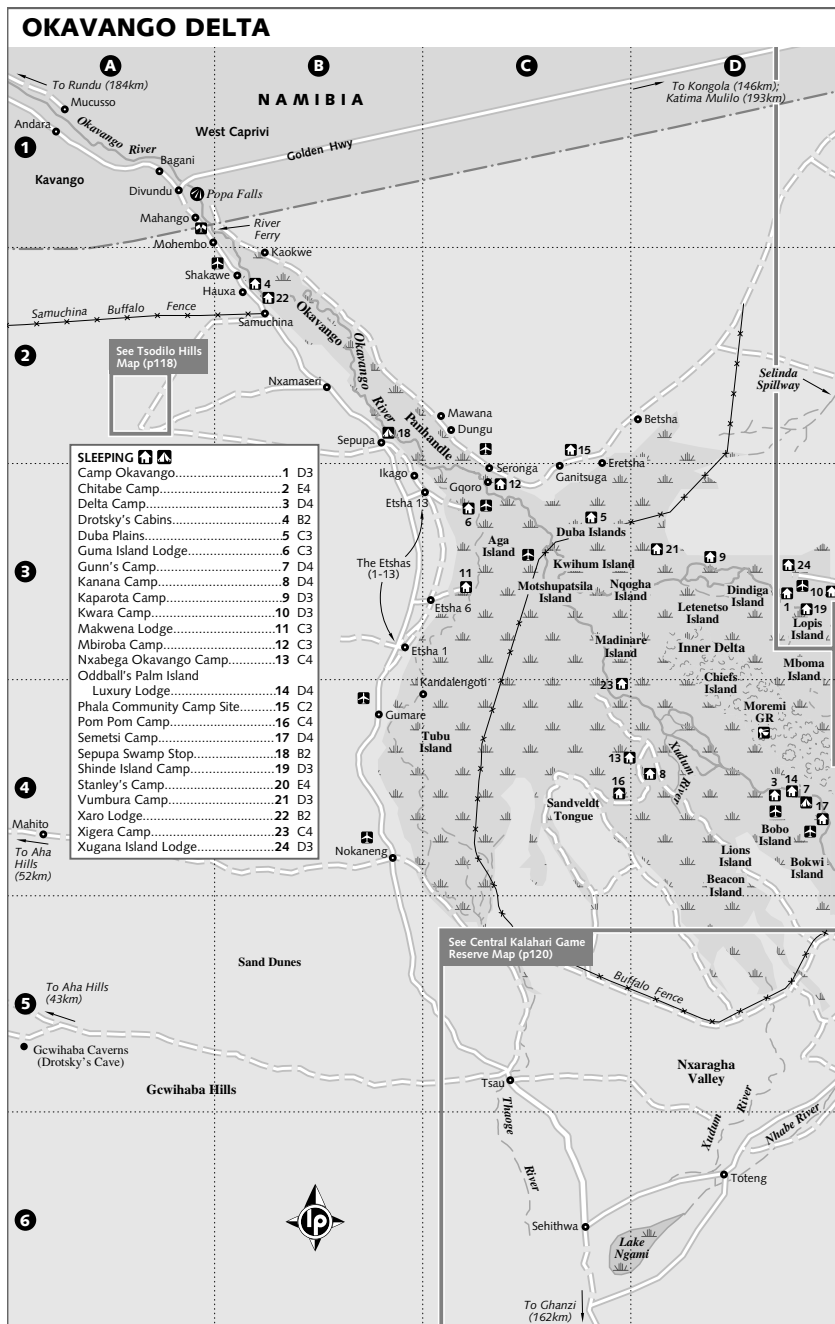
Tourist office (☎ 686 0492; Tsheke Tsheko Rd; ☎ 7.30am-12.30pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Fri) This is improving, and you'll also find good information at the town's many tour companies (see p132) and the Matlapaneng lodges.

EXPLORING THE OKAVANGO DELTA

Stretching like an open palm across northwestern Botswana, the Okavango Delta is a complex and unique ecosystem as well as Botswana's premier tourist attraction. Although the size and scope of the region is often a deterrent for independent travellers, it's easier to plan a trip through the region than you'd imagine, especially if you think of the delta as having four distinct areas:

- **Eastern Delta** – this part of the delta is far more accessible, and therefore cheaper to reach, from Maun than the Inner Delta and Moremi. You can easily base yourself in Maun and arrange a day trip by mokoro (traditional dugout canoe) or an overnight bush camping trip for far less than the cost of staying in (and getting to) a lodge in the Inner Delta or Moremi.
- **Inner Delta** – the area west, north and south of Moremi is classic delta scenery where you can truly be seduced by the calming spell of the region. Accommodation is in top-end luxury lodges, almost all of which are only accessible by expensive chartered flights.
- **Moremi Game Reserve** – this region includes Chiefs Island and the Moremi Tongue, and is the most popular destinations within the delta. The Moremi Game Reserve is the only protected area within the delta, so wildlife is plentiful, but you will have to pay daily park entry fees. Moremi has a few camp sites run by the DWNP as well as several truly decadent lodges with jaw-dropping prices. The Moremi Game Reserve is accessible by 4WD from Maun or Chobe as well as by charter flight.
- **Okavango Panhandle** – this swampy extension of the Inner Delta stretches northwest towards the Namibian border, and is the main population centre in region. Although this area does not offer the classic delta experience, it is growing in popularity due to its ease of accessibility via public transportation or 2WD. Since the area is not controlled by a lodge or by the DWNP, a number of villages in the panhandle have established accessible camp sites, and also offer affordable mokoro trips and fishing expeditions.

If you're planning a 4WD expedition through the park, you will have to be completely self-sufficient as petrol and supplies are only available in Kasane and Maun. If the prospect of driving yourself through the wilds of Botswana is a little too much to handle, the hotels and lodges in Maun can also help you organise a trip through the delta. For more information, see p109.



Sights

The **Maun Environmental Education Centre** (☎ 686 1390; admission free; ☎ 7.30am-12.30pm & 1.45-4.40pm), on the eastern bank of the Thamalakane River, aims to provide school children with an appreciation of nature. If you're in town, it's worth an hour or so rambling around the bush here.

The **Nhabe Museum** (☎ 686 1346; admission free, donations welcome; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat), housed in a historic building, features art exhibitions and outlines the natural history and cultures of the Okavango. Peripheral activities include local theatre presentations and sales of locally produced arts and crafts.

The community-run **Okavango Swamps Crocodile Farm** (admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) is basically all the encouragement you need to keep your hands and feet inside the mokoro while cruising through the delta.

Tours

Most delta lodges are affiliated with specific agencies and lots of safari companies run mokoro trips and 4WD safaris, so it's wise to check around before choosing one (see p132). **Travel Wild** (☎ 686 0822; fax 686 0493; travelwild@dynabyte.bw), opposite the airport, serves as a central booking and information office.

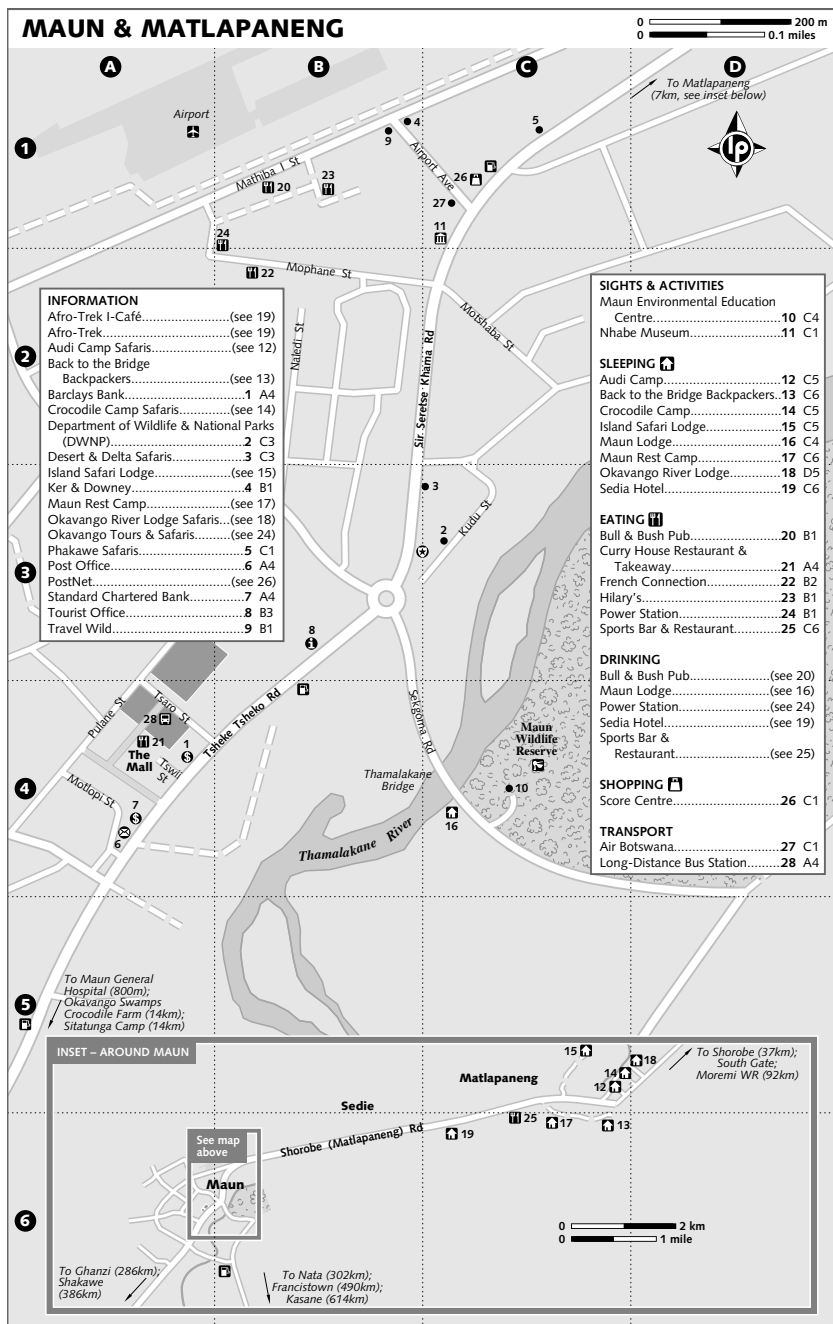
Sleeping

Okavango River Lodge (☎ 686 3707; freewind@info.bw; camping per person US\$3, s/d chalet US\$35/40; P) This down-to-earth spot has a lovely setting on the riverbank, and it's often quiet because it's not as popular as Audi Camp.

Maun Rest Camp (☎ 686 3472; simonjoyce@info.bw; Shorobe Rd, Matlapaneng; camping per person US\$4, basic pre-erected tents per person US\$6, linen per person extra US\$7; P) This no-frills rest camp is spotless, and boasts what may justifiably be 'the cleanest ablation blocks in Maun'.

Audi Camp (☎ 686 0599; fax 686 0581; www.okavango.com; camping per person US\$4, s/double tents from US\$20/26; P) The most-established budget accommodation in Maun is always packed with backpackers. It's by far the most sociable of the lodges, and a good choice if you're feeling a bit lonely, though it lacks the personality of some of the smaller lodges.

Sitatunga Camp (☎ 686 4539; fax 686 4540; ground hogs_@hotmail.com or delta.rain@dynabyte.bw; camping per person US\$4; P) This camp enjoys a nice bush setting 14km south of Maun, and boasts a serious party atmosphere.



Crocodile Camp (☎ 686 0265; www.botswana.com; camping per person US\$5, s/d tent US\$20/40, s/d chalet from US\$40/60; (P)) Arguably the most attractive lodge in Maun, the 'Croc Camp' occupies a superb spot right on the river, and is usually packed with all sorts of interesting characters.

Back to the Bridge Backpackers (☎ 686 2037; hellish@info.bw; Hippo Pools, Old Matlapaneng Bridge; camping per person US\$5; s/d tents from US\$32/48; (P)) This new and friendly option occupies a leafy spot beside the historic Old Matlapaneng Bridge. The atmosphere is chilled out and the riverside setting is tranquil, so there's definitely a lot of potential here.

Island Safari Lodge (☎ 686 0300; fax 686 2932; island@info.bw; camping per person US\$5, s/d chalet US\$55/60; (P)) One of the original lodges in Maun, Island Safari Lodge is starting to show its age, although the riverside setting is still relaxing and tranquil.

Sedia Hotel (☎ 686 0177; sedia@info.bw; Shorobe Rd; camping per person US\$5, s/d from US\$75/90; (P) (♿) (♿)) This resort-like complex features an outdoor bar, a Continental-inspired restaurant and huge swimming pool. You can choose from a number of rooms and self-contained chalets, or simply pitch a tent and take advantage of all the hotel facilities.

Maun Lodge (☎ 686 3939; www.sausage.bw/maun lodge; maun.lodge@info.bw; Old Maun Rd; s/d US\$95/125; (P) (♿) (♿)) The newest upmarket hotel in Maun is located just south of the town centre, and boasts all the luxuries you'd expect at this price.

Eating

Hilary's (Mathiba I St; meals from US\$3; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12pm Sat) This homey place offers a choice of wonderfully earthy meals, including home-made bread, baked potatoes, soups and sandwiches.

Curry House Restaurant & Takeaway (The Mall; meals US\$3-6) The smell of curry wafts across the Mall, and attracts many locals to this unpretentious place. It serves cheap, delicious and authentic curries as well as other tasty Indian delicacies.

Power Station (Mophane St; US\$4-8) Although it's better known as a bar and nightclub, this 'industrial' Maun institution serves a good mix of pastas, burgers, salads, local specialities and vegetarian meals.

French Connection (Mopane Rd; US\$5-8) This stylish café is a good choice if you're looking to put a little flair in your day. You can get all

the classic European standards here including croissants, cappuccinos, baguettes and speciality salads.

Sports Bar & Restaurant (Shorobe Rd, Sedia; US\$5-9) This popular watering hole has a classy restaurant with a huge range of Western-style dishes, all lovingly created by a renowned chef.

Bull & Bush Pub (Mathiba I St; meals US\$5-10) The Bull & Bush is probably the most popular haunt among expats in town. The pub hosts a variety of regular events, and is your best bet for a thick steak and cold beer.

Drinking

While entertainment in Maun is usually of the liquid kind, check out the Friday edition of the *Ngami Times* for the occasional cultural offering.

Bull & Bush Pub (Mathiba I St) Even if you're not in the mood to eat, it's worth stopping by the Bull & Bush for a few rounds.

Maun Lodge (☎ 686 3939; Old Maun Rd) The bar at this upmarket hotel usually has live jazz or traditional performers during the evenings from Thursday to Sunday.

Power Station (Mophane St) Housed in the ruins of an old power station, the most popular nightclub at this popular hotel also serves as a popular disco on Friday and Saturday nights.

Sedia Hotel (Shorobe Rd) The poolside English-style pub at this popular hotel also serves as a popular disco on Friday and Saturday nights.

Sports Bar & Restaurant (Shorobe Rd) This local landmark attracts expats, pilots, safari operators and tourists with its cold beer, strong drinks, satellite TV, pool tables and classy food.

Getting There & Away

AIR
Air Botswana has daily flights between Maun and Gaborone (US\$156). Flights into the delta are typically arranged by lodges through local air charter companies.

BUS

At the long-distance bus station northeast of the Mall you'll find buses to Nata (US\$6; three hours), with connections to Kasane (US\$12, six hours) and Francistown (US\$9, five hours); Shakawe (US\$10, five hours); Shorobe (US\$1, one hour); and Ghanzi (US\$4.50, five

hours). Get to the terminal as early as possible if you want to connect in Nata with a bus to Kasane.

Getting Around

Local minibuses between town and Matlapaneng (US\$0.30) run when full from the bus terminal and airport; taxis cost around US\$4.

EASTERN DELTA

The Eastern Delta includes the wetlands between the southern boundary of Moremi Game Reserve and the buffalo fence that crosses the Boro and Santandadibe Rivers, north of Matlapaneng. If you're short of time and/or money, this part of the delta remains an affordable and accessible option. Mokoro trips in the Eastern Delta are mainly organised by Maun lodges and tour companies (see p132).

Sleeping

Chitabe Camp (Map pp108-9; 📞 bookings through Wilderness Safaris, Johannesburg 27-11 807 1800; www.wilderness

-safaris.com)low/high season US\$225/550 per person; 📍) Situated near the Santandadibe River along the southern edges of Moremi Game Reserve, Chitabe is an island-oasis renowned for the presence of Cape hunting dogs and other less common wildlife.

INNER DELTA

Roughly defined, the Inner Delta occupies the areas west of Chiefs Island and between Chiefs Island and the base of the Okavango Panhandle. Mokoro trips through the Inner Delta are almost invariably arranged with licensed polers affiliated with specific lodges, and operate roughly between June and December, depending on the water level.

Sleeping

Oddball's Palm Island Luxury Lodge (Map pp108-9; 📞 Bookings through Okavango Tours & Safaris, 686 1154; www.okavango.bw; s/d US\$250/350) For years, this lodge catered primarily to backpackers, and was by far the most affordable option in the delta. Although it's still one of the cheapest lodges in the region, Oddball's has gone

TRAVELLING BY MOKORO

Most visitors to the Okavango spend at least some time travelling by mokoro (plural, mekoro), a shallow-draught dugout canoe hewn from ebony or sausage tree log (or, more recently, moulded from fibreglass). The mekoro are poled from a standing position and their precarious appearance belies their amazing stability. A mokoro normally accommodates the poler, two passengers and their food and camping equipment.

While one-day trips are possible in the Eastern Delta (with a return drive lasting several hours from Maun), or a more expensive fly-in trip, most people prefer a multiday trip, where travellers ride for several days with the same poler, breaking their journey with walks on palm islands and moving between established camps or wild camping along the way. In this case, the quality of the experience depends largely upon the skill of the poler, the meshing of personalities and the passengers' enthusiasm.

The importance of finding a competent poler cannot be overstated, especially when you're expecting them to negotiate labyrinthine waterways or lead you on bushwalks through wildlife country. The keenest polers can speak at least some English; warn you about dangers (never swim without first asking the poler!); recognise and identify plants, birds and animals along the way; explain the delta cultures; and perhaps even teach clients how to fish using traditional methods.

If you're organising a budget mokoro trip, inquire in advance as to whether you're expected to provide food for your poler. Even if they do bring their own supplies, many travellers prefer to share meals. The polers may, for example, provide a sack of mealie meal (ground maize) and cooking implements while travellers supply the relishes: tins of curries, stews and vegetables. If you have arranged to provide your poler's meals, the standard daily rations are 500g of mealie meal, 250g of white sugar, six tea bags and sufficient salt and powdered milk.

Although it's still possible to negotiate with independent polers, most visitors organise mokoro trips through delta lodges or Maun safari companies, or through the Okavango Polers Trust in Seronga (see p116).

DELTA LODGES

If you've got a little bulge in your budget, the delta is one place where it's worth dusting off the coat-tails and living it up to your heart's content.

The rates for all lodges in the Eastern Delta, Inner Delta and Moremi Game Reserve include accommodation or camping equipment, all meals and several activities or excursions, such as mokoro trips, nature walks and wildlife drives. The more expensive places also include drinks (beer and wine only), and entry fees to Moremi Game Reserve. All rooms, chalets and tents have private bathrooms (unless stated otherwise).

Transfers (if required) by road or, more usually, by air, from Maun are never included in normal daily rates. (Transfers may be included in package deals, however.) Air fares listed are per person return from Maun. Most lodges and booking agencies deal exclusively with a particular Maun-based air-charter company, so your chances of finding other charter companies offering discounted fares to a certain lodge are negligible.

Most lodges have different rates for 'high season' (about July to October) and 'low season' (about November to June), but if only one rate is listed, this is the rate charged all year. Some places offer unadvertised discounted rates for 'shoulder seasons' (early March to mid-June and mid-October to late November), but you'll have to ask. The rates listed are always per person sharing a twin/double room. Single supplements are usually charged, but will be normally waived if a single traveller is willing to share twin accommodation with another single traveller. Rates listed include all government taxes and service charges. Tips are always extra.

The rates shown in this chapter are for 'foreigners'; most lodges offer substantial (but rarely published) discounts to Botswana citizens and residents and to citizens of 'regional countries', ie mainly South Africa and Namibia. Although tariffs are quoted in US dollars by the lodges, payment is possible in pula – but at a rate that suits the lodge. Payment by credit card may incur an additional surcharge, so check first with the lodge.

All lodges in the Eastern Delta, Inner Delta and Moremi Game Reserve must be pre-booked, preferably before you arrive in Maun.

upmarket in recent years. Its new price tag is a little high, though, considering you're still staying in budget dome tents.

Semetsi Camp (Map pp108-9; 📞 Bookings through Crocodile Camp Safaris, 686 0265; www.botswana.com; s/d US\$250/350) Another comparatively affordable option, Semetsi Camp consists of eight dome tents attractively scattered around a palm-fringed islet that overlooks Chiefs Island.

Delta Camp (Map pp108-9; 📞 Bookings through Okavango Tours & Safaris, 686 1154; www.okavango.bw; low/high season per person US\$350/450) This long-standing camp is beautifully situated beside a flowing channel near the southern end of Chiefs Island.

Nxabega Okavango Camp (Map pp108-9; 📞 Bookings through CCAfrica, Johannesburg 27-11 809 4300; www.ccafrica.com; low/high season per person US\$350/450) On the shores of the Boro River, this exquisitely designed tented camp has sweeping views of the delta floodplains.

Vumbura Camp (Map pp108-9; 📞 Bookings through Okavango Tours & Safaris, 686 1154; www.okavango.bw; low/high season per person US\$400/600) This twin-camp is located on the Duba Plains at the transition zone between the savannas and swamps north

of the delta, and is famous for attracting large buffalo herds.

Xigera Camp (Map pp108-9; 📞 Bookings through Wilderness Safaris, Johannesburg 27-11 807 1800; www.wilderness-safaris.com; low/high season per person US\$400/600) Pronounced 'kee-jera', this isolated spot is located deep in the heart of the Inner Delta, and is renowned for its rich bird life and tropical ambience.

Kanana Camp (Map pp108-9; 📞 Bookings through Ker & Downey, 686 0375; www.kerdowney.com; low/high season US\$425/500) This classy retreat occupies a watery site in a maze of grass- and palm-covered islands.

Gunn's Camp (Map pp108-9; 📞 Bookings through Crocodile Camp Safaris, 686 0265; www.botswana.com; s/d US\$425/650) Much like Oddball's, Gunn's Camp has worked hard in past years to redefine itself as an upmarket luxury lodge. Unlike Oddball's however, the conversion has been more effective, so it's likely that the memory of the old camp will fade quickly.

Pom Pom Camp (Map pp108-9; 📞 Bookings through Okavango Tours & Safaris, 686 1154; www.okavango.bw; low/high season per person US\$450/600) This intimate

camp was one of the original luxury retreats in the delta, though frequent renovations have kept it up to speed with recent properties.

Duba Plains (Map pp108-9; ☎ Bookings through Okavango Tours & Safaris, 686 1154; www.okavango.bw; low/high season US\$550/750 per person) North of the Moremi Game Reserve, Duba Plains is one of the most remote camps in the delta.

Getting There & Away

The only way in and out of the Inner Delta for most visitors is by air. This is an expensive extra, but the pain is less if you look at it as two scenic flights. Chartered flights to the lodges listed above typically cost about US\$150 to US\$200 roundtrip, Mekoro or 4WD vehicles will meet your plane and take you to the lodge.

MOREMI GAME RESERVE

This reserve (📍) 6am-6.30pm Mar-Sep, 5.30am-5.30pm Oct-Feb), encompassing 3000 sq km, was set aside in the 1960s to protect the most wildlife-rich part of the Okavango Delta. The park has a distinctly dual personality, with large areas of dry land rising between vast wetlands.

The two most prominent dry features are Chiefs Island, deep in the Inner Delta, and the Moremi Tongue, comprising the reserve's northeastern extent. Habitats range from mopane woodland and thorn scrub to dry savanna, riverbank woodlands, grasslands, floodplains, marshes, permanent waterways, lagoons and islands.

Sights

THIRD BRIDGE

This is literally the third log bridge after entering the reserve at South Gate (Map pp108-9). It's a rustic and beautiful bridge spanning a sandy, tannin-coloured pool on the Sekiri River, which is an idyllic spot to camp and enjoy a picnic. Contrary to official advice, and despite DWNP regulations, many ignorant visitors swim here, but it's a *very* bad idea – and foolhardy because of the risk of hippos and crocs among the reeds.

MBOMA ISLAND

The grassy savanna of this 100 sq km island (Map p114), which is actually just a long extension of the Moremi Tongue, contrasts

sharply with surrounding landscapes. The 25km sandy Mboma Loop starts about 2km west of Third Bridge and is a pleasant side trip.

XAKANAXA LEDIBA

With one of Africa's largest heronries, Xakanaxa Lediba (Xakanaxa Lagoon; Map p114) is renowned as a bird-watchers' paradise. Potential sightings here include herons, marabouts, saddle-bill storks, egrets and ibises (wood, sacred and glossy). The area also supports an array of wildlife and large numbers of fish.

The lagoon is home to several upmarket lodges that operate boat and mokoro trips for guests. The public may be able to join an organised boat or mokoro trip for a high – but negotiable – fee.

The drive between North Gate and Xakanaxa Lediba follows one of Botswana's most scenic tracks. Worthwhile stops include Dombo Hippo Pool (about 14km southwest of North Gate), where hippos crowd along the shore. Their shenanigans can be enjoyed in relative safety from an elevated observation post. The two water holes at Paradise Pools are as lovely as the name suggests.

Sleeping CAMPING

The DWNP operates each of the four camp sites in the Moremi Game Reserve.

Khwai Camp Site (Map p114; North Gate; 📍) The camp site here is shady and well developed. There are a couple of small shops in Khwai village on the other side of the river.

Maqwee Camp Site (Map p114; South Gate; 📍) The camp site here is reasonably-developed, though the ablution blocks are a bit run down.

Third Bridge Camp Site (Map p114; Third Bridge; 📍) On the edge of a lagoon (so watch out for hippos and crocs), the most popular camp site in Moremi is starting to show its age, though it's still a beautiful place to pitch for the night.

Xakanaxa Camp Site (Map p114; Xakanaxa Lediba; 📍) This camp site occupies a narrow strip of land surrounded by marshes and lagoons.

LODGES

Camp Okavango (Map pp108-9; ☎ Bookings through Desert & Delta Safaris, 686 1234; www.desertdelta.com; low/high season per person US\$250/325; 📍) Set amid

sausage and jackalberry trees just outside of Moremi, this charming lodge shows elegant taste, and the staff is famous for their meticulous attention to detail.

Camp Moremi (Map p114; ☎ Bookings through Desert & Delta Safaris, 686 1234; www.desertdelta.com; low/high season per person US\$5250/325; 📍) This long-standing wilderness retreat sits amid giant ebony trees next to Xakanaxa Lediba, and is surrounded by game-rich grasslands.

Xugana Island Lodge (Map pp108-9; ☎ Bookings through Desert & Delta Safaris, 686 1234; www.desertdelta.com; low/high season per person US\$250/350; 📍) Set on a pristine lagoon just north of Moremi, this lodge offers superb bird-watching and fishing.

Kaparota Camp (Map pp108-9; ☎ Bookings through Wilderness Safaris, Johannesburg 27-11 807 1800; www.wilderness-safaris.com; low/high season per person US\$250/400) Situated on a remote island north of Moremi, this modest camp is named after the heavy concentration of sausage trees that grow on the grounds.

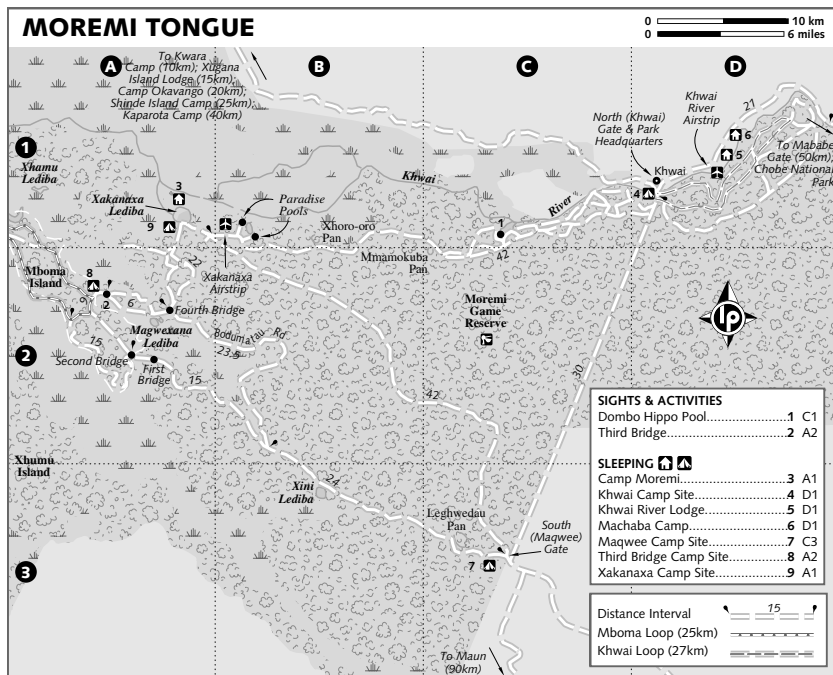
Stanley's Camp (Map pp108-9; low/high season US\$250/450 per person; 📍) Significantly less ostentatious than other lodges in Moremi, Stanley's lacks the formality and pretence commonly found in this corner of the country. You can book through any of the Maun operators (see p132).

Kwara Camp (Map pp108-9; ☎ Bookings through Kwando Safaris, 686 1449; www.kwando.co.za; low/high season per person US\$250/650; 📍) This island camp lies in an area of subterranean springs, which form pools that support enough fish to attract flocks of pelicans (the name means 'Where the Pelicans Feed').

Xakanaxa Camp (Map p114; ☎ Bookings through Okavango Tours & Safaris, 686 1154; www.okavango.bw; low/high season per person US\$300/425; 📍) This camp offers a pleasant mix of delta and savanna habitat, and teems with huge herds of elephants and other wildlife.)

Machaba Camp (Map p114; ☎ Bookings through Ker & Downey, 686 0375; www.kerdowney.com; low/high season US\$375/450, supplement US\$150/200; 📍) Named after the local word for the sycamore fig trees that shelter the camp, Machaba sits along with the Khwai River, which becomes an evening drinking venue for hundreds of animals, including elephants, antelopes and zebras.

Shinde Island Camp (Map pp108-9; ☎ Bookings through Ker & Downey, 686 0375; www.kerdowney.com; low/high season US\$450/550; 📍) This lagoon-side camp, one of the oldest in the delta, is situated on the fringe between the savanna and the delta, just north of Moremi.



Khwai River Lodge (Map p114; 📞 Bookings through Orient-Express Safaris, 686 0302; www.gametrackers.orient-express.com; low/high season per person US\$500/575; 📍) Perched on the northern shores of the Khwai River, this opulent lodge overlooks the Moremi Game Reserve, and is frequently visited by large numbers of hippos and elephants.

Getting There & Away

There's no public transport to Moremi, so you'll need a 4WD vehicle or a drive-in or fly-in safari. If you're booked into one of the delta camps, air, road or boat transport is normally arranged by the camp, but usually for an additional charge.

THE OKAVANGO PANHANDLE

In northwestern Botswana, the Kalahari sands meet the Okavango Delta. In the Okavango Panhandle, the river's waters spread across the valley on either side to form vast reed beds and papyrus-choked lagoons. Here a cosmopolitan mix of people (Mbukushu, Yei, Tswana, Herero, European, San and refugee Angolans) occupy clusters of fishing villages and extract their livelihoods from the rich waters. They're also increasingly catering to the growing numbers of visitors to the region, where mokoro trips and accommodation are more affordable than in other parts of the Okavango Delta.

Sleeping CAMPING

Camping is also available at most of the lodges.

OKAVANGO POLERS TRUST

The **Okavango Polers Trust** (📞 687 6861) was established in 1998 by the people of Seronga to provide cheaper and more accessible mokoro trips and accommodation for visitors. Since the collective is run entirely by the village, all profits are shared by the workers, invested into the trust and used to provide the community with better facilities. The trust directly employs nearly 100 people, including polers, dancers, cooks, managers and drivers. Since no travel agency or safari operator has its fingers in the pie, the cooperative can afford to charge reasonable prices for mokoro trips. Although it's not uncommon to pay upwards of US\$100 per day for a mokoro trip out of Maun, the trust charges US\$30 per day for two people. Keep in mind, however, that you must self-cater (ie bring your own food, water and, if necessary, camping and cooking equipment).

There's no longer a daily bus from Mohembo to Seronga, but it's almost always possible to hitch from the free Okavango River ferry in Mohembo (see p121 for more on hitching in Botswana). Plan on paying about US\$0.75 for a lift. When they're operating, water taxis run along the Okavango between Sepupa Swamp Stop (see above) and Seronga (US\$3, two hours); transfers from the Seronga dock to Mbiroba Lodge, 3km away, cost US\$9. Otherwise, Sepupa Swamp Stop charters 18-passenger boats for US\$90.

Phala Community Camp Site (Map pp108-9; Ganitsuga; camping per person US\$4; 📍) This rustic camp site is friendly, welcoming and far from the tourist crowd. Phala is near Ganitsuga village, about 23km east of Seronga and accessible by a sturdy 2WD or hitching from Seronga.

LODGES

Sepupa Swamp Stop (Map pp108-9; 📞 686 7073; island@info.bw; Sepupa village; swampstop@maun.info; camping per person US\$4, s/d tents US\$30/40; 📍) This laid-back riverside camp site is secluded, handy to Sepupa village, very affordable and accessible (3km) from the Maun-Shakawe road.

Mbiroba Camp (Map pp108-9; 📞 687 6861; camping US\$5, s/d chalet US\$35/45; 📍) This impressive camp is run by the Okavango Polers Trust, and is the usual launch point for mokoro trips into the delta.

Guma Island Lodge (Map pp108-9; 📞 687 4022; gumacamp@info.bw; camping per person US\$5, family chalets US\$150; 📍) Fishing is the focus at this secluded camp, though Guma Island also advertises itself as a 'family resort' – if you're travelling with the little ones, they will be well catered for.

Makwena Lodge (Map pp108-9; 📞 687 4299; fax 687 4302; camping per person US\$6, backpackers' s/d from US\$30/45; 📍) Located on Qhaaxhwa (Birthplace of the Hippo) Lagoon at the base of the panhandle, this stretch of the panhandle closely resembles the Inner Delta.

Drotsky's Cabins (Map pp108-9; 📞 687 5035; drotskys@info.bw; camping per person US\$10, s/d A-frames US\$60/110, 4-person chalets US\$120; 📍) This lovely, welcoming lodge lies beside a channel of the Oka-

vango River about 5km southeast of Shakawe and about 4km east of the main road.

Xaro Lodge (Map pp108-9; s/d chalet US\$50/75; 📍) The lodge is remote – about 10km downstream from Drotsky's – but serene and extremely picturesque. Book through Drotsky's.

GCWIHABA CAVERNS (DROTSKY'S CAVE)

In the !Kung language, the name of this decorated cavern system in the Gcwihaba Hills means 'Hyena's Hole'. They weren't brought to European attention until the mid-1930s when the !Kung showed them to a Ghanzi farmer, Martinus Drotsky, and for years they were known as Drotsky's Cave. The two entrances are 300m apart but the route through the cave is about 800m.

There are no lights and no indication of which route to take, so you must carry several powerful torches as well as emergency lights, such as matches and cigarette lighters. The hardest part is a short, vertical climb down into a pit and then up the other side to a shelf, where there's a tight squeeze before you emerge in a large room. The nearest water is the borehole at Nxainxai (variously spelt Cae Cae, Xai Xai and Cgae Cgae) village.

However inconvenient it may be, visitors are advised to check in with the village of Nxainxai before visiting the caves, as villagers claim ownership of the caves and gates may be installed to prevent visitors entering without paying local guides and admission fees (around US\$5 per person) through the Dutch-organised Cgae Cgae Tlhabolo Trust.

Tours to the cave (and to the nearby Aha Hills) can be arranged in Maun, but only with enough people paying enough money. Self-drivers need a 4WD with high clearance, long-range petrol tanks, water reserves and camping equipment. Take an unsignposted turn-off 2km northwest of Tsau and follow the roving track for about 90km to the signposted turn-off to the Xhaba borehole. Turn south here and after 27km you'll reach the borehole; another 27km gets you to the caverns. Alternatively, you can approach from the Aha Hills.

AHA HILLS

Straddling the Botswana-Namibia border, the 700-million-year-old limestone and dolomite Aha Hills rise 300m from the flat, thorny Kalahari scrub. They're scenic enough, but the

foremost attraction is their end-of-the-world remoteness and utter silence, due mainly to the almost total absence of water. There are no facilities in the Aha Hills, but unofficial camping is allowed within 100m of the main track. Basic supplies and drinkable bore water are available in the villages of Nxainxai and Gcangwa.

Two taxing 4WD routes lead to the Aha Hills. One follows the Gcwihaba Caverns route (see left), and the other turns west from the Maun-Shakawe road, north of a small bridge near Nokaneng. From there, it's 190km west to the Aha Hills.

TSODILO HILLS

The four Tsodilo Hills (Male, Female, Child and North Hill) rise abruptly from a rippled, oceanlike expanse of desert and are threaded with myth, legend and spiritual significance for the San people, who believe this was the site of Creation. More than 2750 ancient rock paintings have been discovered at well over 200 sites. And as in most of Southern Africa, the majority of these are attributed to ancestors of today's San people.

There's now a **museum** near Main Camp, extolling the undeniably spiritual nature of the hills, as well as several unmarked tracks that pass the main paintings and sacred sites. Normally, local San people will guide groups for around US\$13 per day.

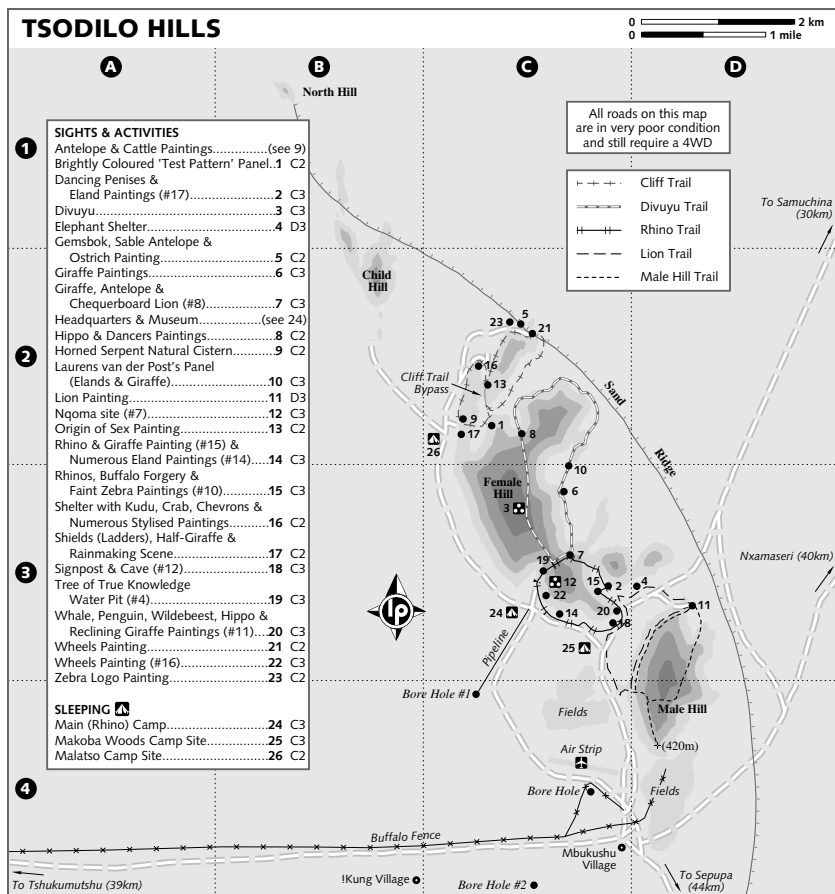
Sleeping

Visitors can camp at either the Main (Rhino), Malatso, Makoba Woods camping grounds for US\$6 per person, or at wild camp sites around the base of the hills, but there are no shops or services. Water is sometimes available at the Main Camp and at the borehole several hundred metres from the airstrip (this water is intended for cattle, so it's wise to purify it).

Getting There & Away

Most Maun safari companies and agencies can organise one-day air charters starting at US\$450 for five people, but they'll allow only three hours of sightseeing, with little time to climb or explore in this remarkable area. Safari companies also run custom safaris, but they need advance notice and enough paying clients to make it worthwhile.

Thanks to three notorious access routes, Tsodilo was once one of Botswana's most



inaccessible wonders. The good news (or bad news, depending on your perspective) is that the middle (Nxamaseri) road is currently being upgraded and, by the time you read this, will have turned from a four-hour grind through deep sand in a low 4WD to a 30-minute 2WD jaunt through the bush. Note, however, that you'll still need a 4WD to explore the hills area.

THE KALAHARI

The Kalahari sands stretch across parts of seven countries: Congo (Zaire), Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa, and form one of Africa's most

prominent geographical features. While a small portion is classic desert, most of the Kalahari is a vast deposit of sandy sediments that receive too much rainfall to be officially classified as an arid zone.

In Botswana, the Kalahari (*Kgalakgadi* in Setswana) offers a solitude all its own. Distances are vast, transport is rare and facilities are few and far between, and off main routes, the scant villages huddle around feeble boreholes.

KHUTSE GAME RESERVE

The 2600 sq km Khutse Game Reserve makes a popular weekend excursion for adventurous Gaborone dwellers. Expect to see a variety of antelopes, as well as such predators as lions,

leopards, brown and spotted hyenas, jackals, caracals (which the San people believe to be the incarnation of the morning star) and even hunting dogs.

Khutse has eight DWNP-operated camp sites, but only Wildlife Camp, near the entry gate, has (brackish) running water and showers. Khutse Camp Site, with a rudimentary camp site, is 14km west of the entry gate. The most distant site is the very pleasant Moreswa Pan, 67km from the gate, which has a natural water source that attracts wildlife. All sites must be pre-booked through the DWNP (Map pp88-9; ☎ 318 0774; dwnp@gov.bw; PO Box 131, Government Endvave,

Khama Cres, Gaborone; ☎ reservations 7.30am-12.45pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Fri) in Gaborone and visitors must be self-sufficient in food, water and fuel.

The entrance gate is 226km from Gaborone; at Letlhakeng the sealed road becomes a rough 103km sandy 4WD track. From Letlhakeng, you may be able to hitch to the gate, but not inside the reserve itself.

CENTRAL KALAHARI GAME RESERVE

The Central Kalahari Game Reserve covers 52,000 sq km and is Africa's largest protected area, sprawling across the nearly featureless heart of Botswana. It's perhaps best known

VOICES AGAINST RELOCATION

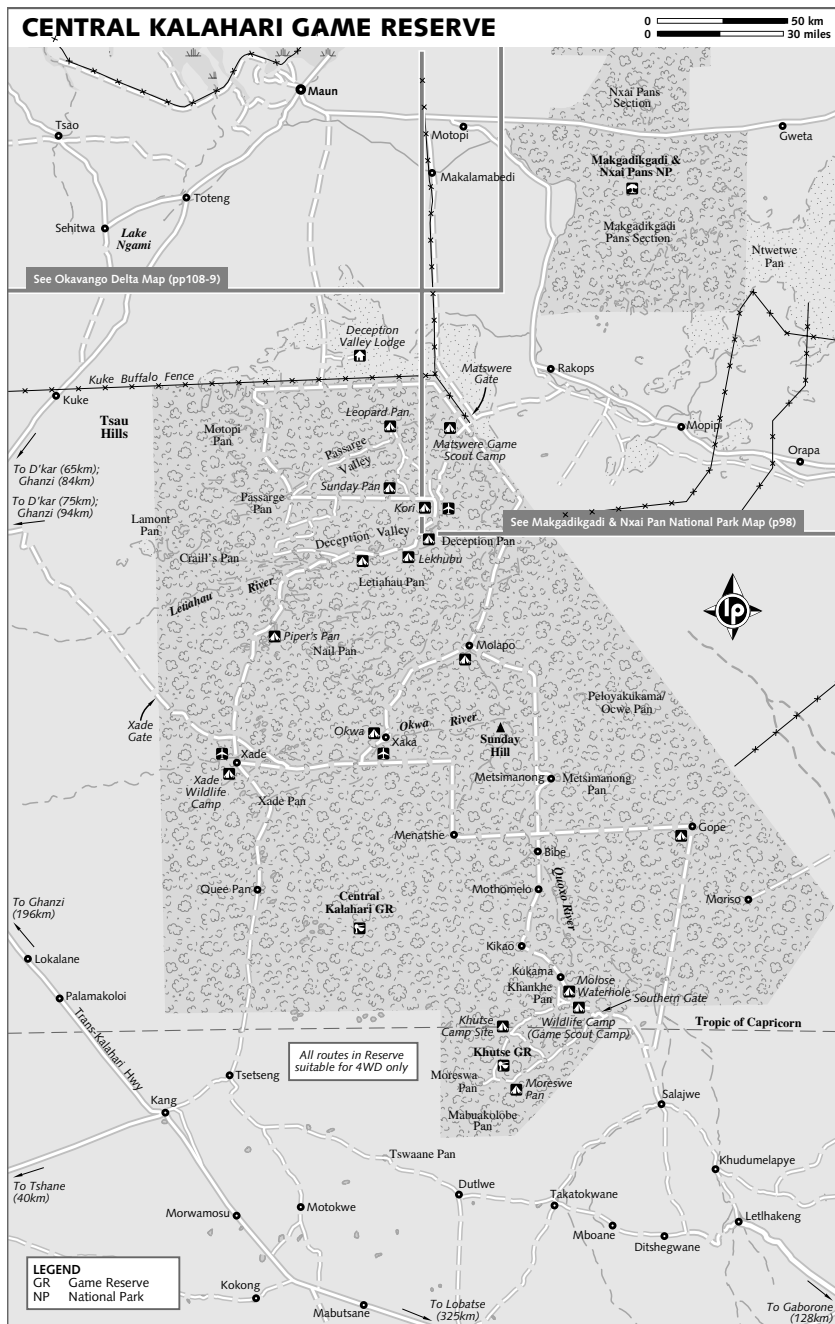
Informal government programmes aimed at removing the San from the central Kalahari began in 1986, and forced relocations intensified from 1997 to 2002. During this time, Survival International (www.survival-international.org), an NGO that advocates for the self-determination of indigenous populations, worked in conjunction with the First People of the Kalahari (FPK), the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) San organisation, in an attempt to reverse the relocation process. In 2005 the actions of FPK were recognised with the bestowment of the Right Livelihood Award, which is regarded as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize'. The following is an excerpt from the acceptance speech by Roy Sesana:

'Why am I here? Because my people love their land, and without it we are dying. Many years ago, the president of Botswana said we could live on our ancestral land forever. We never needed anyone to tell us that. Of course we can live where God created us! But the next president said we must move and began forcing us away... I say what kind of development is it when the people live shorter lives than before? They catch HIV/AIDS. Our children are beaten in school and won't go there. Some become prostitutes. They are not allowed to hunt. They fight because they are bored and get drunk. They are starting to commit suicide. We never saw that before. It hurts to say this. Is this 'development'?

Following Survival International's campaign to bring the forced relocations into the international spotlight, the CKGR achieved global notoriety. The international media has been quick to condemn the Botswana government while praising the efforts of Survival International, but the background is complex.

The CKGR was a legacy of the British colonial administration in Botswana. Before the British administration departed in 1961, it set aside the area to protect the interests of San, and for two decades the Botswana government provided health and education services to the residents in the CKGR. However, in the 1990s it established a more accessible external settlement called New Xade, and relocations began in 1997 – some voluntary, some not. The subsequent course of events is murky, but it seems that at least one model for shared use was put forward, but that shared use was never seriously considered by the Botswana Government, which remained intractable to discussion with the FPK.

Survival International staged a series of international demonstrations intended to persuade the government to back down. These efforts were undoubtedly well-intended – the organisation has a long-standing record of good works – but this particular campaign appears to have been less than successful. The FPK and the government were unable to resume discussions, and the FPK took the matter to the High Court, supported by Survival International. The situation appeared to have been resolved in the favour of the San in December 2006 when the High Court of Botswana ruled that the San were wrongly evicted from the CKGR. However, whether the victory makes a material difference to the condition of the San depends to some extent on the way the ruling is interpreted by the government.



for Deception (or Letiahau) Valley, the site of Mark and Delia Owens' 1974 to 1981 brown hyena study, which is described in their book *Cry of the Kalahari*. At Deception Pan brown hyenas emerge just after dark and you may also see lions. Three similar fossil valleys: the Okwa, the Quoxo (or Meratswe) and the Passarge also bring topographical relief to the virtually featureless expanses, although the rivers ceased flowing more than 16,000 years ago. Other pans in the northern area of the reserve – Letiahau, Piper's, Sunday and Passarge – are artificially pumped to provide water for wildlife.

The only reasonably convenient public access is via the Matswera gate in the north-eastern corner of the reserve.

Sleeping

There are basic DWNP camp sites at Deception Pan, Leopard Pan, Kori, Lekhubu, Letiahau Pan, Sunday Pan and Piper's Pan, but all lack facilities. The well-known Deception Pan enjoys a few rare, shady acacia trees, while Piper's Pan is known for its bizarre ghost trees. Other remote camp sites include **Xaka**, **Molpapo**, **Gope** and **Xade** in the southern part of the reserve. Marginally drinkable water is available only at the **Matswera Game Scout Camp**, near the northeastern gates of the reserve.

Deception Valley Lodge (South Africa ☎ 27-12 665 8554; www.deceptionvalley.co.za; low/high season per person US\$305/550; 🚰) is an exclusive bush retreat located on the edge of the reserve. It was designed to blend into the surrounding nature without detracting from its ambience. The soothing rooms combine Victorian and African design elements, and feature a private lounge and outdoor shower. The lodge is approximately 120km from Maun, and the route is accessible to 2WD vehicles during the dry season.

Getting There & Away

Xade, Okwa and Deception Pan have airstrips that attract upmarket fly-in safaris from Maun.

Most Maun-based safari operators can organise custom drive-in tours, but independent access requires a high-clearance 4WD vehicle, a compass or GPS, and reserve petrol (the nearest supplies are at Ghanzi, Kang and Rakops). From Matswera Game Scout Camp, it's 70km to Deception Pan. The alternative approach, from Makalamabedi near the Maun–Nata road, heads south for about

105km along the eastern side of the buffalo fence to the Matswera Gate. The very remote southern gate is accessed from Khutse Game Reserve and the Xade Gate is reached from a turn-off near D'kar.

GHANZI

The principal attraction of the Kalahari's administrative centre is **Gantsi Craft** (☎ 659 6241; Henry Jankie Dr; 🕒 8am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), which was established in 1953 as a craft outlet and training centre for the San. It's an excellent place to shop for traditional San crafts including dyed textiles, decorated bags, leather aprons, bows and arrows, musical instruments and woven mats.

The **Thakadu Camp** (☎ 72-249221; thakadu@botsnet.bw; camping per person US\$4, s/d chalet US\$30/45; 🚰 🚿) has a modern ablution block with flush toilets and hot showers, as well as a refreshing swimming pool and a pub-style restaurant and bar.

The **Kalahari Arms Hotel** (☎ 659 6298; kalahariarms hotel@botsnet.bw; camping per person US\$4, s/d US\$60/75; 🚰 🚿) is a long-standing Ghanzi institution with modern and well-furnished rooms. The complex has expanded over the years, and now has a pub, take-away, bakery and bottle shop in addition to its popular dining room.

In the morning buses run from the main terminal to Mamuno (US\$3, three hours) and Gaborone (US\$10, 11 hours); the daily bus to Maun (US\$4.50, five hours) leaves at 2.30pm.

D'KAR

The Ncoakhoe San people at the 7500-hectare game ranch **Dq̄ae Qare** (☎ 659 6574; www.kuru.co.w; admission US\$2, camping per person US\$5, San huts per person without/with half-board US\$35/45; 🚰) offer guided hunting and gathering bushwalks (US\$4 per hour), wildlife drives (US\$6 per hour), and other activities providing insight into the lifestyles of the traditional Kalahari San. Transfers from Ghanzi cost US\$22.

KGALAGADI TRANSFRONTIER PARK

The former Mabuasehube-Gemsbok National Park has now been combined with South Africa's former Kalahari-Gemsbok National Park into the new Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. The result is one of the world's largest (28,400 sq km) and most pristine wilderness areas (see p462 for information on the South African side).

Direct road access from Botswana is limited to the Mabuasehube and Kaa gates, both via Kang and Hukuntsi, while the Nossob River section is best accessed from South Africa.

Mabuasehube Section

The Mabuasehube section of the park (the name means 'Red Earth'), covers 1800 sq km and focuses on the low red dunes around three major pans and several minor ones. **Mabuasehube** (🚗 for day visitors 6.30am-6.30pm Mar-Sep, 5.30am-7.30pm Oct-Feb) is best in late winter and early spring when herds of eland and gemsbok migrate from the rest of the park. This section has eight rudimentary camp sites, for two groups of up to 12 people each, at the Entrance Gate, Lesholoago Pan, Monamodi, Mpaathutlwa Pan, Bosobogolo Pan and Khiding Pan, as well as two sites at Mabuasehube Pan. Facilities are limited to pit toilets, but all but Khiding Pan and Bosobogolo Pan have water (it's still wise to carry a good supply of drinking water).

Two Rivers Section

Although you can now reach the Two Rivers section from either Kaa or Mabuasehube, access is still best from South Africa. The Two Rivers Camp, over the Nossob River from South Africa's Twee Rivieren Camp, has cold showers and toilets. There are also two basic sites further north on the Botswanan side: Rooiputs, 30km northeast of Two Rivers, and Polentswe Pan, at Grootbrak, 223km north of Two Rivers and 60km north of South Africa's Nossob Camp.

Wilderness Trails

There are now two challenging wilderness 4WD tracks through this remote corner of Botswana. The Kgalakgadi Wilderness Trail, with two obligatory camp sites along the way, is a bone-shaped 285km loop beginning at Polentswe Pan, at Grootbak on the Nossob River, and winding north to Kaa (where there's water) before looping back toward the Nossob. The other is a two-day 150km route between the Nossob and Mabuasehube (there's also a parallel transit track to the south), which can be done only from east to west. Only one group is permitted per day, and must include two to five 4WD vehicles. Either route (US\$37 per person per night) must be pre-booked through **DWNP** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 318 0774; dwnp@gov.bw; PO Box 131, Government Enclave, Khama Cres, Gaborone; 📅 reservations 7.30am-12.45pm & 1.45-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

in Gaborone. For fees and booking information, see p85.

Getting There & Away

All tracks into the park require a 4WD, reserve petrol and self-sufficiency. The Mabuasehube section has only one entrance gate, which is accessed from Tshabong in the south, Hukuntsi in the north or along the cut line from Kokotsha (useful if you're coming from Gaborone). For the Two Rivers section, you can enter only at Kaa, which is accessed via Kang, Hukuntsi and Tshatswa (Zutshwa), or via South Africa.

BOTSWANA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation (with the exception of camp sites) is subject to a 10% accommodation bed tax. Payment by credit card normally requires an additional charge of 10% to 12%. Rates given in this chapter are for cash payments only.

In general, a budget double room is anything under US\$50. You'll then have to make the leap to US\$80 to US\$150 for comfortable midrange accommodation. Note that there's a real dearth of midrange places in the Okavango Delta, which is largely given over to luxury camps and top-end lodges that can set you back around US\$300, although this can rise stratospherically to around US\$500 in the delta. Most top-end places quote their prices in US dollars although payment can be made in local currency.

Camping

Quite a few hotels and lodges along the road system have camp sites with varying amenities for around US\$7 per person, which normally includes access to the lodge bar and swimming pool. Wild camping is permitted only outside national parks, private land and government freehold lands. If you can't escape local scrutiny, visit the local *kgosi* or police station to request permission to camp and get directions to a suitable site.

In national parks, the typically rudimentary camps have little more than braai pits and flush toilets; many are simply clearings in the dust. However, you can't just turn up at the park gates and get a camp site; they must be pre-booked through Department of

PRACTICALITIES

- Botswana generates electricity at 220 volts AC, 50Hz, though they confusingly use two types of plugs: the South African type with its three round prongs, and the UK type with the three square prongs.
- *Daily News*, published by the Department of Information & Broadcasting, is distributed free in Gaborone and includes government news, plus major national and international news.
- Print and slide film, batteries and accessories as well as video cartridges are available in Gaborone, Francistown and Maun, though it's not cheap, and you might not find your desired brand.
- Nationwide programming is provided by Radio Botswana, broadcasting in both English and Setswana, while most of the country has access to Botswana Television (BTV), which broadcasts local, African and international news.
- Botswana uses the metric system for everything.

Wildlife & National Parks (DWNP) offices (see p85).

Hotels

Every town has at least one hotel, and larger towns and tourist areas offer several in different price ranges. However, you won't find anything as cheap as in most other African countries, and the less expensive hotels in Botswana sometimes double as brothels.

Safari Camps & Lodges

Most safari camps and lodges are found around Chobe National Park, the Tuli Block, the Linyanti Marshes, the Moremi Game Reserve and all over the Okavango Delta. They range from tiny tented camps to large complexes of brick or reed chalets. While a few lodges are accessible by car or 4WD, most Okavango Delta camps are accessed only by air, which will add around US\$150 to US\$200 to your bill. All remote camps and lodges require pre-booking, but some road-accessible options around Kasane and Maun may accept walk-ins.

ACTIVITIES

Since Botswana is largely a high-budget, low-volume tourist destination, activity tourism focuses on the softer or more expensive options: wildlife viewing, 4WD safaris etc. If you're really flush with cash, the sky is the limit, and you can choose between elephant or horseback safaris in the Okavango, learning to fly in Maun, quadbiking on the Makgadikgadi Pans, or hiring a 4WD and heading out into the Kalahari. Hiking opportunities are limited to the Tsodilo Hills in the north-

west and several small ranges in the eastern and southeastern parts of the country. Wildlife hikes can also be arranged for guests of Okavango Delta lodges or participants on mokoro safaris.

BOOKS General

Kalahari – Life's Variety in Dune and Delta, by Michael Main, and *Okavango – Jewel of the Kalahari*, by Karen Ross, study the faces of the Kalahari and the Okavango Delta, respectively, with particular attention to their vegetation, wildlife and geological and cultural histories. They're full of personality and good colour photos.

A Story Like the Wind, by Laurens van der Post, is an entertaining, fictional treatment of a meeting between European and San cultures. Its sequel is *A Far Off Place*.

The Sunbird, by Wilbur Smith, is a light read telling two fanciful and highly entertaining tales about the mythical 'lost city of the Kalahari'.

Guidebooks

African Adventurer's Guide to Botswana, by Mike Main, concentrates on off-road information, including GPS coordinates, for those venturing into the great unknown with their own vehicles. It's available in better bookshops around Southern Africa.

History & Culture

Ditswammung – The Archaeology of Botswana, by P Lane, A Redi and A Segobye, is a weighty tome, compiled by the Botswana Society, and is the definitive work for archaeology buffs.

History of Botswana, by T Tlou & Alec Campbell, is the most readable account of Botswana's history, from the Stone Age to modern times.

A Marriage of Inconvenience: The Persecution of Seretse and Ruth Khama, by Michael Dutfeld, details the negative responses to the marriage of Ngwato heir and Botswana's first president, Sir Seretse Khama, and English-woman Ruth Williams in the 1950s.

Travel Literature

Lost World of the Kalahari, by Laurens van der Post, is a classic work dealing with the San people and contains some wonderful background on the Tsodilo Hills. The author's quest for an understanding of San religion and folklore is continued in *Heart of the Hunter* and *The Voice of the Thunder*.

Starlings Laughing, by June Vendall-Clark, is a memoir describing the end of the colonial era in Southern Africa. The author spent many years in the Maun area.

Cry of the Kalahari, by Mark & Delia Owens, is an entertaining and readable account of an American couple's seven years studying brown hyenas in the Central Kalahari.

With My Soul Amongst Lions and Last of the Free, by Gareth Patterson, carry Joy and George Adamson's *Born Free* legacy from Kenya to Mashatu, in Botswana's Tuli Block. These rather tragic tales may make depressing reading for anyone inspired by Adamson's early efforts and visions.

BUSINESS HOURS

Normal business hours are 8am to 5pm (often with a one- or two-hour closure for lunch). On Saturday shops open around 8am and close at noon or 1pm; on Sunday there's scarcely any activity anywhere. In larger towns, banking hours are from 9am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday and 8.30am to 11am Saturday. Post offices are open from 8.15am to 4pm (closing for lunch between 12.45am and 2pm). Government offices are open from 7.30am to 12.30pm and 1.45pm to 4.30pm Monday to Friday.

Restaurant opening hours vary according to the type of establishment – as a rule cafés and cheap eats will be open all day, closing in early evening. More expensive restaurants will be open from around 10.30am to 11pm Monday to Saturday, usually with a break between lunch and dinner. Run-of-the-mill bars open around 5pm until late, while nightclubs and late-night

drinking spots open their doors around 9pm (or 10pm) and keep going until 5am.

In this chapter we have only listed opening hours where they differ significantly from these broad guidelines.

CHILDREN

Although Botswana is a safe country for children to travel in, be advised that child-related goods and services are extremely limited, particularly in the far fringes of the Kalahari and the Okavango Delta.

CUSTOMS

Botswana is a member of the Southern African Customs Union, which allows unrestricted carriage of certain items between member countries duty free. From outside the union, you can import up to 400 cigarettes, 50 cigars and 250g of tobacco duty free. Edible animal products such as untinned meat, milk and eggs are confiscated at the border.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The greatest dangers in Botswana are posed by natural elements, combined with a lack of preparedness. While police and veterinary roadblocks, bureaucracy and bored officials may become tiresome, they're mostly just a harmless inconvenience. Although theft occurs, Botswana enjoys a very low crime rate compared with other African (and many Western) countries.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Botswana Embassies & Consulates

Botswana has embassies and high commissions in Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (see the relevant country chapters), as well as in the following countries. Where Botswana has no diplomatic representation, information and visas are available through the British High Commission.

EU (☎ 32-2-732 2070; fax 735 6312; 169, Ave de Tervuren, B-1150 Brussels, Belgium)

UK (☎ 020-7499 0031; fax 7495 8595; 6 Stratford Pl, London W1N 9AE)

USA (☎ 202-244 4990; fax 244 4164; 1531-33 New Hampshire Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Botswana

All of the following are in Gaborone:

Angola (Map pp88-9; ☎ 390 0204; fax 397 5089, angolaemb@info.bw; 5131 Nelson Mandela Rd, Private Bag BR111, Broadhurst)

France (Map pp88-9; ☎ /fax 397 3863; 761 Robinson Rd, PO Box 1424)

Germany (☎ 395 3143; fax 395 3038; 3rd fl, Professional House, Broadhurst, PO Box 315)

Namibia (Map pp88-9; ☎ 397 2685; BCC Bldg, 1278 Lobatse Rd, PO Box 1586)

UK (Map pp88-9; ☎ 395 2841; fax 395 6105; Queen's Rd, Private Bag 0023, the Mall)

USA (Map pp88-9; ☎ 395 3982; fax 395 6947; pausemb3@botsnet.bw; Government Enclave, Embassy Dr, PO Box 90)

Zambia (Map pp88-9; ☎ 395 1951; fax 395 3952; Zambia House, the Mall, PO Box 362)

Zimbabwe (Map pp88-9; ☎ 391 4495; fax 390 5863; Orapa Close, PO Box 1232)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Botswana stages few major celebratory events. Gaborone's **Maitisong Festival** (☎ 367 1809; fax 358 4946; www.info.bw/~maitisong), in March or April, features local and regional music, dance and drama. Celebrations are held all over the country on Sir Seretse Khama Day, President's Day and Botswana/Independence Day.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays in Botswana include the following:

New Year's Day 1 January

Day after New Year's Day 2 January

Easter March/April – Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Monday

Labour Day 1 May

Ascension Day April/May

Sir Seretse Khama Day 1 July

President's Day July

Botswana/Independence Day 30 September

Day after Independence Day 1 October

Christmas 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet and email access is now available at internet cafés in Gaborone, Maun, Francistown, Kasane and Ghanzi, and it's relatively fast and inexpensive. The most popular ISP is **botsnet.bw** (www.botsnet.bw), based in Gaborone.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Following is a list of helpful websites:

Botswana Government (www.gov.bw) Contains current news and links to business and government departments.

Info Botswana (www.info.bw) Includes links to tourism operators, plus the latest news and weather.

On Safari (www.onsafari.com) Gives details on tour companies and lodges in Botswana and Southern Africa.

University of Botswana (www.ub.bw) Provides information on history, archaeology, politics, society and tourism.

LANGUAGE

English is the official language of Botswana and the medium of instruction from the fifth year of primary school. The most widely spoken language, however, is Setswana, which is the first language of over 90% of people. For more on language, see p772.

MAPS

The most accurate country map is the *Shell Tourist Map of Botswana*, which shows major roads and includes insets of tourist areas and central Gaborone. Almost as good is Rain-bird Publishers' 1:2,500,000 *Explorer Map Botswana*. The 1:1,750,000 *Republic of Botswana*, published by Macmillan, also contains insets of Gaborone and the tourist areas. The detailed *ContiMap* is a decent road map that sells for US\$10.

MONEY

Botswana's unit of currency is the pula (meaning 'rain'), which is divided into 100 thebe (meaning 'raindrops'). Bank notes come in denominations of P5, P10, P20, P50 and P100, and coins in denominations of 5t, 10t, 25t, 50t, P1, P2 and P5.

ATMs

ATMs are common in major cities and towns, and accept most major Western cards.

Credit Cards

Most major credit cards (especially Visa and MasterCard) are accepted at tourist hotels and restaurants in the larger cities and towns.

Moneychangers

To change cash, both Barclays and Standard Chartered banks charge 3% commission, while the former charges 3% to change travellers cheques.

Tipping

In most places a service charge is added as a matter of course, but the official policy of courting upmarket tourists only has increased expectations.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques are falling into disuse in Botswana, though they can still be changed in tourist centres such as Maun and Kasane.

POST

Although generally reliable, postal services can be extremely slow, so allow at least two weeks for delivery to an overseas address. Postcards and standard letters (weighing up to 10g) cost P3.10 (US\$0.50) to other African countries, P3.90 (US\$0.70) to Europe and P4.70 (US\$0.80) to the rest of the world. Designate an airmail letter by clipping one corner off the envelope.

TELEPHONE & FAX

Botswana's country code is ☎ 267; there are no internal area codes, so when phoning from outside Botswana, dial ☎ 267 followed by the phone number. From Botswana, the international access code is ☎ 00, which should be followed by the country code, area code (if applicable) and telephone number.

Reliable coin and card telephone boxes are found at Botswana Telecom (Map pp88–9) and post offices, and in shopping centres in all major towns. Phonecards in varying denominations are sold at shops, post offices and some petrol stations.

Botswana has two global mobile (cell) phone networks, **Mascom Wireless** (www.mascom.bw) and **Orange Botswana** (www.orange.co.bw), of which Mascom is by far the largest provider. Still even Mascom's coverage is patchy, and is confined to the eastern corridor from Gaborone in the southeast to Francistown in the east. Outside of these areas you'll find reception is minimal, with little areas of coverage over Maun, Ghanzi and Mamuno. This is set to change as the market is moving forward steadily, and it is worth contacting your mobile operator.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The continually improving office of the **Department of Tourism** (Map pp88–9; ☎ 395 3024; fax 390 8675; botswanaturism@gov.bw; 2nd fl, Standard Chartered Bank Bldg, the Mall, Private Bag 0047, Gaborone) dispenses tourist information and also distributes brochures, maps and the annual *Botswana Focus* and *Discover Botswana* magazines. The offices located in **Kasane** (☎ 625 0357) and **Maun** (☎ 686 0492) are also becoming more useful.

VISAS

Visas are not required by citizens of most Commonwealth countries, most European countries or the USA; however, Israelis do need visas. On entry, everyone is granted a 30-day stay.

VISA EXTENSIONS

Extensions are available for up to three months. You may be asked to show an onward air ticket or proof of sufficient funds for your intended stay. For more than a three-month extension, apply to the Immigration and Passport Control Officer at the **Department of Immigration Head Office** (☎ 361 1300; fax 355 2996; cnr State House Dr & Khama Cres, PO Box 942, Gaborone) before your trip.

Working visas are also available for non-residents – see following.

WORK

Botswana is developing rapidly and the education system cannot produce enough skilled professionals in several fields. Those with training and experience as medical doctors, secondary school teachers, professors, engineers and computer professionals will find the warmest welcome. Most foreigners choose to remain in or around Gaborone, Francistown or Maun, but if you're willing to work in the bush, your chances of employment will increase. Foreigners are normally granted a three-year renewable residency permit. Applications must be submitted from outside the country to the **Department of Immigration** (☎ 361 1300; fax 355 2995; PO Box 942, Gaborone).

Numerous NGOs and international volunteer organisations – the Peace Corps, VSO etc – are also active in Botswana, and accept volunteer placements.

TRANSPORT IN BOTSWANA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

This section covers travel between Botswana and its neighbouring countries only. Information on travel to Southern Africa from elsewhere in Africa or from other continents is outlined in the Transport in Southern Africa chapter (p752).

Passport

All visitors entering Botswana must hold a passport that is valid for at least six months.

Also, allow a few empty pages for stamp-happy immigration officials, especially if you're crossing over to Zimbabwe and/or Zambia to see Victoria Falls.

Members of the EU, the USA, South Africa, Scandinavia, Balkan countries and all members of the Commonwealth (with the exception of Ghana, India, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and Mauritius) will be granted a one-month entry permit on arrival (passport photos required). Other nationalities will need to obtain a visa before they arrive in the country.

Air

Botswana's main airport is **Sir Seretse Khama International Airport** (GBE; ☎ 35 11 91), located 15km north of the capital Gaborone. Although the airport is well served with flights from Johannesburg and Harare, it is seldom used by tourists as an entry point into the country. Far more popular are **Maun Airport** (MUB; ☎ 66 02 38) and **Kasane Airport** (BBK; ☎ 65 01 36). The international air departure tax of US\$9 is included in ticket prices.

The national carrier, Air Botswana, flies routes within Southern Africa. It has offices in Gaborone, Francistown, Maun, Kasane and Victoria Falls (Vic Falls) in Zimbabwe.

No European or North American airline flies directly into Botswana. The country is only served by two airlines and a number of special charter flights. Most travellers fly into either Johannesburg or Cape Town in South Africa (both of which are served by an array of international and domestic carriers) and hop on a connecting flight.

Air Botswana (BP; ☎ 390 55 00; www.airbotswana.co.bw; hub Gaborone)

South African Airways (SA; ☎ 020-22 96 63; www.flysas.com; hub Johannesburg)

Border Crossings

Overland travel to or from Botswana is usually straightforward. At border crossings, arriving travellers are often requested to clean their shoes, even those packed away in their luggage, in a disinfectant dip to prevent them carrying foot-and-mouth disease into the country. Vehicles must also pass through a pit filled with the same disinfectant.

Border opening hours change all the time, but major crossings between Botswana and Namibia or South Africa generally open sometime between 6am and 8am and close sometime between 6pm and 10pm. The main

crossings between Botswana and Zimbabwe are open from 6am to 8pm and the Kazungula ferry to Zambia runs from 6am to 6pm. Minor crossings, such as the many crossings over the Limpopo and Molopo Rivers between Botswana and South Africa, are normally open between 8am and 4pm, but close in periods of high water. Some minor crossings close for lunch from 12.30pm to 1.45pm.

Those entering by vehicle need current registration papers and third-party insurance valid in the Southern African Customs Union. On entry, foreign-registered vehicles are subject to a road safety levy of US\$10.

NAMIBIA

The three main border crossings are at Ngoma Bridge, Mahango–Mohembo and Mamuno–Buitepos. Note that during the winter months (late May to August), Namibia is one hour behind Botswana.

Bus

There's at least one daily combi between Ghanzi and Mamuno (US\$3, three hours), on the border, but from there, you'll have to wait for a minibus on to Gobabis or Windhoek. Unfortunately, on the Namibian side they only run when full, so you may have to hole up on the border at the useful East Gate Petrol Station & Rest Camp.

At 7.30am on Monday **Audi Camp** (☎ Maun 686 0599, ☎ Windhoek 0811-272870) runs a useful shuttle service from Maun to Windhoek (US\$55, 10 hours), via Ghanzi. From Windhoek, it departs at 7.30am on Wednesday. Pre-booking is essential.

Although the Intercape Mainliner bus between Windhoek and Victoria Falls passes through Kasane, passengers may not embark or disembark in Botswana. There are no cross-border buses through the Mahango–Mohembo border crossing.

Hitching

From Kasane the sealed 54km transit route through Chobe National Park to Ngoma Bridge is relatively well travelled, and doesn't require payment of park fees. Nearly everyone refuels at Kasane, so you may want to look for lifts at the Shell petrol station, which also serves as the bus terminal. There's no longer any serious strife in Namibia's Caprivi region, so hitching isn't inordinately risky (see also p131 for more on hitching), but the stretch

between Kongola and Divundu still sees little traffic.

To hitch along the Trans-Kalahari Highway from Ghanzi to Gobabis (Namibia), inquire about lifts at the Kalahari Arms Hotel or the Oasis petrol station, both located in Ghanzi. Most people head out in the morning. To improve your chances, you can also hitch with a Gaborone-bound vehicle to New Junction, 40km south of Ghanzi, and wait there; be sure you have lots of water.

SOUTH AFRICA

Most overland traffic between Botswana and South Africa passes through the Ramatlabama, Tlokweng or Pioneer border crossings. Other border crossings serve back roads across the Limpopo River, in the Tuli Block, and the Molopo River in southern Botswana; some of these are impassable to 2WD vehicles, and may be closed during periods of high water.

Bus & Minibus

Minibuses between Gaborone and Jo'burg (US\$12, six hours) leave when full, 6am to 5.30pm, from the northwest corner of the main bus terminal. Minibus services also connect Lobatse with Mafikeng (US\$3, 1½ hours) and run between Palapye and Jo'burg (US\$14, eight hours), via Martin's Drift.

Intercape Mainliner (Gaborone Map pp88-9; ☎ 357 4294; Kudu Shell, Queen's Rd; Pretoria ☎ 012-654 4114; 108 Klerk St) travels daily between Gaborone and Jo'burg (US\$18, six hours), leaving Gaborone at 6.30am and Jo'burg Station at 3.30pm.

Hitching

Between Botswana and South Africa, hitching is straightforward, especially at the main border crossings, but you may be expected to pay for lifts (see p131).

ZAMBIA

Botswana and Zambia (along with Zimbabwe and Namibia) share what's certainly the world's shortest international border – a single point in the middle of the Zambezi River. Direct travel between the two countries is on the Kazungula ferry, which operates from 6am to 6pm daily and costs US\$0.50 per person and US\$7.50 for motorbikes, US\$12 for cars and US\$20 for larger vehicles. If there's a long queue or the ferry isn't operating, it's not difficult to reach Livingstone via Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

If you're hitching from Kasane–Kazungula or the Zambian shore of the Zambezi, ask truck drivers about lifts to Livingstone.

ZIMBABWE

The two most commonly used borders are at Ramokgwebana–Plumtree and at Kazungula, west of Victoria Falls. There's also a lesser-used back-road crossing at Pandamatenga.

Bus

Between Francistown and Bulawayo (US\$3.50, three hours), buses leave five to seven times daily in either direction. Alternatively, take a combi from Francistown to Ramokgwebana (US\$1.50, 1½ hours), on the border, and then another combi to Bulawayo.

Golden Bridge also has a bus service on Monday and Friday from Maun to Gweru (US\$11, 10 hours), via Bulawayo (US\$5, eight hours). It returns from Gweru on Wednesday and Sunday. The same company also runs a nightly bus from Gaborone (US\$5, 10 hours).

In Kasane, Thebe River Safaris and Chobe Safari Lodge offer Victoria Falls transfers (US\$28, two hours). If they don't have enough passengers, ask them to ring around and find a bus that is going. In Victoria Falls, Gareth McDonald at the **Victoria Falls Backpackers' Lodge** (☎ Victoria Falls 013-42209; www.victoriafallsbackpackers.com; 357 Gibson Rd) runs inexpensive transfers (US\$10 per person) to Kazungula, but doesn't cross the border. Taxis between Victoria Falls and the Kazungula border cost around US\$30.

Although the Intercape Mainliner bus service between Victoria Falls and Windhoek passes through Kasane, passengers cannot embark or disembark in Botswana.

Train

Due to Zimbabwe's failure to pay its share of the costs for the rail link between Gaborone and Bulawayo, this service no longer operates, and it's unlikely to resume as long as Zimbabwe's political and economic crises continue.

Hitching

It is fairly easy to hitch between Francistown and Bulawayo, using the Ramokgwebana–Plumtree border crossing. Mornings are best for hitching into Botswana, while most afternoon traffic is headed towards Bulawayo.

From Kasane to Victoria Falls, it's best to wait for a lift at the Kazungula border post; from Victoria Falls to Kasane, wait at the Kazungula road turn-off 1.5km southeast of the town centre (see page 131 for more).

GETTING AROUND

Botswana's public-transport network is limited and, at times, expensive. Although domestic air services are fairly frequent and usually reliable, Air Botswana (and charter flights) are not cheap and only a handful of towns are regularly served. The railway service is inexpensive and dependable, but it is terribly slow and is restricted to one line along the thin populated strip of eastern Botswana. Public buses and combis (minibuses) are also cheap and reasonably frequent, but are confined to the limited number of paved roads so the more interesting places are not accessible. All in all, hiring a vehicle is the best and most practical.

Air

The national carrier, Air Botswana, operates a limited number of domestic flights between larger towns around the country, namely Gaborone, Francistown, Maun and Kasane. They also run occasional packages between Gaborone and Maun, including hotels and sightseeing tours – check with the airline, or look for advertisements in the local English-language newspapers.

One-way fares are more expensive than return fares, so plan your itinerary accordingly; children aged under two sitting on the lap of an adult cost 10% of the fare and children aged between two and 12 cost 50% of the fare. Passengers are allowed 20kg of luggage (unofficially, a little more is often permitted if the flight is not full).

For details about the costs and frequency of domestic flights, and the contact details for Air Botswana offices, see under Getting There & Away in the relevant regional chapters of this book.

CHARTER FLIGHTS

Charter flights are often the best and, sometimes, the only way to reach remote lodges and isolated villages, but they are an expensive extra cost.

On average a one-way fare between Maun and a remote lodge in the Okavango Delta will set you back around US\$100 to US\$150. These services are now highly regulated and

flights must be booked as part of a safari package with a mandatory reservation at one of the lodges. This is essential; you can't simply turn up in these remote locations and expect to find a bed for the night as many lodges are very small. Likewise, you are not permitted to book accommodation at a remote lodge in the delta without also booking a return air fare at the same time. Packages can be booked through agencies in Maun.

It is very important to note that passengers on charter flights are only allowed 10kg to 12kg of luggage each (check the exact amount when booking). However, if you have an extra 2kg to 3kg the pilot will usually only mind if the plane is full of passengers.

Bicycle

Botswana is largely flat – and that's about the only concession it makes to cyclists. Some travellers still take a bicycle in the hope of avoiding the uncertainties of hitching and public transport, but unless you're an experienced cyclist and equipped for the extreme conditions, abandon any ideas you may have about a Botswana bicycle adventure. Also bear in mind that bicycles are not permitted in Botswana's national parks and reserves, and cyclists may encounter potentially dangerous wildlife while travelling along any highway or road.

Bus

Buses and minibuses travel regularly along all major highway routes in Botswana, but services are less frequent in the western part of the country than along the eastern corridor. With few exceptions, small villages are served only if they lie along major highways. On the most popular runs, minibus services operate according to demand and depart when full, while buses follow a fixed schedule. Botswana's small population means that its public-transport service is quite limited. In all cases, there are no advance bookings; tickets are sold only on board.

Note that there's no bus service through Chobe National Park between Kasane and Maun but safari companies offer three-day 4WD safaris via Moremi Game Reserve (see p132).

Car & Motorcycle

The best way to travel around Botswana is to hire (or buy) a vehicle. With your own car or

motorbike, you can avoid public transport (which is limited to routes between major towns) and organised tours. The downside is that distances are long and the cost of hiring a vehicle is high in Botswana – but probably cheaper in South Africa.

You cannot hire a motorbike in Botswana and although it can be great fun to ride dirt bikes along desert tracks, in between are roads and tracks where clouds of dust and sand kicked up by other vehicles could make for a miserable experience on a motorbike. It's also important to note that motorbikes are *not* permitted in national parks and reserves for safety reasons.

DRIVING LICENCE

Your home driving licence is valid for six months in Botswana, but if it isn't written in English you must provide a certified translation. In any case, it is advisable to obtain an International Driving Permit (IDP). Your national automobile association can issue this and it is valid for 12 months.

FUEL & SPARE PARTS

The cost of fuel (petrol) is relatively expensive in Botswana, around US\$0.75 per litre, but prices vary according to the remoteness of the petrol station. Petrol stations are open 24 hours in Gaborone, Francistown, Maun, Mahalapye and Palapye; elsewhere, they open from about 7am to 7pm daily.

As a general rule you should never pass a service station without filling up and it's advisable to carry an additional 100L of fuel (either in long-range tanks or jerry cans) if you're planning on driving in more remote areas.

Spare parts are readily available in most major centres, but not elsewhere. If you are planning on some 4x4 driving it is advisable to carry the following: two spare tyres, jump leads, tow rope and cable, a few litres of oil, wheel spanner and a complete tool kit. See p103 for more about bush driving.

If you're renting a hire car make sure you check you have a working jack (and know how to use it!) and a spare tyre.

HIRE

To rent a car you must be aged at least 21 (some companies require drivers to be over 25) and have been a licensed driver in your home country for at least two years (sometimes five).

Most major international car-rental companies will allow you to take a vehicle to South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia and Zimbabwe, but only if you have cleared it with the company beforehand so they can sort out the paperwork. Rental companies are less happy about drivers going to Zambia and will not allow you to go anywhere else in Africa. It is possible to hire a car, for example, in Gaborone and return it to Johannesburg (South Africa) or Windhoek (Namibia), but this will cost extra.

Naturally, always check the paperwork carefully and thoroughly examine the vehicle before accepting it; make sure the 4WD engages properly and that you understand how it works. Also, check the vehicle fluids, brakes, battery and so on – the Kalahari is a harsh place to find out that the company (or you) has overlooked something important.

It is probably best to deal with one of the major car-rental companies listed below. For information about hiring a car in South Africa and then driving it to Botswana, see p589.

Avis (www.avis.com) Offices in Gaborone, Francistown, Maun, Kasane and all over Southern Africa.

Budget (www.budget.co.za) Offices in Gaborone, as well as in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

Imperial (www.imperialcarrental.co.za) Offices in Gaborone and Francistown, and in the major cities of South Africa, Namibia and Zambia.

Tempest (www.tempestcarhire.co.za) This large South African-based company has offices in Gaborone and throughout South Africa, and in Namibia.

Additional charges will be levied for the following: a fee for may be charged for dropping off or picking up the car at your hotel (rather than the car-rental office); a 'tourism levy' of 1% is sometimes charged (but this seems fairly arbitrary); a 'cleaning fee' (which can amount to US\$50!) may be incurred at the discretion of the rental company; and a 'service fee' may be added. Also check to make sure the government sales tax (10%) is included. Most companies can also provide baby seats, for an extra cost.

It is nearly always advisable to pay with a 'gold level' credit card, which will offer you some protection should anything go wrong and will possibly cover you for collision as well.

INSURANCE

Although insurance is not compulsory, it is *strongly* recommended. No matter who you

hire your car from make sure you understand what is included in the price (unlimited kilometres, tax, insurance, collision-waiver and so on) and what your liabilities are. Most local insurance policies do not include cover for damage to windshields and tyres.

Third-party motor insurance is a minimum requirement in Botswana. However, it is also advisable to take Damage (Collision) Waiver, which costs around US\$20 extra per day for a 2WD, and about US\$40 per day for a 4WD. Loss (Theft) Waiver is also an extra worth having. For both types of insurance, the excess liability is about US\$1500 for a 2WD and US\$3000 for a 4WD. If you're only going for a short period of time it may be worth taking out the Super Collision Waiver, which covers absolutely everything, albeit at a price.

PURCHASE

Unless you're going to be staying in Botswana for several years, it's not worth purchasing a vehicle in-country. The best place to buy a vehicle is across the border in South Africa. For more information on purchasing a vehicle in South Africa see p761.

If you do buy a car with hard currency and resell it in Botswana, you can remit the same amount of hard currency to your home country without hassles – just keep the papers and inform the bank in advance.

ROAD CONDITIONS

At the time of independence in 1966, Botswana's only paved road extended for 5km from the Lobatse train station to the High Court building. (The road was completed in 1947 in preparation for the visit by King George VI.)

These days good paved roads link all the major population centres. Tracks with sand, mud, gravel and rocks (and sometimes all four) – but normally accessible by 2WD except during exceptional rains – connect most villages and cross a few national parks.

Most other 'roads' are poorly defined and badly mapped tracks that should only be attempted by 4WD. In the worst of the wet season (December to February), 4WDs should carry a winch on some tracks (eg through Chobe National Park); and a compass or, better, global positioning system (GPS) equipment. A GPS is essential for driving by 4WD around the salt pans of the Kalahari or north-eastern Botswana at any time.

ROAD RULES

To drive a car in Botswana, you must be at least 18 years old. Like most other Southern African countries, traffic keeps to the left side of the road. The national speed limit is 120km/h on paved roads, 80km/h on gravel roads and 40km/h in all national parks and reserves. When passing through towns and villages, assume a speed limit of 60km/h, even in the absence of any signs.

Highway police use radar and love to fine motorists (about US\$10, plus an additional US\$1 for ever 10km you exceed the limit) for speeding. Sitting on the roof of a moving vehicle is illegal, and wearing seat belts (where installed) is compulsory in the front (but not back) seats. Drink-driving is also against the law, and your insurance policy will be invalid if you have an accident while drunk. Driving without a licence is also a serious offence.

If you have an accident causing injury, it must be reported to the authorities within 48 hours. If vehicles have sustained only minor damage and there are no injuries – and all parties agree – you can exchange names and addresses and sort it out later through your insurance companies.

Wild animals, including elephants and the estimated three million wild donkeys in Botswana, can also be a hazard, even along the highways. The Maun–Nata and Nata–Kasane roads are frequently trafficked by elephants and should be driven with caution. The chances of hitting a wild or domestic animal is far, far greater after dark, so driving at night is definitely not recommended.

One common but minor annoyance is the so-called 'buffalo fences' (officially called Veterinary Cordon Fences; see p85). These are set up to stop the spread of disease from wild animals to livestock. Unless you're driving, or travelling in, a cattle truck, simply slow down while the gate is opened and make an effort to offer a friendly wave to the bored gate attendant.

HITCHING

Hitching in Botswana is an accepted way to get around given that public transport is sometimes erratic in remote areas. There are even established rates for main routes. Travellers who decide to hitch, however, should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs

and let someone know where they are planning to go.

The equivalent of a bus fare will frequently be requested in exchange for a lift, but to prevent uncomfortable situations at the end of the ride determine a price before climbing in.

Local Transport

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

COMBI (MINIBUSES)

Combis, recognisable by their blue numberplates, circulate according to set routes around major towns such as Gaborone, Kasane, Ghanzi, Molepolole, Mahalapye, Palapye, Francistown, Selebi-Phikwe, Lobatse and Kanye.

TAXI

Licensed taxis are also recognisable by their blue numberplates. They rarely bother hanging around the airports at Gaborone, Francistown, Kasane and Maun, so the only reliable transport from the airport is usually a courtesy bus operated by a top-end hotel or lodge. These are free for guests but anyone else can normally negotiate a fare with the bus driver. Taxis are always available to the airports, however.

It is not normal for taxis to cruise the streets for fares – even in Gaborone. If you need one, telephone a taxi company to arrange a pick-up or go to a taxi stand (usually near the bus or train stations). Fares for taxis are negotiable but fares for occasional shared taxis are fixed. Taxis can be chartered – about US\$45 to US\$60 per day, although this is negotiable depending on how far you want to go.

Tours

From Maun (p106), which is the traditional jumping-off point for the Okavango Delta, it's also easy to book tours to other parts of Botswana, most notably to Chobe National Park, Tsodilo Hills and the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. These excursions are often added to the end of delta tours. Maun is also the base for overland safaris to Kasane via Chobe National Park.

A good place to start is at **Travel Wild** (☎ 686 0822; fax 686 0493; travelwild@dynabyte.bw), opposite the airport, which serves as a central booking and information office for lodges, safaris and other adventures.

The following Botswana tour operators are recommended:

Afro-Trek (Map p110; ☎ 686 0177; www.afrotrek.com; Shorobe Rd, Maun) This company specialises in midmarket safaris, and is located in the Sedia Hotel (p111).

Audi Camp Safaris (Map p110; ☎ 686 0500; www.okavangocamp.com; Mathiba I St, Maun) This budget operator is run out of the popular Audi Camp (p109).

Back to the Bridge Backpackers (Map p110; ☎ 686 2406; hellish@info.bw; Shorobe Rd, Maun) This budget operator is run out of Back to the Bridge Backpackers (p111).

Bathusi Travel & Safaris (☎ 686 0647; www.info.bw/~bathusi; Tsheko Rd, Maun) This company specialises in upmarket safaris, and is located next to Riley's Garage.

Crocodile Camp Safaris (Map p110; ☎ 686 0265; www.botswana.com; Shorobe Rd, Maun) This budget operator is located at the Crocodile Camp (p111).

Island Safari Lodge (Map p110; ☎ 686 0300; island@info.bw; Mathiba I St, Maun) This budget operator is run out of the Island Safari Lodge (p111).

Maun Rest Camp (Map p110; ☎ 686 3472; simonjoyce@info.bw; Shorobe Rd, Maun) This budget operator specialises in mobile safaris, and is run out of the Maun Rest Camp (p109).

Ker & Downey (Map p110; ☎ 686 0375; www.kerdowney.com; Mathiba I St) One of Botswana's most exclusive tour operators.

Okavango River Lodge (Map p110; ☎ 686 3707; freewind@info.bw; Shorobe Rd, Maun) This budget operator is run out of the Okavango River Lodge (p109).

Okavango Tours & Safaris (Map p110; ☎ 686 1154; www.okavango.bw; Mophane St, Maun) This well-established operator specialises in upmarket lodge-based tours.

Phakawe Safaris (Map p110; ☎ 686 4337; www.phakawe.demon.co.uk; Sir Seretse Khama Rd) This reader-recommended operator runs informal participation safaris, and is housed in a bright-orange building called the Pumpkin Patch.

Wilderness Safaris (Johannesburg ☎ (27) 11 807 1800; www.wilderness-safaris.com) This operator specialises in upmarket safaris and is located near the airport.

Train

The Botswana railway system is limited to one line running along eastern Botswana. It stretches from Ramokgwebana on the Zimbabwean border to Ramatlabama on the South

African border, and was once part of the glorious Johannesburg–Bulawayo train service, which is now sadly defunct. Although cheap and reliable it is painfully slow and serves places of little or no interest to the tourist.

There are two different types of train – the quicker and more expensive 'day train', and the slower and cheaper 'night train'. Both travel the route between Lobatse and Fran-

cistown, via Gaborone, Pilane, Mahalapye, Palapye, Serule and other villages.

Schedules and tickets are available at all train stations, but reservations are only possible at Gaborone, Francistown and Lobatse (for trips beyond Gaborone). For 1st and 2nd class, advance bookings are essential; economy-class passengers can buy a ticket in advance or on the train.

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