

BEST OF BOTSWANA

Makgadikgadi Pans, The Okavango Delta,
and Chobe National Park

September 25 – October 5, 2023



Day 00 – 0, Sep. 23 or 24 - Depart the US

You will need to leave the US a day or two early to arrive in Johannesburg by September 25. If you opt to arrive earlier than September 25, *Cheepers! AFRICA* will assist in arranging accommodation for your extra night(s) and include the cost on your final invoice.

Day 1, Sep. 25 - Arrive in Johannesburg, South Africa:

You will arrive in Johannesburg today, where you will be met by a driver or guide and transported to your hotel. Depending on arrival times, the group will enjoy a welcome dinner at the hotel.

O/N Birchwood Hotel (D)

Day 2, Sep. 26 -Johannesburg to Kasane, Botswana and on to Chobe Safari Lodge:

We will take a morning flight from Johannesburg to Kasane in Botswana. Upon our arrival in Kasane, we will transfer to our vehicles, which we will use for the rest of the Botswana trip, and drive approximately 15 minutes to our lodge. The lodge gardens attract a whole host of good birds such as **Schalow's Turaco**, **Trumpeter Hornbill**, and **Collared Palm Thrush**. Careful searching might even reveal a roosting **White-backed Night Heron**.

O/N Chobe Safari Lodge (BLD)

11 Days / 10 Nights

\$4850*

Single supplement \$500

Our Best of Botswana trip offers our clients the opportunity to experience Botswana at an affordable price by making use of more basic but still very comfortable accommodation options and driving rather than flying between lodges. Participants can expect to see birds and mammals very similar to what we see on our fly-in safari and get to experience the magic of the Okavango Delta first-hand. We combine some of the best game viewing and bird watching spots in Botswana to offer you a safari that you will never forget.

***This is 2022 pricing; we expect 2023 prices to be 5-10% higher. Minimum group size is 6 people.**

Day 3, Sep. 27 -Chobe National Park:

Massive elephant populations, riverboat safaris, sunset cruises, riverfront safari lodges and top-quality game drives have firmly positioned the Chobe National Park as a “must visit” destination for any enquiring safari enthusiast. Chobe National Park is famous for its elephants. The latest enquiry into the elephant population estimates it to be 120,000 - the highest elephant concentration in Africa and the largest continuous surviving elephant population on Earth. Read more at <http://www.botswanaturism.co.bw/destination/chobe-national-park>

The Chobe floodplain is several kilometers wide in flood. In years of exceptional rains, the water stretches as far as the eye can see. Teak Woodlands dominate large parts of the park, and Roan and Sable Antelope thrive in these woodlands, where the low density of predators and lack of competition for food makes this prime habitat for these large ungulates. Leopard occurs in these woodlands in low numbers, but they are highly secretive and seldom seen.

Some of the most unusual bird species are to be found in the teak (*Baikia plurijuga*) woodlands. This broad-leafed woodland provides good pickings for insectivorous birds that favor canopy habitat. **Ashy, African Paradise and Pallid Flycatchers, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, Scarlet-chested and Amethyst Sunbirds, Yellow-throated Petronia, Red-headed Weaver and Violet-backed Starling** are only a few of the species that move around in the “bird parties” in the canopy. **Dickinson’s Kestrel, Red-necked Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, and Lizard Buzzard** are some of the raptors to keep an eye out for, while the diminutive **White-faced Owl** can often be seen roosting in the road-side vegetation. **Olive-Tree Warbler, Neddicky** (now known as **Piping Cisticola**), and **Flappet, Fawn-colored and Dusky Larks** are other special species here.

We plan to do a full day of safari activities in the park, which will include a morning and afternoon game drive and/or boat cruise, with some time spent closely following the Chobe River. The river is presided over by an impressive sand-ridge, where broad-leafed woodland is the



dominant vegetation. As you move into the valley, the impact of the high Elephant population is felt with the paucity of large trees that typically line the rivers of sub-tropical Africa and the dense tangled masses of knobly Combretum (*Combretum mosambicense*) and woolly Caper Bush (*Capparis tomentosa*) that appear impervious to the constant onslaught of browsers. The river itself is broad and meandering, and in the flood season it is an impressive sight. To the east, outside of the park, lie the riparian forests that are home to so many of the more tropical species whose ranges end abruptly in northeastern Botswana. Much of the Chobe’s wildlife come to drink in the latter half of the morning

and early afternoon when the heat excites their thirst. This is one of the best places to see Roan and Sable Antelope. Breeding herds of Elephant seem to be around every corner here in the dry season and the massive herds of Cape Buffalo are constantly flanked by the ever-hungry Lions of the Chobe. Chobe has one of the highest Lion densities of any national park or game reserve in southern Africa. Puku antelope occur nowhere else in southern Africa except here on the Chobe floodplains. With the diminishing woodlands and thickets, the magnificent Bushbuck is becoming ever scarcer, but the western Chobe supports strong herds of Burchell's Zebra.

Bat-Hawk, Cuckoo Hawk, Eurasian Hobby and Ovambo Sparrowhawk are some of the more interesting raptors we can hope to encounter, while **Corncrake, African Crake, African Rail, Luapula Cisticola, Malachite Kingfisher, Quail Finch and Rosy-throated Longclaw** are found on



Malachite Kingfisher

the edges of the floodplain. Large flocks of **Great White Pelican** investigate the drying pools as the floodwaters recede. Much larger flocks of the nomadic **Collared Pratincole** and also some **Black-winged Pratincole**, numbering in the thousands, can be found on the drying floodplains. The woodlands support **Racket-tailed Roller** and **Stierling's Wren-Warbler**.

O/N Chobe Safari Lodge (BLD)

Day 4, Sep. 28 - Kasane to Elephant Sands:

After some early morning birding and a hearty breakfast, we will pack our bags and head due south to our next destination near the town of Nata. This 300-km drive often produces some interesting mammal and bird sightings. We often see Elephant and Giraffe along the way; keep in mind that we're no longer in any form of national park or

game reserve, so to see these animals roaming the countryside freely is a totally unique experience. We'll make a stop en route to try for **Yellow-throated Sandgrouse**, a species that occurs here in good numbers and usually comes in to drink mid-morning.

O/N Elephant Sands Lodge (BLD)

Day 5, Sep. 29 -Elephant Sands:

This lodge is more off the beaten track than many others, being east of Maun and slightly off the usual circuit. It has been included partly because it has a great reputation for sightings of African Wild Dogs (a pack came through the lodge's open-air restaurant recently in pursuit of a Kudu!), but also because it gives the opportunity to experience a very different set of dry, desert-like habitats of the Makgadigadi Pans and the Kalahari. We will have the whole day birding and game viewing at Elephant Sands. The camp overlooks a stunning waterhole with a continual stream of Elephants, Greater Kudu and other wildlife coming to drink. We also have a very good chance of

spotting Wild Dog here, which will be one of the main focuses of our effort. **Burchell's Sandgrouse** drinks here every morning, as well as many other dry country species.

O/N Elephant Sands Lodge (BLD)

Day 6, Sep. 30 -To Maun:

We'll spend one last morning at Elephant Sands, after which we will depart for Maun, with a possible stop at the Nata Bird Sanctuary. Maun is about a 3-hour transfer through interesting and quite wild country of various extensive pans (basins that are subject to seasonal or perennial surface water inundation) or salt flats formed by temporary lakes in the wet season. We arrive in Maun in the late afternoon.

O/N Island Safari Lodge (BLD)

Day 7, Oct. 1 -To Moremi

National Park:

We set off this morning to Moremi National Park for a full day of birding and game viewing. The area is very good for raptors with **African Hawk-Eagle, Gabar Goshawk, Shikra, Little Sparrowhawk, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Tawny Eagle, Lesser**



Southern Yellow Hornbill

Spotted Eagle and Steppe Eagle

all inhabiting the mopane and adjacent woodlands. Other birds common along this route include most of Botswana's hornbills including **Red-billed, Southern Yellow-billed, African Grey, Bradfield's and Southern Ground Hornbills**. A large number of brood-parasites may also be seen: **Diederick, Levillant's, Jacobin, Great-spotted, African and Common Cuckoos; Shaft-tailed, Pin-tailed and Eastern Paradise Whydahs;** and **Greater and Lesser Honeyguides**. Moremi is among the best game reserves in Africa for viewing the endangered African Wild Dog.

O/N Island Safari Lodge (BLD)

Day 8, Oct. 2-Okavango Delta:

The Okavango Delta, one of the most incredible wilderness sanctuaries in Africa, is 15,000 square kilometres of water channels, lagoons and islands. Each year, floodwaters flow from the central African highlands over 1,000 km away into the Delta to create this wondrous wetland within a desert. It is home to large numbers of wildlife, from common mammals and birdlife to those that are not often seen elsewhere, such as sitatunga, wild dog, and Wattled Crane. Read more at <http://www.botswanaturism.co.bw/destination/okavango-delta>

We will take a boat ride into the Okavango for birding, which is particularly good in this area. Habitats here range from wide-open floodplains, marshes, lagoons, papyrus-fringed channels, vast stands of *Miscanthus* and *Phragmites*, woodland, and savannah. As a result of the extremely variable habitat, the diversity of both wildlife and birdlife is excellent. We should have a good chance to see the likes of **Slaty Egret, Pel's Fishing Owl and White-backed Night Heron**. Some local birding in the Maun area in the afternoon should yield good results.

O/N Island Safari Lodge (BLD)

Day 9, Oct. 3 - To Khwai:

We will continue our journey through excellent game country wilderness to another famed area for wildlife at the Khwai Game Concession. We should arrive in time for some initial exploration of this exciting area. The journey may follow water courses with the track weaving from the riverside and floodplains into the mopane veld and the woodlands that make Khwai one of the most scenic areas of the Okavango. We may pass the magnificent Dombo Hippo Pools in the morning, stopping to enjoy the scenery and the antics of the resident Hippos. The western mopane veld is home to mostly breeding herds of Elephant while the eastern reaches of Khwai are home to some impressive old bulls. The mature bulls revel in the cool waters of the Khwai and are far more approachable while drinking and bathing than the breeding herds. The river has an unusually high density of Hippo as well as some huge Nile Crocodile. Leopard, Cheetah, Serval and Lion are

common predators along this route. Khwai is included in the home ranges of 2 different packs of African Wild Dog. General game includes southern race of Giraffe, Burchell's Zebra, Tsessebe and Red Lechwe with Roan and Sable Antelope being less-common residents.

In the mopane woodlands **African Hawk-Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Gabar Goshawk, Little Sparrowhawk, African Harrier Hawk and Shikra** are common raptors. Mixed bird parties move through the canopy and include **Red-headed Weaver, Stierling's Wren-Warbler, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Neddicky, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Chin-spot Batis and Diederik Cuckoo**, to name but a few. The verges of the swamp form breeding grounds for the **Rosy-throated Longclaw, Black Coucal, Black-bellied Bustard and African Crake.**
O/N Khwai Guest House or similar (BLD)



African Harrier-Hawk (Gymnogone)

Day 10, Oct. 4 -Exploring the Khwai Game Concession area:

The Khwai River forms a boundary between the reserve and the community area. We can explore the Khwai floodplains on game drives both during the day and at night. Morning and afternoon game drives in Khwai will give us further good chances to find African Wild Dogs. The area is well-known for these predators, and they are apparently increasing here and should be less nomadic at this time of year as they are denning with pups. There will, of course, be many more birds to find and other game on the daytime drives; we will have the option of taking a night drive for more difficult nocturnal birds and mammals.

Exploring after dark with spotlights offers an opportunity to experience some of the nocturnal animals that are rarely encountered during the day. We will also have the opportunity to explore the surrounding wilderness on foot and enjoy an up close and personal encounter with Botswana's flora and fauna. It is important to note that night drives and guided walks are not permitted within the national parks and reserves. These activities are conducted outside the boundaries of the Moremi Game Reserve in the Khwai community area. We will spend our time between the dry-land habitats of the lead-wood and camel-thorn woodlands and savannahs and



Bateleur

the riverside and marshy backwaters of the Khwai. The Khwai region boasts excellent populations of Elephants as well as Lion, Leopard, Serval and African Wildcat being quite common predators with African Wild Dog and Cheetah being less common. Buffalo use this area seasonally with large herds moving in during the summer rains. The swampy areas in the west are home to Red Lechwe. Other ungulates include Tsesebe, Blue Wildebeest, Giraffe, Kudu, Sable and Roan Antelopes and Impala.

Truly one of Botswana's birding Meccas, the western reaches of Khwai are prime habitat for the uncommon **Rosy-throated Longclaw**. The entire length of the river is hunting domain for **Bat Hawk**. Other interesting raptors here are **Cuckoo Hawk** (rare), **Long-crested Eagle** and **Black Sparrowhawk**.

More common raptors include **Tawny Eagle**,

Steppe Eagle, Lesser-spotted Eagle, Martial Eagle, Bateleur and African Hawk-Eagle. The waterways host **Africa Rail, African Crake, Greater Painted Snipe, Allen's Gallinule, Lesser Jacana, and Lesser Moorhen.**

O/N Khwai Guest House or similar (BLD)

Day 11, Oct. 5 - Departure:

After some birding in the lodge grounds and a hearty breakfast, we'll head to the airport for our flights back to Johannesburg to connect with your international flights out, or to begin the Western Cape extension of our South Africa tour.

(B)



Rosy-throated Longclaw



Scarlet-chested Sunbird

PRICE INCLUDES:

- ~ All accommodation
- ~ All meals as indicated on itinerary
- ~ Ground transportation and Fuel
- ~ Full-time services of an expert local guide and driver
- ~ Full-time services of 2 *Cheepers!* tour leaders (Jim and Cindy Beckman)
- ~ Bottled water
- ~ All tolls and entry fees
- ~ All indicated activities
- ~ Pre-trip gift package, including customized checklist
- ~ Post-trip electronic final checklist
- ~ Post-trip collection of photos on USB drive

PRICE EXCLUDES:

- ~ All flights
- ~ Items of a personal nature such as laundry, phone calls, snacks, souvenirs, etc.
- ~ All drinks other than bottled water
- ~ Gratuities

TERMS AND CONDITIONS:

Deposit of \$750 with registration. Balance is due 4 months prior to start date of the tour.

Cancellation policy:

Cancellation should be made in writing (email or snail mail)
More than 6 months prior to departure – full refund of deposit
Between 4 and 6 months prior to departure – 50% refund of deposit
Less than 4 months prior to departure – No refund of deposit

Trip insurance is recommended.

You can compare prices offered by various trip insurance companies at these websites:

<http://www.insuremytrip.com>

http://www.quotewright.com/?sub_id=6056

Cheepers! Birding on a Budget LLC reserves the right to make changes in the itinerary if the need should arise due to unforeseeable circumstances such as weather, landslides, and other natural phenomena, as well as suggestions by local guides in order to take advantage of an unusual birding opportunity. Lodging is subject to change based on availability.

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