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Travel And Leisure : International

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Botswana Safari Tours Review - Africa's Hidden Gems

By [Anne Z. Cooke](#) -- Photos By [Steve Haggerty/ColorWorld](#)

BOTSWANA SAFARIS – What You Need To Know Before Planning Your Wildlife Safari to Botswana's Okavango Delta.

MAUN, **BOTSWANA** – What's my all-time recipe for a dream vacation? Take two elephants, gently stirred in a tree-shaded lagoon, and mix in one lion, a giraffe and the **Okavango Delta**, in southern Africa's Botswana. Simmer slowly for nine days and record with your camera for a once-in-a-lifetime delicacy. Here's how to make it happen:



Endangered Black Rhinos Thrive In the Okavango Delta

START WITH AN EXPERIENCED TOUR COMPANY:

Most travelers visit the **Okavango Delta**, in Botswana, on a custom-designed tour planned by a full-service company with offices in the U.S., and lodges, employees and guides in Botswana. The price of a typical itinerary includes roundtrip flights from an airport in **South Africa** (Johannesburg or Cape Town), to Maun, on the southern edge of the Okavango Delta, as well as all flights between lodges. Also included guides, game drives, all meals, afternoon tea, snacks, beverages, daily maid service and even laundry.



Most Safari Lodges Are Open to the Sun and Fresh Air

Look for a tour company whose reservations staff have been to the lodges they recommend and can describe the experience. High-end outfitters – such as [Abercrombie & Kent](#) and [Ker & Downey](#) and [CC Africa](#) – will meet you at the airport in South Africa (Johannesburg or Cape Town), drive you to your hotel and assist with check-in, lost luggage and canceled flights. Your camp accommodations will be in luxuriously-appointed tents and daily game drives will be limited to four-to-six travelers per vehicle.

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Despite Their Size, Bull Elephants Tread Silently Through the Bush



Okavango Delta Lions Depend on the River's Annual Flood

As you'd expect, budget outfitters cost less but offer fewer conveniences. You may have to arrange your own flights to Maun, the wildlife viewing areas will be different, and the safari vehicles provided may be modified to carry eight to 12 guests seated in rows on bench seats. Camping-style tours may provide transportation, buffet meals and guiding; you provide your own sleeping bag and tent.

PICK A DATE:

June through August (winter) in Botswana is dry with cool to cold nights and mild, sunny days. September and October are dry but warmer; bare tree limbs and fewer water holes means better game viewing. November through March can be rainy.



A wary hippo checks us out

AVOID MALARIA:

The mosquitoes that carry this always debilitating and sometimes fatal disease are rarely a threat during Southern Africa's dry months, July through October. It may be enough to wear long-sleeve shirts and pants and apply ample repellent on all exposed skin. But it's vital to consult your doctor about taking prophylactic drugs, advisable in many parts of Africa, especially during rainy months.



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BOOKING YOUR FLIGHT:

Plan to book your own flights to and from **South Africa**; this is an ideal time to cash in airline mileage awards. We also recommend purchasing travel and medical insurance, including a provision for emergency evacuation to South Africa.



Seen From Above, the Okavango Delta's Water World Beckons

Since small planes enforce space and weight restrictions, pare away all non-essentials and carry only what fits into a medium-size duffel. Pack your camera, money, passport, medications and toiletries in a small carry-on bag. You won't need fancy clothes; safari dress codes are strictly casual and many lodges provide free laundry service every other day. Two pairs of long pants, two short pants, short and long-sleeve shirts, underwear, a jacket, tennis shoes, bathing suit, foldable hat, scarf, binoculars and mosquito repellent ought to do it. Light-colored clothing helps to repel mosquitoes.

AIRLINES:

South African Airways (SAA) flies non-stop and one-stop flights from American cities to Johannesburg and Cape Town, in South Africa; at

(888) 722-4872 or visit www.flysaa.com. **British Airways** flies from London through Cairo and Nairobi; at www.britishairways.com. Dates and prices change seasonally. Look for special promotions during the current economic recession.



Chief's Camp Guests Stretch Their Legs

GUIDEBOOKS:

Your guidebook is an important as your choice of tour company. The **Bradt Guide To Botswana**, by Chris McIntyre, (Globe Pequot Press, \$24.95), is the best source available, a virtual bible to the area. Complete, readable, intelligent and regularly updated, it is available at bookstores and from www.bradtguides.com. Don't leave home without it.

The Shell (Oil Company) Tourist Guide (and map) to Botswana, by Veronica Roodt, a resident of southern Africa, is not available in the U.S. but is sold in South Africa and at many safari lodges. If you're lucky enough to spot one in an airport or gift shop, pick it up.

LASplash Correspondent Anne Z. Cooke is a student of African history and politics and a frequent visitor to Southern Africa.

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