

# Ultimate Botswana

## With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures



August 10 – 24, 2020

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Embark on a true African safari to Botswana, where the wildlife is pristine and our days are timed with the rhythm of nature. Botswana is visually exciting—each of its unique habitats have distinct features, most famous of which is the Okavango Delta. This tour is limited to just nine participants traveling with local experts and Naturalist Journeys' Greg Smith.

We call this one “ultimate,” not for contrived creature comforts but for the amazing opportunity you have to intimately take in the spectrum of Botswana’s wildlife. Designed by Naturalist Journeys’ owner and founder, Peg Abbott, who has decades of experience visiting Africa, this is an ultimate experience for seeing Africa’s birds and iconic large mammals.

We start in Chobe National Park in a fun way, with photo experts along on our boat trips and game drives to give us tips, perfect at the start of safari to make the most of our efforts at any level of photography throughout the trip. Chobe can get crowded (Botswana’s Yellowstone) but is always special so we keep it on the itinerary. And we go beyond the crowd on a three-night houseboat trip, mooring on a quiet section of river where we can be out at dawn and dusk for the wildlife action with ease. We spend six incredible nights in Moremi Game Reserve, a critical stronghold for several endangered species. We spend our Moremi days on the move, at two varied locations, kept comfortable by the support crew of a mobile-tented camp, complete with private bathroom, a chef, and a wildlife and birding guide with an unparalleled 25+ years of experience. This mobile camp is designed to get us as close to the wildlife as safety allows. Imagine the richness of those wild nighttime sounds beneath skies awash with southern stars. We get amazingly close views of predator and prey without disturbing their interactions and day-to-day survival. We then visit the watered side of the delta

## Tour Highlights

- ✓ Explore the Okavango Delta’s papyrus-lined channels and lagoons, the teak woodlands of Kasane, extensive wetlands and Moremi’s Mopane forests
- ✓ Hone your photo and wildlife-spotting skills daily on drives and boat trips in Chobe National Park with a naturalist and photo guide.
- ✓ Look for Leopard, often seen in Chobe National Park
- ✓ Spend three nights on the *Pangolin Voyager* cruising the wildlife-rich Chobe River, where we watch Elephant, Lion, Sable Antelope, and a host of herons and egrets, including the world’s largest: the Goliath Heron
- ✓ Live “National Geographic moments” in real time on each morning and afternoon game drive
- ✓ Follow wildlife and elegant, colorful birds with expert guides from a six-night mobile camp in the heart of the renowned Moremi National Park
- ✓ Find signature birds like Slaty Egret, Black Heron, African Openbill Stork, Hamerkop, African Fish Eagle, Southern Ground Hornbill, bustards, hoopoes, and of course, the stunning Lilac-breasted Roller
- ✓ End at lovely Xaro Lodge with two nights at a deep water lodge on the Okavango River; look for Pel’s Fishing Owl, colorful nesting bee-eaters, and Sitatunga amid lush palm papyrus and reed habitat
- ✓ Opt to go deeper in and experience the arid but fabulous Kalahari Desert on our Nxai Pan extension, where wildlife and birds congregate at our tented camp’s waterhole

## Tour Summary

15-Day / 14-Night Botswana Safari with Greg Smith

\$9550 from Kasane, from Maun

Arrival airport is Kasane (BBK), departure airport for the main safari is Kasane or Maun (MUB)



region. We take a scenic flight over the Okavango Delta, right up to the heart of its fan-shaped structure to spend time at Xaro Lodge, prime for birders with species such as Pel's Fishing Owl and Goliath Heron right outside your door. For birds and mammals it is great to be in the realm of rivers, papyrus and reeds.

If big game, southern constellations, and the enchanting sounds of wild Africa beckon, this journey is sure to entice.

## Make the Most of Your Time

You've flown all the way to Africa. Here are a few great options that let you make the most of your flight.

### **Option 1 OUR TOP CHOICE! Pair with our Namibia Tour**

Our African Summer Series was designed to combine together. This August Ultimate Botswana trip was designed to pair perfectly with our [Namibia tour](#), August 25 – September 4, 2020. A short flight from Windhoek to Kasane makes pairing these two easy.

### **Option 2 Pair with our Kenya Tour**

Our 15-day Kenya safari, [July 26 – August 9, 2020](#), is an excellent choice if you want to fully embrace an ultimate African safari experience. Naturalist Journeys' owner, Peg Abbott, joins you in Kenya.

### **Option 3 Add Post-tour time on our Nxai Pan Extension**

If you want to extend your stay but don't have enough time to add on Namibia or South Africa, consider adding time in the Kalahari Desert at Nxai Pan National Park. We can help you arrange a most comfortable lodge from which to discover a host of new species—from Bat-eared Fox to arid-land birds.

### **Option 3 Add on time at Victoria Falls**

A visit to Victoria Falls is easy to do before we start at Kasane. You can fly in to Kasane and take a day trip over to the falls or simply book your international flight into Victoria Falls' International airport, spend a few days exploring on your own (we can recommend an affordable B&B or a splurge hotel), and then it's an easy ground transfer over to Kasane to join the group at the start of the trip.



## Itinerary

### **Mon., Aug. 10 Arrive in Kasane, Botswana\***

Welcome to Botswana! Your ultimate safari is about to start. Flights into Kasane most often originate in Johannesburg (“Joburg” to locals), South Africa, so please plan your flights from the USA to arrive in Kasane today. You are met at the airport, then settle in at the lovely Pangolin Safari Lodge, just minutes from the airport, located on a hill with a fine view of the Chobe River and the Caprivi Plains of Namibia. Enjoy the pool and some time to relax, bird the grounds, or start right in with an afternoon game drive led by a photo expert to help you get the best shots possible.

Dinner is served under the stars; we enjoy wonderful food by the chef and team at Pangolin, with wine included.  
*Accommodations at Pangolin Lodge, Kasane (D)*

\*If you plan to come in early to visit Victoria Falls, your arrival airport may be Victoria Falls airport.

### **Tues., Aug. 11 Chobe National Park | Chobe River**

Northern Botswana is renowned for its vast herds of Elephant, African Buffalo, and other plains animals. At this time of year they congregate along the Chobe River, especially as the rain-filled pans become dry. Northern Botswana is also known for its very healthy African Lion population and Leopard sightings are frequent. In the lush river-associated wetlands, Hippo and Crocodile abound. The Chobe River supports the largest concentration of Elephant in all of Africa. These Elephant migrate here and depend on the river during the dry season. Some groups that use the river area number in the hundreds and they often feed in the water.

We take morning and afternoon game drives, giving you ample opportunities to witness and capture images of wildlife and birds. If you are a photographer, there is an editing room at our lodge and experts at the lodge can share processing tips between the outings.

Dinner is served under the stars on a patio next to the swimming pool. It’s a great way to start our trip in comfort after the long journey to get here. Our hotel is intimate, only 14 rooms, and is close to the park gates—perfect for being first on the scene in the morning. Rooms are air-conditioned with private balconies. The dining



area and lounge, pool, and fireplace are a part of the hotel's gracious hospitality and it's a great way to start off the trip with pleasant creature comforts and connections (yes, WiFi).

*Accommodations at Pangolin Chobe Hotel (B,L,D)*

**Wed., Aug. 12 – Fri., Aug. 14**

### **Cruise the Chobe River with Three-Nights Aboard the *Pangolin Voyager***

After a last morning outing from Pangolin Chobe Hotel, we do a simple border crossing into Namibia, where we embark on a grand adventure: a three-night cruise on the *Pangolin Voyager* houseboat, a Naturalist Journeys charter (we have the boat to ourselves) to explore the Chobe River! Our route is within and alongside Chobe National Park, though technically we are in Namibia and any landings are in Namibia. As the river is also the national boundary, we actually board our boats from the Namibia side of the river, so we first drive across the border, clearing customs and immigration before settling on the boat.

This is a fabulous river cruise with almost non-stop wildlife action. Elephant abound and love the river margin. In addition to large herds and family groups, we should get good looks at African Buffalo, Chacma Baboon, Vervet Monkey, Impala, Giant Kingfisher, and African Fish Eagle. One of the opportunities along the Chobe River is seeing bank-nesting birds such as White-fronted or Little Bee-eaters and Malachite Kingfisher in good numbers and at close range. Odd-looking Hamerkop sit perched on their massive stick nests and we do get quite close to herds of African Buffalo. From our houseboat we take smaller skiff excursions for close up views of wildlife and birds. We look for Puku, an antelope that loves the river areas, and Sable Antelope. Best of all, we get past the many people who cluster near Kasane, and while that is still a good experience, it's nice to extend and get away from the admiring crowds.

The rhythm of our days is to be out in the skiffs early and late in the day, and take some down time with viewing from our air-conditioned rooms as we go. The boat's dining deck has floor to ceiling windows so we never miss a sighting. Up top there is a shade and sun deck for open-air viewing. There is also a chance to walk among Baobab trees on a safe river island, and if you wish, you can schedule a visit to a local village.

*Accommodations on the Pangolin Voyager (B,L,D)*



## **Sat., Aug. 15 Flight to Xakanaxa Airstrip | Mobile Safari in Moremi Game Reserve with Masson Safaris | Okavango Delta**

After we say goodbye to our lovely houseboat, we fly on to meet Ewan Masson and his crew from Masson Safaris for the Moremi National Park portion of our adventure. Moremi Game Reserve borders Chobe National Park. Within its boundaries lies about a third of the land area that makes up the Okavango Delta. It is a spectacular place where desert meets water. Landscapes of Moremi reveal upland tracts of Mopane forest, open savanna and papyrus-lined water channels, lagoons, and mature riverine forests. Aquatic animals and water birds abound, along with herds of plains game and predators. It has an amazing combination of vegetation types, animal species, and bird life. One of the treats is seeing Yellow-billed and Red-billed Hornbills calling from the crowns of trees. Birdlife abounds and there are babblers, shrikes, coucals, rollers, barbets, and the gaudy and comical African Hoopoe. Black-backed Jackal, Warthog, Kudu, Impala, and Red Lechwe are often observed here.

Elephant and Giraffe appear out of nowhere, and it is not uncommon to have Lion and other wildlife laying in the shade of a Mopane tree along the road. We are the eyes and ears for our drivers as they take us deeper into the heart of this game preserve. It takes a bit of getting used to, but after a while you are picking out Zebra in the dappled shade that makes them seemingly disappear. We arrive at our private mobile camp with time to unpack, and get settled before an afternoon game drive.

Each night we gather around the fire for drinks and light appetizers before dinner (and after dinner around the campfire) where we all discuss our day's sightings, photographs, and experiences. Then the kitchen staff arrives carrying serving dishes filled with different foods that just taste so good after our drive.

*Accommodations in a Mobile Tent Camp (B,L,D)*

## **Sun., Aug. 16 & Mon., Aug. 17 Xakanaxa | Mbomba Area**

Our days start with the call, "Morning, morning, time to get up," as our lead guide gets us ready for an early start. A quick field breakfast with coffee and tea gets us ready to go out searching for wildlife at first light. Our group is usually the first one out and that always pays dividends. Nocturnal hunters like Lion and Hyena are finishing their hunts, while browsers and grazers (Waterbuck and Kudu) are breathing a sigh of relief as daylight



offers them better visibility. It is also the time when the diurnal predators such as African Wild Dog and Cheetah start their hunting forays.

After our mid-day siesta, we head out again, this time looking for those same animals finishing their hunts while the nocturnal predators are starting theirs.

We have chosen this area as conditions have been dry for the last few years, and this is one of the more watered areas of Moremi. The Okavango is ever-changing! The Okavango River channels water from the highlands of Angola into this incredible maze of wetlands, an area the size of Wales. In a country where water is so precious a resource, the delta provides sustenance for a large number of animals and birds. The Okavango is not unlike our Everglades, a slow moving, major river system that allows water to fan out across the Kalahari Desert, transforming it into a paradise for wildlife. It is the largest Ramsar designated site in the world, set up to protect globally important wetlands.

Among the reed beds of isolated lagoons we look for Lesser Jacana, African Crake, Long-toed Plover, Pygmy Goose, and Dwarf Bittern. There are many species of kingfishers to find, both on the water and in the woodlands! Some of the birds we may encounter include the threatened Wattled Crane, Painted Snipe, a variety of waders including Rufous-bellied Heron and the rare Slaty Egret (endemic to Okavango). Overhead we watch for Western Banded Snake Eagle, Pink-backed Pelican, and near the river, African Skimmer.

*Accommodations in a Mobile Tent Camp (B,L,D)*



## **Tues., Aug. 18 Xakanxa Boat Trip | Second Mobile Safari Camp at Khwai River, Moremi Game Reserve**

As we move from our first camp of three nights to our second, we enjoy a morning boat trip from Xakanxa. Tall papyrus and reeds line the channel and we often have Elephant feeding on the river margin. We watch for a deep-water tolerant antelope, the Sitatunga. And we listen for Chirping Cisticola and on an island lunch stop, have a chance at seeing the rare Pel's Fishing Owl.

It is a full and rewarding day, often we see over 100 bird species between the driving route and boat tour. Our tents await and we are now well-trained on the routine. On to drinks, dinner, night-sky viewing, and sleep!  
*Accommodations in a Mobile Tent Camp (B,L,D)*

## **Wed., Aug. 19 & Thurs., Aug. 20 Khwai River, Moremi Game Reserve**

"Morning, morning." We are up at dawn as adventure calls. Riverine forests line the Khwai River channel and in this mosaic of habitats we look for Leopard, Red Lechwe, Kudu, and Giraffe. Lion of the Okavango have taken freely to hunting in the water—a behavior rarely seen in other areas. Wild dogs also find a stronghold here and with luck (and persistence) we may find them! Leopard enjoy resting in massive, often flowering Sausage Trees.

This is our guide's favorite part of the park as game animals and their predators abound. We should find ample numbers of Blue Wildebeest, various antelope species, Common (Burchell's) Zebra, Warthog, Lion, and Elephant. We make every effort to see as many mammals as possible. Birds are also plentiful (often up to 250 species) and some are huge, such as Ostrich, Kori Bustard, and Southern Ground Hornbill. Some of the birds bear spectacular colors—Carmine and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters and possible Narina Trogon to name just a few.

Khwai has had active Wild Dog packs on both sides of the river in recent years, and at least one of our groups has spotted two species of otter! It's a scenic area and memorable. Time goes quickly here.  
*Accommodations in a Mobile Tent Camp (B,L,D)*

## **Fri., Aug. 21 – Sun., Aug. 23 Okavango River | Xaro Lodge**

New to our trip this year is two nights at a most delightful lodge, nestled under palms on an island in the Okavango River. It is a popular lodge for birders and fisherman and affords some wonderful photo opportunities. Goliath Heron are often on patrol outside the lodge and here we may find White-backed Night-Heron and Pel's



Fishing Owl. It's nice to be able to walk around the grounds and gardens and to gather around the campfire at day's end.

On Friday, we fly late-morning from the Khwai Airstrip—our flight route takes us right over the fan of the Okavango Delta ... fascinating! We arrive in time to take an exciting boat trip upriver with a chance to visit a quiet lily-lagoon where African Swamphen and African Pygmy Geese can be found.

Saturday, we have time for extensive birding by boat and by walking the grounds. In addition to birding, the lodge is known for its great location for fishing, so if any in our group want to fish, a morning or late-afternoon outing can be arranged (additional cost).

On Sunday, those that wish can visit a World Heritage Site, Botswana's archeological gem: the Tsodilo Hills. Here 3000-year old rock paintings adorn colorful rock walls and you also find Botswana's highest peak, all in a tiny inselberg mountain range visible for miles around. This is a day trip and you arrive back at the lodge mid-afternoon. If you prefer to go fishing, or remain in camp, you can do some land-based birding and a second boat trip.

*Accommodations at Xaro Lodge (B,L,D)*

## **Mon., Aug. 24 Depart from Maun to Connect with Flights Home**

Our herd disperses today. We all take a morning flight to Maun, from which you can readily catch the early afternoon flights to Johannesburg that then connect with outbound evening flights back home. Those continuing on to Nxai Pan either fly direct from Shakawe Airfield, or we all go together, touching down in Maun and then continuing the short ways to Nxai Pan.

## **Nxai Pan Post-Tour Extension**

### **Mon., Aug. 24 – Thurs., Aug. 27**

Experience the arid Kalahari Desert from the comforts of one of our favorite lodges. This camp features nine beautifully crafted casitas on the edge of a large salt pan, replete with birds and wildlife. The camp is 100% solar powered, with central area dining and bar. Rooms face the permanent waterhole, which draws in numerous



birds. We access this lodge on small planes from the Maun airport, so your first experience of the Kalahari and its vastness is from the air.

Nxai Pan is part of the greater Makgadikgadi/Nxai Pan National Park. From our comfortable base, enjoy birding and wildlife drives with lodge naturalists. Little has changed there since 1862, when the British adventurer and artist, Thomas Baines, explored the area and made famous its enormous Baobab trees. Watch for breeding larks that are active at this time, including Sabota, Rufous-naped, Red-capped, and Fawn-colored among the more common. Beautiful Capped Wheatear, White-quilled Bustard (Black Korhan), and Kori Bustard can be found in open country; watch for barbets and hornbills and possible Bat-eared Fox starting to consider their den sites.

Elephant frequent the waterhole; their presence against the immense silence of this remote location is memorable. We should see family groups and also huge bachelor males. We should also see Gemsbok and Springbok, desert adapted animals that are rare and typically not seen in Moremi. Lion, Giraffe, Impala, and Wildebeest are here too, as are some of the more elusive species: Bat-eared Fox, Honey Badger, and Cheetah.

For those that wish, the lodge provides a unique experience. Many of their staff are people of the Kalahari, the San or Bushman. You can walk with one of the San bushmen trackers to enjoy an informative walk that takes place within the camp's footprint. Learn about how the San lived nomadically, how they hunted, gathered food, their water sources, and which plants were used for medicinal purposes. Their wealth of true bush knowledge is unparalleled, and one of our guests' favorite experiences at our desert camps.

*Accommodations at Nxai Pan (B,L,D)*

## About Masson Safaris

For six nights at two camps, our Ultimate Botswana trip goes mobile! There is NO better way to get close to prime wildlife areas. Our hosts and guides are from Masson Safaris, an ecologically-friendly, family-run company. Masson is dedicated to providing safaris aimed at wildlife viewing, bird watching, and spending quality time in nature. They have over 25 years of experience, a marvelous camp staff, and chef. They operate with a fully-mobile set-up so we are comfortable, but close to wildlife. Our camps are private and set up in remote areas. Tents are large enough that you can stand, with a private bathroom equipped with bush (chemical)



toilets. Hot water is brought to you each morning to freshen up, and hot water for showers is set up as needed (most often mid-day since mornings are quite chilly).

Our game drive vehicles are open, extended Land Rovers that offer the very best photographic opportunities and are great for binoculars and scopes. They have a fridge in which we stock a good variety of fruit juices, bottled waters, and for evening sundowners, mixers, beer, and wine. And be assured of a good system for charging your camera and other batteries.

Throughout the safari, we have an early morning game drive, followed by a hearty brunch, and then time for a siesta, in-camp viewing, and photography or relaxing. We have an afternoon game drive at sunset. Dinner is after dark, under an airy tent with candlelight and stars. It is served with fresh-baked breads and wine, as desired.

## About the Pangolin Voyager

Watch a video about the Pangolin Voyager [here](#).

### Rooms

On the lower level, the houseboat has five well-appointed en-suite cabins with double or twin beds available depending on the required configuration. The beds are fitted with the finest linen and specialist mattresses. The cabins have built-in cupboards, a cooling fan, and the windows are fitted with a mosquito net to allow the gentle breeze from the river and the nighttime sounds of Chobe National Park to permeate the rooms.



## Communal Areas

The middle level is home to the lounge and dining area along with a deck at the rear, which accommodates the braai (barbeque). The comfortable lounge area is stocked with reference books and binoculars, which are yours to use as we drift between our private mooring points. Meals are served on the large dining table and the menu varies depending on which ingredients can be locally sourced throughout the seasons. There is a comprehensive selection of alcoholic and soft drinks for you to enjoy throughout the day from the bar. Local wine and spirits are included.

The upper level hosts a viewing deck equipped with chairs, sun loungers, and a table perfect for topping up those tans in between activities and for witnessing the majestic African sunsets that grace us every evening.

## Guide Greg Smith



Greg spent over 20 years working as an ecologist managing sensitive bird species for California State Parks along the Central coast. His decision to promote to the Park Superintendent series allowed him to work directly with partners in conserving lands for the benefit of birds, people, and resources. And then he retired! Three days later he started his now eleven-year career with Naturalist Journeys by leading his first of over sixty tours. He had already traveled to all seven continents, and now has a Master Bird Banding permit, both of which made him a great fit to work with Peg and to lead natural history and birding tours to her exceptional array of tour locations. His relaxed style and breadth of knowledge makes his tours both educational and fun, all while exploring Naturalist Journeys' diverse locations and viewing the areas' distinctive birds, wildlife, and plant species.

Two of his favorite past times are good food and photography, so take a peek at his [Flickr site](#) to see some of what he shares with those that join him on his tours.

# Cost of the Journey

## Travel Information

The short in-country flights are included with your tour cost and are arranged for you. These are small charter aircraft that provide excellent viewing of the Okavango Delta as you fly. This tour has several internal flights: Kasane to Moremi's Xakanaxa, Khwai to Shakawe, and Shakawe back to Maun. Those going on to Nxai Pan also have round trip flights from Maun there, a short 40-minute hop. Weight restrictions for luggage do apply.

You may arrive in Kasane at your convenience on August 10. Most flights arrive in the morning, and route through Johannesburg, South Africa. There are now several carriers with direct flights there from Atlanta and Washington DC. Depart from Maun any time after 1 PM on August 24. If you prefer to overnight in Maun we can help you make arrangements to start out fresh the following day. If you are on the Nxai Pan extension, please book flights out from Maun on August 27. Our travel agent is waiting to help!

## Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website shows a grid of tour cost and age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

## Group Size

This safari is limited to just 9 people.

## Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$9550. Singles are limited, and not possible on the boat, so please inquire. Partial single supplement (other than the *Pangolin Voyager*) may be possible if booked early. Cost includes airport transfers, 14 nights' accommodations, meals from dinner Day One through breakfast Day 15, professional guide services, park and preserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Internal flights are included. Several of our lodges and camps are all-inclusive, providing beer and wine, bar drinks, and laundry service.

Cost of the Nxai Pan extension is \$2130 DBL/\$2805 SGL.

Cost of the journey does not include airfare to Kasane, departing Maun, or items of a personal nature, like drinks from the bar, telephone, and local guide gratuities (at your discretion).

## Photo Credits

Male Lion, Greg Smith (GRSM); Malachite Kingfisher, Peg Abbott (PEAB); Vervet Monkey, PEAB; White Rhinoceros, GRSM; Carmine Bee-eater, GRSM; Marsh Owl, GRSM; Yellow-billed Hornbill, PEAB; Saddle-billed Stork, PEAB; Leopard stretch, GRSM; Elephants sunset, PEAB; Hyena Family, GRSM; Zebra Nxai Pan, PEAB; Tawny Eagle, PEAB; Kudu Feeding, PEAB; Black-backed Jackal, PEAB; Lilac-breasted Roller, PEAB; African Skimmer, PEAB; Hippo, GRSM; African Openbill, PEAB; Wattled Crane, PEAB; Chacma, GRSM; Springbok, PEAB; Greg Smith, Naturalist Journeys Stock (NJS).