



Botswana: Wildlife Safari & Birding The Okavango Delta, Chobe River & Moremi Game Reserve September 16 – 27, 2017

With Extensions to South Africa's Cape Region & Victoria Falls, at Your Leisure



Embark on a true African safari to Botswana, where the wildlife is pristine, and our days are timed with the rhythm of nature. Across the Okavango Delta and along the Chobe River, experience birds and mammals of different habitats, from vast savanna to deep water wetlands. On safari, we get amazingly close views of predator and prey, without disturbing their interactions and day-to-day survival. We spend our first days on the move, kept comfortable with the rustic luxuries of a mobile-tented camp, complete with private baths, a chef, and a host guide with 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 next spend time at two lodges that feature the upscale comfort of permanent camps with private facilities, and central restaurant and bar. With more developed resources, these small permanent camps (Pom-Pom and Chobe Safari Lodge) have an ambiance of luxury and give us a sense of the camps visited by Hemingway and others in years gone by.

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



Tour Highlights

- Follow the wildlife with expert guides and the mobility of a tented camp
- Embark on morning and afternoon game drives
- Find a great sampling of Southern Africa's elegant and colorful array of birds, in addition to myriad mammals like big cats, Elephants, and more!
- Explore Moremi Game Reserve's Papyrus-lined channels, lagoons, and lush riverine forests
- Find signature birds like Slaty Egret, Black Heron, African Openbill Stork, Hammerkop, African Fish Eagle, Ground Hornbill, bustards, hoopoes, and of course, the stunning Lilac-breasted Roller
- Stay at two deep water camps, where we watch Elephant and other wildlife while on boat excursions
- Have an excellent chance to see, and photograph, African Wild Dog
- Experience a cruise along the Chobe River, encountering Hippo, Water Buffalo, and a host of herons and egrets, including the world's largest: the Goliath Heron



Tour Summary

12-Day / 11-Night African Safari with Guide Peg Abbott

\$6595 (Special offer! Sign up by July 15, 2016, and book at last year's pricing: \$6295) from Maun, Botswana

With options to extend at leisure to South Africa or Victoria Falls

Arrival airport is Muan (MUB), departure airport is Kasane (BBK)

About Masson Safaris



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.

Typically 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. Dining is after dark, under an airy tent with candlelight and stars. It is served in style with fresh-baked breads and wine, as desired.



Itinerary

Sat., Sept 16 Arrive in Maun, Botswana

Flights into Maun originate in Johannesburg (“Joburg” to locals), South Africa, so please plan your flights from the USA to arrive in Maun today, since we leave fairly early the next morning for our safari. A representative from Masson Safaris welcomes you as you arrive at the Maun airport, then helps you transfer and check in to our Guest House for a chance to freshen up after your flight. Given that folks arrive throughout the day, dinner is at your leisure tonight. However, those arriving in time may certainly gather together (although some may head off to sleep!). Better yet, book a night ahead simply to rest up from your flights — our lodgings are a great choice for this.

Accommodations at Royal Tree Lodge, or similar, Maun, Botswana

Sun., Sept. 17 – Tues., Sept. 19 Safari Drive to Moremi Game Reserve / Khwai River

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 the Moremi Game Reserve reveal 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, comical African Hoopoe. Black-backed Jackal, Bat-eared Fox, and Cheetah are often observed hunting here.

It is a wonderful, wildlife filled drive as we leave Maun in our safari vehicles and drive to our base camp on the Khwai River, home for the next three days. Elephant and Giraffe appear out of nowhere, and it is not uncommon to have Lion



and other wildlife laying in the shade of a baobab 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 have a picnic lunch as we work our way to camp, all the while finding more wildlife and some of those exotic birds. There are restroom breaks along the way at different government camps, but we are heading to our own private campground that has been reserved just for our group.

We arrive at camp with our tents in place so that we can get cleaned up, unpack, and then walk over to the dinner seating tent where appetizers and optional beverages await. It is this opportunity 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.



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 ones 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 do take one day at this camp to explore via a full-day boat ride on the Khwai River, exploring lagoons, oxbow lakes and channels. What a relaxing way to observe animals and birds. Waters of the Khwai are surprisingly clear and cool; dense reed beds and papyrus groves filter these slow-moving, mountain-born waters. Among the reed beds 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). Pel's Fishing Owl can be found here on day roosts, and overhead we watch for Western Banded Snake Eagle, Pink-backed Pelican, and near the river, African Skimmer.

Mobile Tented Camp Accommodation (B,L,D)

Wed., Sept. 20 – Fri., Sept. 22 Moremi Game Reserve / Okavango Delta



Botswana is visually exciting — each of its unique habitats having distinct features. Its most famous habitat is the Okavango Delta. 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.

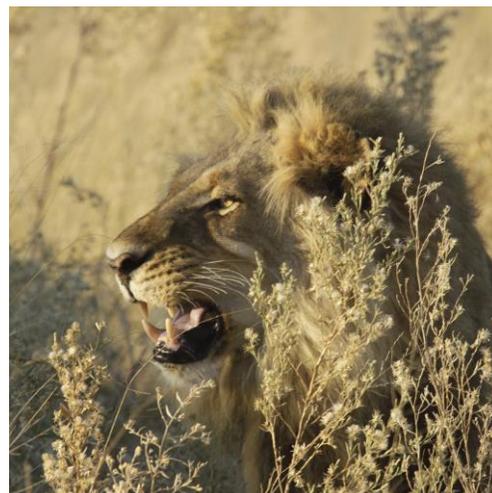
Riverine forests line some of the water channels and in this mosaic of habitats we look for Leopard, Red Lechwe, Kudu, and Giraffe. Lion of the Okavango have taken freely to hunting in the water — a behavior rarely seen in other areas. Wild dogs also find a stronghold here and with luck (and persistence!) we may find them!

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 (over 350 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 Narina Trogon to name just a few.

Mobile Tent Camp Accommodations (B,L,D)

Sat., Sept. 23 & Sun., Sept. 24 Return to Maun / Flight into Pom Pom Safari Camp – Okavango

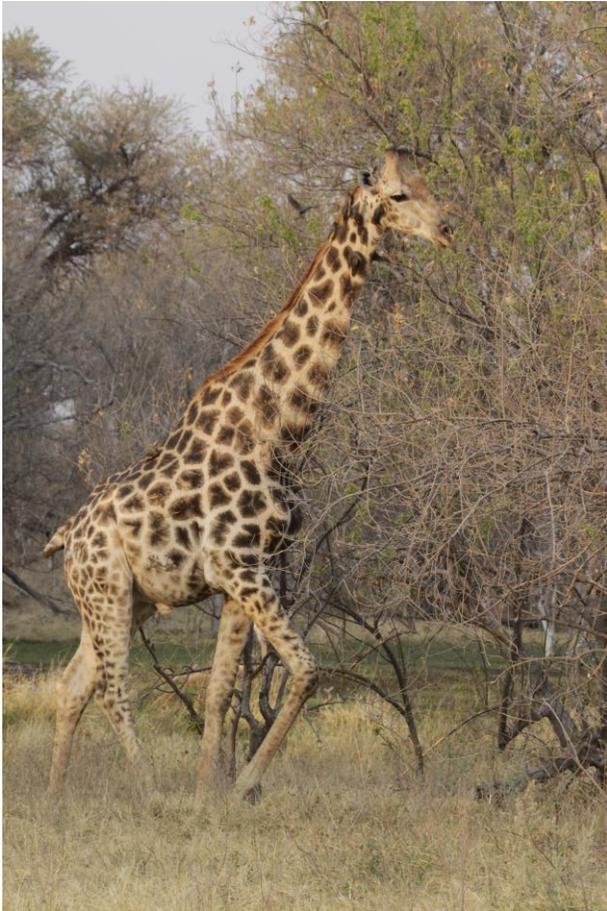
Today we return to Maun's airport and fly back to the Okavango Delta for two nights at Pom-Pom Safari Camp. Why fly? Pom-Pom is located on a large island on the west side of Moremi Game Preserve, *in* the delta, there is no way to drive to this intimate camp. They only have nine permanent en-suite Mehru tents, along with their full service kitchen, lounge/dining room, and pool. We chose Pom-Pom because of its location, facilities, and their capability of doing night-time game viewing drives. The government does not allow mobile tent-camping operators to conduct nighttime drives. It is on the nighttime drives that we see some of the strictly nocturnal species of the region: Serval Cat, Pangolin, and Aardvark. Daytime game drives should also give us ample opportunity to spot additional birds like the Dwarf Pygmy Goose, Pied Kingfisher, and Myer's Parrot.



Our two nights here are filled with wildlife in an isolated setting that few get the chance to explore.

Accommodations at Pom-Pom Safari Camp (B,L,D)

Mon., Sept. 25 & Tues., Sept. 26 Flight to Kasane / Chobe National Park / Chobe



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. It is also known for its very healthy African Lion population. 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 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.

On one of our mornings we take a three-hour cruise down the Chobe River. In addition to large herds described above, we should get good looks at 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 Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters and Malachite Kingfisher in good numbers and at close range. Odd-looking Hammerkop sit perched on their massive stick nests and we do get quite close to herds of African Buffalo.

We also finish our last day with a sunset cruise on the Chobe River. Along this stretch of the Chobe is the border with Namibia. You can almost reach out and touch this

Western African country as we cruise along in our covered boat, watching wildlife come down to the water's edge after a day of foraging in the dryland forest. The lighting is sublime and the wildlife has no fear of our "water-dwelling" boats, so photography and wildlife viewing is fantastic.

Accommodations at Chobe Safari Lodge (B,L,D)

Wed., Sept. 27 Depart Kasane for Flights Home / Optional One-Day Stay for Victoria Falls Excursion

Today we take flights from Kasane to Johannesburg where we catch our flights home. If you would like to visit the world-famous Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, we can help you arrange for an extra day's stay in Kasane, round trip transportation, and a guide for an additional fee. (B)



Optional Day Trip to Victoria Falls

From Kasane, we are very close to Victoria Falls — less than a two-hour drive from our lodge. Kasane is just seven miles from the Zimbabwe border and our Botswana host company can arrange for a driver/guide and transportation to Victoria Falls at your cost. This is one of the most famous waterfalls in the world, and is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Lush vegetation surrounds the falls with wonderful paved paths between scenic vistas giving you various vantage points. Some of the birds we may find include Trumpeter Hornbill, Malachite Kingfisher, Rock Pratincole, and strikingly-colored Schalow's Turaco.

If you choose to visit Victoria Falls, flights from Kasane to Johannesburg depart on Thursday, September 28.

Accommodations at Chobe Safari Lodge

Pre-Tour Extensions in South Africa

Flying all the way to “Joburg” for your Botswana Safari puts you within a two-hour flight of South Africa’s Cape Region. The area is world-renowned for four different reasons: Cape of Good Hope National Park, Hermanus, the wine region, and self-drive vacationing.

The Cape Region floristic province (Cape of Good Hope National Park) has fynbos and plants that are found nowhere else in the world, like pincushion species and Leucodendrons, plus other species you might recognize from our temperate climate locations in the U.S. (The Cape Region is approximately the same latitude South as California is latitude North).

Another specialty a little further north along the coast is West Coast National Park, well known all over South Africa for its spring wildflower displays (September is the Austral spring!)

Hermanus is the Southern Right Whale capital of the world. This listed species comes close to shore here ... you can take a whale-watching tour, but why? Hermanus has the Whale Walk, a paved trail along the ocean bluffs that allows you to look down on calving females and mating adults. If you fly into Cape Town, you really must make the drive to Hermanus!

If you enjoy the subtleties of fine wines, then a couple of days in the South Africa’s wine region are a must. They do produce many of the wines we drink in North America (you may have already sampled some), but their red Pinotage is a local highlight and a must at any restaurant.



Finally, the last reason to consider a pre-safari visit to the Cape Region is that it is well-known for self-drive vacations (and yes, they drive on the “other” side of the road). Not interested in self-drive? We can work with our contacts in South Africa to set up a custom tour for you. Either way, let us know if you are interested in visiting this part of Africa and we can get you set up! If there is interest we can plan a small group journey, or you can rent a car and explore at leisure.

Cost of the Journey

The 12-day Main Tour price is \$6595 double occupancy, per person, single occupancy is limited, please inquire. The tour price includes airport transfers, 11N accommodations, all meals from breakfast Day Two through breakfast Day 12, professional guide services, park and preserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Internal flights are included, the flight to Pom Pom Safari Camp, and from Pom Pom over to Chobe Safari Lodge (currently \$465 total). If you wish to add a night and do the day trip over to Victoria Falls, please indicate this with registration and add approximately \$375. This outing is set up by our lodge, with excellent local guides.



Cost of the journey does not include airfare from your home to Maun, Botswana, departing Kasane, Botswana, or items of a personal nature, such as drinks from the bar, telephone, and local guide gratuities (at your discretion, we will give some guidelines).

Travel Information

The in-country flights are included with your tour cost and will be arranged. You may arrive in Maun at your convenience, Peg Abbott will share what her flights are if anyone wants to match up for that routing, through

Johannesburg, South Africa, with a direct flight there from Atlanta. Routing through Johannesburg makes it very easy to add side trips to other famous game parks and to the Cape Area where flora peaks at this time of year and fascinating birds and whales can be found. There are small luxury fly-in lodges, or you can continue on to almost anywhere in Africa with ease. If you wish to extend, we can share ideas.

Naturalist Journeys, LLC is an equal opportunity service provider and committed to the goal of ensuring equal opportunity for all in employment and program delivery.

Photo Credits: Lilac-breasted Roller, Greg Smith (GS); Bathing Elephant, Peg Abbott (PA); African Fish Eagle, GS; Masson Safari Vehicle, courtesy of their website: massonsafaris.net; Elephant Line Up, GS; Lionesses, PA; Bat-eared Fox, GS; Hippos, PA; African Wild Dog, PA; Lion, PA; Giraffe, PA; Southern Right Whale, GS; Zebras, GS