

Private Botswana Wildlife & Birding Safari with Naturalist Journeys

Aug. 21 – Sept. 5, 2023

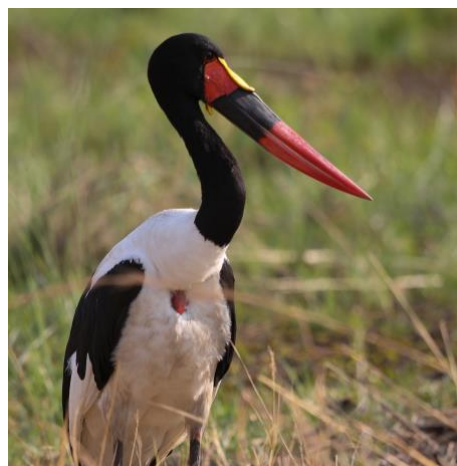
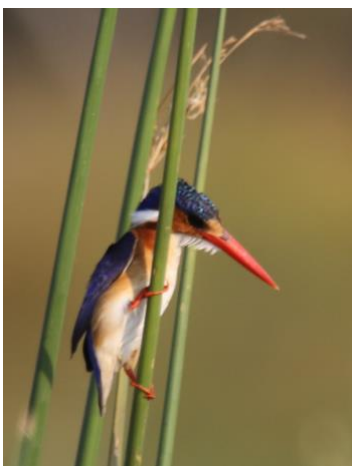
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Embark on a true African safari to Botswana, where the wildlife is pristine, and our days are timed with the rhythm of nature. Each of Botswana's signature habitats have distinct features, most famous of which are the expansive reed and papyrus beds and palm islands of the Okavango Delta and the contrasting arid realm of baobabs and sand in the Kalahari Desert. Our safari camps and destinations are chosen for consistent sightings of Wild Dog, Leopard, Lion, and Cheetah in addition to habitat variety for great birding and a mix of some of the smaller, more elusive wildlife. Six nights are spent in the heart of Moremi National Park in a camping mobile safari; eight nights follow at three lovely, tented camps that provide a pampered level of creature comforts while you stay immersed in prime wildlife areas.

Botswana is known for having big numbers of Elephants, watch interactive behaviors in some of the largest herds in Africa, often drawn to waterholes in the arid landscape. Daily find zebra, a variety of antelopes, warthog, giraffe, and impressive birds including Southern Ground Hornbill, Secretarybird, Southern Carmine Bee-eater, Malachite Kingfisher and Lilac-breasted Roller – all classic birds of Africa – as well as regional specialty species like Slaty Egret, Wattled Crane, Kori Bustard, Pel's Fishing Owl and possibly White-backed Night-Heron. From Maun, Botswana, we meet our veteran safari guide Ewan Masson for the mobile portion of our journey. Once gear is loaded into the Land Rover, we drive a few hours north to Moremi Game Reserve, one of the top areas for seeing predators in the wild in Africa, a vast area that includes Mopane Woodland and savanna interspersed with fingers of the Okavango Delta, an amazing mosaic of terrain. We stay three nights each at two mobile camps – the two sites provide contrast, and as large mammals move around, give us the best chance possible for seeing predators. We then move outside of Moremi Game Reserve to stay in lodges which are in adjacent conservation concessions ecologically linked to the park but run by local communities. Time exploring from Kwara and Lagoon Camps, in two different locations, enables us to do night drives, giving us a chance to find species such as Aardwolf, Bat-eared Fox, and other elusive species. We also expand our range exploring the delta habitats by boat. Activity at the famous Gadikwe Lagoon rookery for Yellow-billed Stork, Marabou and various herons is at a peak, for some a spectacular highlight and excellent photography! Our final camp is in the Kalahari Desert where a stark landscape and animals adapted to it present new species.

See the Okavango Delta and Kalahari Desert from the air! Typical of tourism in Botswana, we fly from camp to camp. Our route has four flights: Moremi National Park at Khwai to Kwara, Kwara to Lagoon, Lagoon to Nxai Pan, then Nxai Pan to Maun at the end. While on the ground we travel in open safari vehicles, perfect for wildlife photography. Due to the presence of large predators, we get out mainly for rest stops and the main walks are done in Camp, when out we are driving, scanning, and finding an incredible mix of species. If big game, southern constellations, a rainbow of colorful African birds and the enchanting sounds of wild Africa beckon, our Botswana- Namibia journey across two counties of Southern Africa is sure to entice.

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Arrive in Maun, Botswana, home of the Okavango Brewery and primo birding along the Thamalakane River that flows through town
- ✓ Seek out elusive predators and colorful birds with expert guides on a six-night mobile camp in the heart of the renowned Moremi Game Reserve

- ✓ Greet dawn with a chorus of African birds, then head out for game drives to check out the activity of Lion, Leopard, Wild Dogs or Cheetah
- ✓ Watch great herds of Lechwe in the wetlands and Impala, Zebra, buffalo, wildebeest and waterbuck in the uplands
- ✓ Boat through papyrus-lined channels and lagoons from a riverside camp at Linyanti and Mopane forests of Moremi Game Reserve
- ✓ Experience the fabulous Kalahari Desert with prime lodging at Nxai Pan, where wildlife and birds congregate at our elegant, tented camp's waterhole
- ✓ Live "National Geographic moments" in real time on each morning and afternoon game drive
- ✓ 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
- ✓ Capture that ultimate African sunset—acacia tree, Giraffes, Leopard, and more
- ✓ Admire dark skies completely filled with stars...

Tour Summary

16-Day / 15-Night Botswana Safari

\$7390 DBL, from Maun

Airport is Maun International (MUB)

Day-to-Day Itinerary

Mon., Aug. 21 Arrival in Maun, Botswana*

The flight to Africa is long, so our first night is in Maun, at the Cresta Riley's Hotel where you can rest up from travels. This lovely shaded property is situated on the banks of the Thamalakane River, where if water levels are good the bird life abounds. Watch African Hoopoe and Magpie Shrike on the lawn, and Goliath and Purple Herons at the water's edge. We enjoy patio dining under blooming Jacaranda trees.

[Accommodations at Cresta Riley's Hotel, Maun \(D\)](#)

**To arrive in Botswana today, you likely need to depart your home airport on August 19 or 20, pending your route as you cross the date line. This works in your favor going home.*

Tues., Aug. 22 Mobile Safari—Moremi Game Reserve

Ewan Masson picks up the group after breakfast at the Cresta Riley hotel and once we pack up the gear we head out, getting right into safari mode with a drive north to our first camp in Moremi Game Reserve north of Maun. Much of the route is on sand roads, and we see wildlife even ahead of entering the park gate.

Moremi Game Reserve is one of the most important in Africa. Within its boundaries lies about a third of the land area that makes up the Okavango Delta. 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.

Our safari begins and we dive right into the adventure! For six nights at two camps, we keep things simple – going totally mobile. A wonderful camp crew sets up camp and takes care of the details, so we are free to focus on wildlife. There is no better way to get close to prime wildlife areas where there are few lodges. From the circle of our dining area, vehicles, and ring of small tents, it is truly an incredible experience to hear the night sounds, sit around a campfire, jump in the vehicles to be out at dawn, and see predator and prey in their realm.

Our hosts and guides are from Masson Safaris, an ecologically friendly, family-run small safari company. Naturalist Journeys has been with them for many years now and we consider them good friends. They provide safaris aimed at wildlife viewing, bird watching, and spending quality time in nature. They have over 25 years of experience, and a marvelous camp staff and chef. 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). This is as authentic as it gets—with a strong focus on seeing birds and wildlife. We are out early and back after watching sunset with the game.

Our safari 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 as we love sunset light for photography, we wait for our return to camp on these days to have our sundowners, with mixers, gin (or other on request) beer, wine, and sparkling water. Batteries can be fully charged from the vehicles mid-day and evenings.

Learn the rhythm of safari: An early morning game drive, followed by a hearty brunch, and then time for a siesta, in-camp viewing, and photography or relaxing. This is a great time to take a refreshing camp shower. We then have an afternoon game drive lasting until sunset. Dinner is after dark, under an airy tent with candlelight and stars. It is served with fresh-baked breads and wine, as desired.

Mobile accommodations under the stars (B,L,D daily)

Wed., Aug. 23 & Thurs., Aug. 24

Two Full Safari Days: Mobile Camp in Central Moremi Game Reserve

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 African Lion and Spotted Hyena are finishing their hunts, while browsers and grazers (such as Waterbuck, Impala, 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. We stay out for much of the morning.

After our lunch, it’s time to tally up the species list and take a mid-day siesta before we head out again, this time looking for those same animals finishing their hunts while the nocturnal predators are starting theirs. 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.

Each evening 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 arrive carrying serving dishes filled with Dutch-oven cooked food that just tastes so good after our drives.

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

Fri. Aug. 25

Move to Second Mobile Safari Camp at Khwai River, Moremi Game Reserve

As we move from our first camp to our second, there are several routes we can take to traverse the park. Water levels are constantly changing in the Delta, so we choose our route accordingly. There are some large lagoons we like to visit where we may spy Lesser Jacana, African Pygmy Goose, or troops of Baboon. Passing through Mopane Woodland, we look for some of the smaller songbirds and listen for Striped Kingfisher or one of the African species of woodpecker. This is a good spot to look for Sable, one of the most beautiful antelopes.

We often choose one of the public campgrounds for our lunch break/rest stop, arriving at our second camp in the afternoon. Our tents await and we are now well-trained on the routine. If time permits, we head down the Khwai River to watch Elephants bathing and drinking or to see if tracks of Lion or Leopard are around. Then it is back to camp, on to drinks, dinner, night-sky viewing, and sleep!

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

Sat., Aug. 26 & Sun., Aug. 27

Two Full Days in the Khwai River Area, Moremi Game Reserve

Riverine forests line the Khwai River channel and in this mosaic of habitats we look for 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 are known from this area to enjoy resting in massive, often flowering Sausage Trees; our route winds between many of them as we search.

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 to name just a few. And each bend of the river makes for good shorebird and wading bird habitat, with many to inspect at close range!

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)

Mon., Aug. 28 Flight from Khwai Airstrip to Kwara Private Reserve

After a final game drive and brunch, we pack up and head to the airstrip. While almost adjacent in the larger Moremi ecosystem, we need a short flight to reach our camp, which is in the heart of the neighboring Kwara Private Reserve adjoining concession and it's great to see how it all fits together from the air. Prepare to unwind with a little luxury after camping.

We say good-bye to Ewan and the camp crew, and at the Kwara landing strip we are met by our local lodge guides in rugged 4-wheel drive safari vehicles. They review safety guidelines, and we go to camp to settle in. Our “tents” here feel luxurious on their raised platforms, with antique furnishings, spacious inside bathrooms that include indoor and outdoor showers, and a private patio with views of a lagoon. Delightful cuisine is featured and at day’s end you can listen to night sounds from your large and comfortable bed. One could get used to this safari life! Often, we enjoy afternoon tea with snacks before heading out for a game drive in the afternoon when activity is high.

Kwara Camp in the Kwara Private Reserve shares a 30-kilometer water boundary with Moremi Game Reserve, allowing free passage of all species. It is over 400,000 acres and hosts a fabulous mix of upland and wet habitats in a mosaic attractive to herds of Lechwe, Impala, and other antelopes. High prey density equates to high probability of seeing predators and this camp, like Khwai, is in a prime location.

Accommodations at [Kwara Camp](#) (B,L,D)

Tues., Aug. 29 & Wed., Aug. 30 Two Full Safari Days from Kwara Lodge

Kwara Lodge is our base for the next two days of exploring. We rise early to be out with the animals. We look first for predators that are easier to find at dawn and dusk; our guides are expert trackers and have often followed the resident Lion pride, African Wild Dog pack, or Cheetah family for months—such a help to our finding them. After assessing the action from the night before, we switch gears to watching other species, birds, and mammals. With our group all helping with spotting, we see so much! Roads go out from the lodge into different habitats, so every day is different, and we often feel that we are experiencing a National Geographic moment, one right after the other.

One morning, we enjoy a boat ride that takes us up to a quiet lagoon where an active heron rookery is exciting. We moor the boat and watch as stunning, Yellow-billed Stork and gangly Marabou fly back and forth. There are numerous other herons, cormorants, and ibis. We travel a channel to get there, and on the route, Malachite Kingfisher often perch in close view, their jewel tones just captivating. The Okavango region is not unlike our Everglades, a slow moving, major river system that allows water to fan out across the otherwise arid landscape, transforming it into a paradise for wildlife. It is the largest Ramsar designated site in the world, set up to protect globally important wetlands.

Do not be surprised if an Elephant feeds along the shore as you take your after-lunch rest, or if Green Pigeon come to roost in the large shading tree. Camp is one of the few places you can walk safely, so it is fun to birdwatch as you come and go between your tent and the main dining area. There may be a roosting Pearl-spotted or Barred Owl, a dashing Crimson-breasted Shrike, one of the snazzy African woodpeckers, or a mixed flock with some of the tree-dwelling species.

Food is healthy and delicious and yes, there are sweet treats for dessert and with your tea. Drinks are included and served at sunset out in the field if we wish (we often choose based on animal activity as this is also prime photo time) or once we return to camp. African sunsets are memorable; once we savor this, it is back to the lodge to freshen up and join a lovely gathering for cocktails or tea followed by dinner in the open-air tent or out under the stars.

One night we take a drive to find more elusive mammals and perhaps Verreaux's Eagle or other owl species.
Accommodations at Kwara Lodge (B,L,D)

Thurs. Aug. 31 Flight to Lagoon Camp | Afternoon to Sunset Boat Trip

This morning we enjoy a last game drive out from Kwara for one more chance here to see additional species. We then have brunch, freshen up, and pack up before heading to our next camp in the Linyanti part of the ecosystem. This is another great chance to see the Okavango Delta region from the air; it's fun to spot herds of Elephant in the water or crossing between waterholes, big herds of African Buffalo, or Giraffe.

At our new camp, we continue the rhythm of safari; an early morning game drive, followed by a hearty brunch, and then time for a siesta, in-camp viewing, and photography or relaxing. Then, it is an afternoon game drive lasting until sunset. Dinner is after dark, under an airy tent with candlelight and stars and more delicious and varied entrees and fresh fruits and greens.

Accommodations at [Lagoon Camp, Linyanti Channel](#) (B,L,D)

Fri., Sept. 1 Lagoon Camp along the Linyanti Channel

Lagoon Camp sits in a spectacular place where desert meets water. Landscapes reveal upland tracts of Mopane forest set in a mosaic of open savanna amid 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. Lagoon has had a breeding pack of African Wild Dogs for many years, and we hope this pack is visible.

At Lagoon, we enjoy time on the river by boat as well as our explorations by 4-wheel drive. Elephant are often feeding on the river margin. We watch for a deep-water tolerant antelope, the Sitatunga. And we listen for Chirping Cisticola and with luck, may have a chance at seeing the rare Pel's Fishing Owl. And each bend of the channel is good tern, shorebird, and wading bird habitat, with many to inspect at close range!

This evening we gather around the fire for drinks and light appetizers before dinner (and after dinner for those that like to linger around the campfire) where we discuss the day's sightings, photographs, and experiences. Most often we do our species checklist after lunch, when we have good visibility and good energy.

Accommodations at [Lagoon Camp, Linyanti Channel](#) (B,L,D)

Sat., Sept. 2 From Wetland to Kalahari—Flight from Lagoon Camp to Nxai Pan National Park

There is time for one more game drive early this morning from camp. One more chance to follow tracks, search for predators and prey, and be immersed in this riverine setting. Then we pack up, head to the airstrip as its time to move on to new terrain. This is our most dramatic change of habitat. From the air the arid Kalahari seems stark and barren, on the ground one quickly finds that not so!

Nxai Pan National Park has a small tented camp, featuring nine beautifully crafted accommodations on the edge of a large salt pan, replete with birds and wildlife. The camp is 100% solar powered, with a spacious and impressive central area dining and bar. Rooms face the permanent waterhole, which draws in numerous mammals and birds. They are spacious with high ceilings, a sitting area, large comfortable bed, electricity for charging gear, and large bathrooms with indoor and outdoor showers.

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.

We take an afternoon game drive watching the sky for raptors such as Pale Chanting Goshawk, Martial Eagle, or Lanner Falcon. 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.

Gather around the campfire for tea or a cocktail (drinks are included) and then enjoy dinner at this lovely lodge, with a view of the night sky.

[Accommodations at Nxai Pan Lodge](#) (B,L,D)

Sun., Sept. 3 & Mon., Sept. 4 Nxai Pan National Park | Explore the Kalahari

We have two full days to explore this arid-land national park and we take both a morning and afternoon game drive each day. Star attractions here are two waterholes, one by the lodge and the other along our drive.

Elephant frequent the waterhole; their presence against the immense silence of this remote location is memorable. We should see family groups and huge bachelor males. The arid setting is in such contrast to those we viewed in Moremi, we start to understand the endurance and flexibility of this species.

One day we may venture farther afield to look for Gemsbok near some of the largest Baobab trees. Close to camp we see many Springbok, desert adapted animals that are rare and typically not seen in Moremi. Zebra, Kudu, Lion, Giraffe, Impala, and Wildebeest are here too, as are some of the more elusive species: Bat-eared Fox, Aardvark, Honey Badger, or (rare) Cheetah. Photographically, the edge of the waterhole provides unending beauty as species line up to drink—multiple species shots are prized!

On a long loop drive through the park, our coffee/tea break is enjoyed at the South Campground which has restroom facilities and large trees that can make it a very active place to see songbirds. Kalahari Scrub Robin may venture out of a brush pile with its cocky tail alert, Cape Crombec are vocal and alert us to a mixed flock that may have Common Scimitarbill, Green-winged Pytilia (a beauty!), Southern Cordonblue, and Golden-breasted Bunting.

For those that wish, the lodge provides a unique experience. Many of their staff members are people of the Kalahari, the San or Bushman. You can go with one of the San 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.

Coffee around the campfire starts your day and drinks (included) and social time around it, under the beautiful African night sky ends it. Our final evening is here, around the campfire—few will want to say good-bye.

Tues., Sept. 5 Morning Game Drive | Departures

Our amazing journey must come to an end. We have time for a quick game drive and brunch, and then head to the airstrip. We time this short flight to be in Maun for the mid-day flights back to Johannesburg and places beyond. (B)

Tour Details

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance.

Cost of the Journey

The cost of this Botswana safari is \$7390, based on double occupancy. Single supplement is limited; please inquire. This cost includes accommodations for 15 nights, all meals as specified in the itinerary, professional guide services, other park and program entrance fees and miscellaneous program expenses. The mobile camp provides a limited selection beverages and lodges are all-inclusive so alcohol and bar drinks are included. Tour cost does not include flights to and from Maun or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone charges, gratuities for guides, lodge staff members and drivers, or at your hotel in Maun, and beverages from the bar.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at your convenience at Maun International Airport (MUB) on or before August 21. Please plan departures after 12:30 PM on September 5. If you wish to add other lodges to your stay, or time in South Africa, we can assist. We can also connect you with our travel agent who can help you make your flights; please ask.

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