

Botswana's Kalahari Desert

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London.
Day 2	Maun.
Day 3/5	Passarge Valley, Central Kalahari Game Reserve.
Day 6/8	Deception Valley, Central Kalahari Game Reserve.
Day 9	Depart Maun.
Day 10	Arrive London.

Departs

February and March.

Focus

Mammals, birds and other wildlife.

Grading

A traditional African safari – Grade A.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code BWA06).

Highlights:

- Includes six nights of fully-serviced mobile camping in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve
- Open vehicles with great visibility
- Stay at two private & remote campsites
- Look for mammals such as Cheetah, Lion, Bat-eared Fox & Brown Hyena
- Raptors including Martial, Tawny & Steppe Eagles
- Abundant birdlife such as Crimson-breasted Shrike, Violet-eared Waxbill, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater & Sociable Weaver
- Expertly guided by local naturalist guides



From top: Kalahari Lion, Crimson-breasted Shrike & Springbok



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Introduction

Beyond the watery reaches of Botswana's magnificent Okavango Delta, lies the vast expanse of the Kalahari Desert. Although baked by an unrelenting sun for much of the year, the Kalahari bursts into life at the end of Southern Africa's summer rains. By early March, the parched landscape is fleetingly transformed into a mosaic of rich grasslands, dotted with colourful flowers, acacia scrub and seasonal watering holes. This is an exciting time to visit. Herds of game move in to take advantage of the new growth – stalked by their attendant predators – whilst numerous birds arrive to either breed or refuel on their long journeys north. The starkly beautiful landscape of the Kalahari is best explored on a mobile safari and this tour follows a similar format to our long-running, and very popular, 'Botswana's Desert & Delta' holiday. After an initial night in a comfortable lodge near Maun, the safari includes six nights of fully serviced ensuite camping in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, split between two exclusive and remote campsites in Deception and Passarge Valleys. From here we will head out on morning and afternoon game drives in our open vehicles in search of such mammals as Cheetah, Lion, Bat-eared Fox, Gemsbok, Springbok, Southern Giraffe, Eland and perhaps something rarer such as a Caracal or Brown Hyena. Martial, Tawny and Steppe Eagles circle overhead, whilst other birds to look out for include Pale Chanting Goshawk, Temminck's Courser, Northern Black Korhaan, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Black Cuckoo, Violet-eared Waxbill and the aptly-named Sociable Weaver. For those wishing to see more of Botswana, or another southern African country, there are plenty of extension options available, including time in the Okavango Delta or a visit to the spectacular Victoria Falls.



Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Depart London

We depart London's Heathrow airport on a British Airways scheduled evening service to Johannesburg.

Day 2

Maun

We will arrive in Johannesburg around 0700 hours and transfer late morning to a South African Airlink or Air Botswana flight to Maun, the gateway to the Okavango Delta, arriving early afternoon. On arrival we will be met

and driven for 20 minutes or so to a nearby lodge on the outer fringes of the Delta. Following a little time to relax, we will end the day with a two hour sunset cruise on the Thamalakane and Boro Rivers (if water levels permit). This cruise will offer us the opportunity to enjoy a different suite of animals and birds from the rest of the tour, species that favour the wetter environments and lush vegetation of north-western Botswana. These include Hippopotamus, Red Lechwe, African Fish Eagle, White-faced Duck, African Jacana, Coppery-tailed Coucal, Swamp Boubou, Black-collared Barbet, Golden Weaver, plus various egrets, herons, storks and kingfishers.

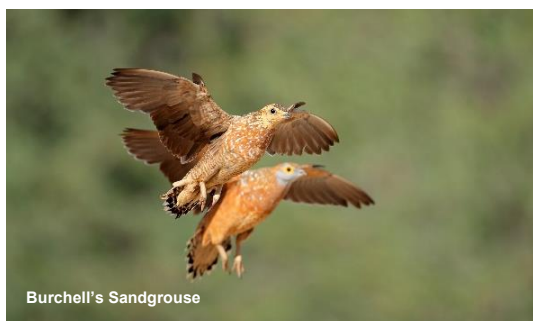


NB – If water levels are too low for a sunset cruise, you will be escorted on a birdwatching walk around the lodge grounds and nearby.

Day 3 – 5 Passarge Valley, Central Kalahari Game Reserve

Following an early breakfast on Day 3 we will leave our lodge on the edge of the Okavango Delta and drive south to the vast Central Kalahari Game Reserve. The drive is likely to take around six to seven hours – with refreshment and wildlife stops enroute – but we plan to arrive at our private and remote campsite in time to take our first late afternoon wildlife safari.

The Central Kalahari Game Reserve is located in central Botswana and covers an area of nearly 53,000 square kilometers, the second largest reserve in Africa. It was established in 1961 as a place where the San Bushmen could continue to follow their traditional, nomadic hunter/gatherer lifestyle free from the disturbance of the outside world. This vast land of distant horizons and sweeping vistas is baked by the desert sun for much of the year, but as the unpredictable summer rains come to an end it is fleetingly transformed into mosaic of rich grasslands, acacia scrub and seasonal watering holes. The whole area has a wild, mysterious beauty to it. Northern parts are clothed in waving grasslands interspersed with stunted trees and scrubby bushes. Flat or gently undulating bushveld covers the centre of the reserve whilst the south and east mainly consists of open Mopane forest. The night skies throughout the reserve are truly spectacular!



We will spend our first three nights in a small private campsite in the Passarge Valley from where we will explore this remote land on a series of morning and afternoon game drives. The Passarge Valley is a long, fossil river bed located towards the north of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. The clay floor of the valley provides highly nutritious grazing for the region's game and can support higher numbers of animals than the sandy dune-veld to the south. The wide open landscape is dotted by tree islands of

Umbrella Thorn; these quintessentially African trees offer precious shade in an otherwise harsh landscape. Gemsbok (Oryx), Springbok, Blue Wildebeest and Red Hartebeest make up the majority of the herbivores, although groups Southern Giraffe are not uncommon and the occasional Eland (the largest of Africa's antelopes) can also be found. The wide open plains are the domain of the speedy Cheetah and prides of Lion are also frequently seen. For the fortunate, there is also a chance of Caracal or African Wild Cat! Birds to look out for include a range of raptors such as Pale Chanting Goshawk, Tawny and Steppe Eagles, Pygmy Falcon and Lappet-faced, White-headed and White-backed Vultures, plus Crimson-breasted Shrike, Violet-eared Waxbill and Sociable Weaver.

Since the cool early morning hours offer the best game viewing, our days will start at the first hint of dawn with coffee and a light breakfast to the rhythmic background cooing of a myriad Ring-necked Doves. From here we head straight out into the field on a game drive returning to camp once again around 10 am - 11am for a delicious brunch. As the heat of the day kicks in you are free to relax, read a book or bird/mammal watch from camp, before typically heading out once more in the late afternoon for another game drive (please note that night drives are not permitted within Botswana's game reserves).

Day 6 – 8

Deception Valley, Central Kalahari Game Reserve

We will leave camp after breakfast on Day 6 and move our base from Passarge Valley to Deception Valley, approximately 60 kilometres away. The transfer will double-up as an extended game drive as we will be travelling through the game reserve throughout. Our camp staff will have arrived at our new campsite several hours before us and will have our wilderness home fully erected by the time we drive in with a refreshing cup of tea ready to drink!



Deception Valley lies in the north-east of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. It is an 80 kilometre riverbed that gets its name from the shimmering mirages that are often seen during the heat of the day, a phenomenon even noticeable from the air! This is the most well-known part of the reserve, made famous by Mark and Delia Owens book 'Cry of the Kalahari', an account of their seven years in Deception Valley studying the wilderness and its inhabitants. During the December to April rains, the valley attracts particularly high concentrations of herbivores which move in to take advantage of the new growth of grass and other vegetation. These are followed by a variety of predators and a wealth of birdlife. There will be many different areas to explore during our time here including Tau Pan, Sunday Pan, Leopard Pan and Deception Pan.

Herds of Gemsbok and Springbok make up much of the wildlife in Deception Valley with smaller numbers of Red Hartebeest, Eland, Blue Wildebeest, Burchell's Zebra, Southern Giraffe, Steenbok and Greater Kudu. These are stalked by Cheetah, Lion, Leopard and Spotted Hyena and the occasional pack of (rarely seen) Wild Dogs. The endearing Bat-eared Fox is frequently observed in this area, as are Cape Fox and Black-backed Jackal, and there is a chance of something rarer such as Brown Hyena, Caracal or Aardwolf.



The northern regions of the Kalahari are blessed with higher rainfall than the drier south which results in tracts of mature woodlands of Purple-pod Terminalia. These are home to a variety of birds not found in the rest of the reserve including Crested Francolin, African Paradise Flycatcher, White-crowned Shrike, Black-backed Puffback, and White-browed Scrub-Robin. Black Cuckoos arrive in good numbers during the wetter months to parasitize on the Crimson-breasted Shrike, whilst on the floor of the open pans we will look for Ostrich, Temminck's and Double-

banded Coursers, plus Northern Black Korhaan, Crowned Lapwing and Great Sparrow. Martial Eagle, Tawny Eagle and Black-chested Snake-Eagle are the more common of the large raptors.

Day 9

In flight

This morning we must say a sad farewell to our camp staff and depart Deception Valley after an early breakfast to begin our long drive back to Maun. Early in the afternoon we will arrive back at Maun's small international airport to await the departure of our mid-afternoon South African Airlink or Air Botswana flight to Johannesburg from where we connect with our mid-evening British Airways flight home.

Day 10

London

We will arrive back at London Heathrow around 0600 hours this morning.

Weather

Botswana's summer rains run from November through to March. This is the time of the year when the Central Kalahari Game Reserve bursts into life attracting many of the mammals and birds we hope to see. You can expect dry and sunny weather for most of the safari, with the occasional heavy thundery shower in the afternoon or overnight. Daytime temperatures usually climb well above 30 degrees C, but drop significantly at night

Your transport

We use open-sided 4-wheel drive safari vehicles for this holiday. They have a canopy to shade from the sun and are excellent for photography. The group will be rotated frequently and the open nature of the vehicles means everyone will have excellent visibility. In order to be fair to all participants, we regret that we are unable to guarantee a permanent front seat to those who might suffer from motion sickness or other concerns.



Tour focus

This is a general natural history safari focusing on the mammals, birds and other wildlife of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation is included in the cost of the holiday. Apart from the first night in a comfortable lodge on the edge of Maun, for most of this holiday we will be camping in a mobile wilderness safari camp. We use small camp sites for the camping element of the tour, normally set under the shade of trees and our group have exclusive use of each site. They are positioned well away from the tourist lodges allowing us the unique experience of camping in the true wild heart of the Africa with only the sounds of the African night to lull you to sleep!

The 'Meru' style tents measure approximately three metres by four metres with a high roof. They come equipped with camp beds, bedding, pillows and an en-suite 'bathroom' accessed through a zip door at the rear of the tent (with bucket shower and long-drop bush toilet). Showers can be ordered as hot, cold or warm and the water is heated in a bucket on the fire. Showers may be taken at any time but the guide holds the right to limit water use if necessary. The camping is 'fully-serviced' and you will not be expected to help with camp chores such as setting up tents, cooking and washing-up.

NB – On occasion, we may need to swap our three nights at Passage Valley with three nights in the Letiahau region of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. This is another excellent area of the reserve for mammals and birds and, if a move is necessary, it will in no way affect the wildlife content of the safari.



Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of your holiday; drinks, tips to local guides (approximately £100 per person) locally payable airport taxes, lunches on Day 2 and Day 9 and all items of a personal nature such as souvenirs, telephone calls etc. UK citizens do not currently require a Visa to enter Botswana; other nationalities should check requirements with their local Botswana Embassy.

Entry requirements

No vaccinations are mandatory, but several are strongly recommended and we suggest you visit your GP to discuss your travel plans as far in advance of the tour as possible to discuss this and malaria prophylactics which must be

taken. There is no visa fee for UK citizens wishing to enter Botswana. Your passport must have at least six months validity left after the return travel date and at least 2 blank pages.

Your safety & security

Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/botswana or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.

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