

# Ultimate Botswana: Wildlife & Birding Safari

Kalahari Desert, Moremi Game Reserve, Okavango Delta & Chobe River Cruise  
With Naturalist Journeys & Caligo Ventures

September 6 – 22, 2019

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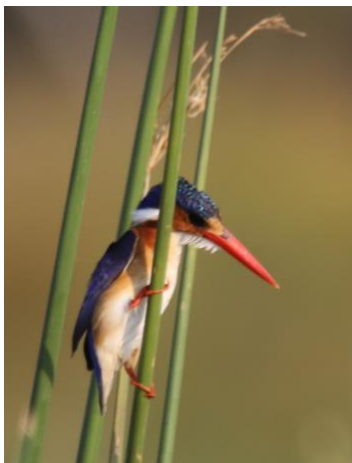
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Naturalist Journeys, LLC





Embark on a true African safari to Botswana, where the wildlife is pristine, and our days are timed with the rhythm of nature. This Ultimate Botswana trip includes three nights in the Kalahari Desert at the start, and at the end caps off with a stunning three-night cruise on the wildlife-rich Chobe River. We call this one “ultimate,” not for contrived creature comforts but for the amazing opportunity you have to intimately take in the spectrum of wildlife of Botswana. Designed and guided by our owner, Peg Abbott, who has decades of experience visiting Africa, this is an ultimate experience for birding, photography, and seeing Africa’s iconic large mammals.

Enjoy a lovely permanent tented camp, placed on a very active water hole in the Kalahari Desert at Nxai Pan. We then head out to Moremi National Park, where 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 by the support crew of a mobile-tented camp, complete with private baths, 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 next spend time at Pom-Pom lodge, a luxury deep water camp that features the upscale comfort of elegant platform tents with private facilities, and a central restaurant and bar. With more developed resources, these small permanent camps like Pom-Pom give us a sense of the camps visited by Hemingway and others in years gone by. We fly into Pom-Pom from an airstrip in Moremi, then out to Kasane, on the

## Tour Highlights

- ✓ Experience the fabulous Kalahari Desert, where wildlife and birds congregate at our tented camp’s waterhole
- ✓ Follow wildlife and brilliant birds with expert guides at a mobile camp in renowned Moremi National Park
- ✓ Take morning and afternoon game drives
- ✓ Find Southern Africa’s elegant and colorful array of birds, in addition to mammals like big cats, Elephants, and more!
- ✓ Explore Moremi Game Reserve’s papyrus-lined channels, lagoons, and lush forests
- ✓ 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
- ✓ Have an excellent chance to see, and photograph, African Wild Dog
- ✓ Visit a woven basket gallery — Botswana is known for expert basket-weaving
- ✓ Spend three nights 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
- ✓ Look for Leopard and other species on a safari drive in Chobe National Park

## Tour Summary

17-Day / 16-Night African Safari with Peg Abbott  
\$8750 from Maun

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



incredibly wildlife-rich Chobe River. Here we've chosen an environmentally-friendly lodge that caters to photographers and wildlife enthusiasts. We plan to explore Chobe National Park on safari by day, as well as the Chobe River, with several boat outings.

If big game, southern constellations, and the enchanting sounds of wild Africa beckon, this journey is sure to entice. A visit to Victoria Falls is easy to do from Kasane, either as a day trip or overnight there and depart on your international flight from the Victoria Falls International Airport. Ask a travel planner for details

### **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 a good system for charging camera and other batteries.

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

## Itinerary



### **Fri., Sept 6 Arrive in Maun, Botswana**

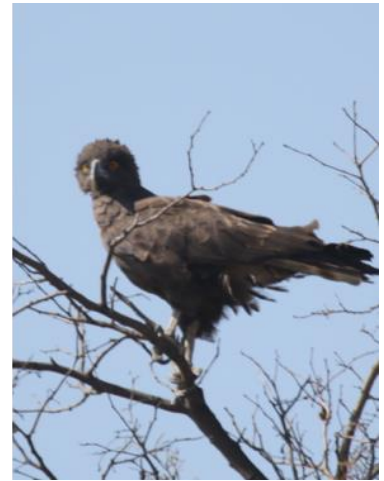
Flights into Maun originate in Johannesburg (“Joburg” to locals), South Africa, so please plan your flights from the USA to arrive in Maun today, since we leave fairly early the next morning for our safari. A representative from Masson Safaris welcomes you as you arrive at the Maun airport, then helps you transfer and check in to our lovely lodge for a chance to freshen up after your flight. Most flights arrive Maun in the morning hours; enjoy the day to rest, take a walk along the river (you should see 50 or more species at this lodge!), and savor gracious hospitality with our hosts, who run the lodge to benefit a social cause.

*Accommodations at Royal Tree Lodge, or similar (D)*

### **Sat., Sept. 7 – Mon., Sept. 9 Nxai Pan | Kalahari Desert**

Experience the arid Kalahari Desert from the comforts of a lodge. This camp features nine tents 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 and visit the famous Baines Baobab site. Little has changed there since 1862, when the British adventurer and artist Thomas Baines explored the area. 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 at the baobab site.

Elephants frequent the waterhole; their presence against the immense silence of this remote location is memorable. We should see family groups and also the huge bachelor males. We 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. 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)*

## **Tues., Sept. 10 Return to Maun | Rivernest Boutique Cottages**

We enjoy the morning at Nxai Pan, then fly back to Maun. Our lodgings here are on the river, and with lush plantings provide a good oasis for birds. We have the afternoon to relax a bit, and for those that wish we can visit a basket shop in Maun, and perhaps a local farm. Dinner is at our accommodations; we head out for safari the next morning so this is also a good chance to freshen up and pack for the next part of our adventure.

*Accommodations at Rivernest Boutique Cottages (B,L,D)*

## **Wed., Sept. 11 – Fri. Sept. 13**

### **Mobile Safari in 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 in our safari vehicles as we cross into the park a few hours north of Maun 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 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 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 do take one day at this camp to explore via a full-day boat ride, 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 possibly 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)*



**Sat., Sept. 14 – Mon., Sept. 16**

### **Mobile Safari in Moremi Game Reserve | Okavango Delta | Xini**

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!

Our destination for our second camp takes us past some of the watery realm, then on to an upland region that fewer visitors frequent. 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 (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)*

### **Tues., Sept. 17 Flight to Kasane | 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. 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 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 say good-bye to our safari guides at an airstrip near Moremi, and head northeast to Kasane. This afternoon we reach 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, birding on the grounds. The town is in walking distance if some have the urge to explore or shop.

*Accommodations at Pangolin Safari Lodge (B,L,D)*

### **Wed., Sept. 18 – Fri., Sept. 20**

#### **Cruise the Chobe River Aboard the *Pangolin Voyager***

The next morning we embark on a grand adventure, a three-night cruise on the *Pangolin Voyager* houseboat, a Naturalist Journeys charter 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. Elephants abound and love the river margin. In addition to large herds and family groups, 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 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, more prominent here than in Moremi. 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 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 a chance to walk among Baobab trees on a safe island of the river, and if you wish, to schedule a visit to a local village.

### **Sat., Sept. 21 Return to Botswana | Chobe National Park**

We return to Botswana by road today, since we have the border crossing. Once settled back in Kasane, on our agenda is to take a land excursion into Chobe National Park with local guides. If time permits ahead of flights, we





may do one game drive this evening, and another in the morning, but either way you get a good chance to drive the circuit popular from Kasane in the park.

The Chobe area can be busy, a bit like Yellowstone on a busy day, but wildlife viewing is still good, and Leopards are often sighted. Our hotel is intimate, only 14 rooms, situated on a hill overlooking the Chobe River and Caprivi Floodplains, yet close to the park gates for being first on the scene in the morning. Rooms are air-conditioned with private balconies. The dining area and lounge, pool, and firepit are a part of the hotel's gracious hospitality and at this point in our journey, after our many adventures and being unplugged, we welcome the creature comforts and connections (yes, wifi...).

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

## **Sun., Sept. 22 Depart Kasane for Flights Home | Optional One-Day Stay for Victoria Falls Excursion**

Our herd disperses today! Most of the group takes flights from Kasane to Johannesburg to catch international flights home. Others may wish to book a one-day or overnight visit to Victoria Falls (additional cost) or to extend to other parts of Africa such as neighboring Namibia or South Africa; if so, our travel planners can assist. Note that it is also possible to fly internationally from Victoria Falls, just a two hour drive away. (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 hosts at the Pangolin Chobe Hotel can help 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 you may find include Trumpeter Hornbill, Malachite Kingfisher, Rock Pratincole, and strikingly-colored Schalow's Turaco.

### **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's 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 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 partner company 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!



## 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 the Chobe National Park to permeate the rooms.

### Communal Areas

The middle level is occupied by 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 what 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 Peg Abbott

Peg Abbott is the owner and lead guide of Naturalist Journeys, LLC. She has been designing, guiding, and organizing natural history tours for more than 25 years, working for the National Audubon Society and other organizations before launching Naturalist Journeys, LLC in 1998. Her work has taken her from Alaska to Africa and Argentina, as well as many other locations around the world. She has conducted research on several bird and mammal species and keeps a close interest in Yellowstone and Mexican wolf reintroduction projects. Her interests include all aspects of natural history and geology. After 20 years in and around the Yellowstone area, Peg relocated in 2003 to the birding mecca of Portal, AZ.

## Cost of the Journey

### 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.

### Cost of the Journey

Cost of the journey is \$8750 DBL, per person. 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, 16 nights' accommodations, meals from dinner Day One through breakfast Day 17, professional guide services, park and preserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. Internal flights are included.

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

### Travel Information

The in-country flights are included with your tour cost and will be arranged for you. These three internal flights are: In and out of Nxai Pan and from Moremi National Park to Kasane. Weight restrictions for luggage do apply. You may arrive in Maun at your convenience on September 6. 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. Routing through Johannesburg makes it easy to add side trips to famous game parks or 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.

### Photo Credits

Lion Cub, Peg Abbott (PA); Yellow-billed Hornbills, PA; Giraffe, PA; Elephants, Greg Smith (GS); Malachite Kingfisher, PA; Zebras, PA; Leopard, PA; Mokoro Ride, PA; Little Bee-eater, PA; Safari Vehicle, PA; Carmine Bee-eater, PA; Sunset, PA; Royal Tree Lodge, PA; African Jacana & Hippos, PA; Bat-eared Foxes, GS; Kudus, PA; Nxai Pan Lodge, courtesy kwando.co.bw; Wattled Crane, PA; Slaty Egret, PA; Brown Snake Eagle, PA; Baboon, PA; Lions, PA; Yellow-billed Stork, PA; Leopard, PA; Goliath Heron & Water Buffalo, PA; Spotted Hyenas, PA; Black Heron, PA; Baby Elephant, PA; Hippos, PA; *Pangolin Voyager*, courtesy pangolinvoyager.com; Victoria Falls, GS; *Pangolin Voyager*, courtesy pangolinvoyager.com.

### Group Size

This safari is limited to ten (10) people.



*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.*