



Safari “Seasons” in Botswana (Lodges)

This is a guide to the different seasons in Botswana and how the varying temperatures, rainfall, conditions and other factors can influence your safari experience. It will help guide your decision as to what time of year you choose to visit.

The “Dry Seasons” - May - October

The “Cold Dry Season” – May, June, July and August

Otherwise known as our winter, this is a very popular time of year to visit. Temperatures barely get above 25 degrees C in the day and the sun is likely to shine continuously without any cloud. We have had the odd “freak” rain during this time, but this is very rare.

Temperatures suddenly drop after sunset, even getting down to zero on occasions, especially in the “Kalahari parks.” This cold is exacerbated on morning activities where wind chill on moving safari vehicles or boats makes it feel even colder! (Do read our travel advice section on what to pack for these conditions – yes you do need to bring gloves to Africa!).

You will find the roads dry and dusty, however excessive dust is usually temporary.

The game viewing during this time is excellent. In theory, the longer we are into the dry season, the better and more consistent the game viewing is – so the months of July and August are “technically” better for sightings. Further, the dry conditions in these months make for less grass and cover for the animals to hide, resulting in increasing ease to spot them. That is the theory anyway.

The lack of rain and colder conditions results in most migratory bird species departing for warmer climates in the Northern hemisphere – birders should mostly choose to visit when our rains start later in the year.

One of the most remarkable events at this time of year is the annual breeding season of the African wild dogs (between June and August), when the dogs will raise their puppies in den sites. There are specific lodges where you can get to see the dens, so do inquire about this!

Another big highlight is that the Makgadikgadi zebra herds will be on the Boteti River at this time of year. Again, there are good lodges where the game will come to drink from the river, right below your room!

Further, you will be bothered less by mosquitos in these winter months and insects in general will mostly be absent from the lodges at night.



On an interesting note, these months are also the “flood’ season in the lower reaches of the Okavango! This is the best time to do a boat safari, as water levels will be at their highest and the floodplains inside the Moremi Game Reserve will be full. You can be more sure that Okavango lodges will still have their “water activities available – low water later in the year can sometimes stop the boat and mekoro activities.

So, the Okavango “flood season” actually happens in our dry season. And in our wet, rain season, the Okavango rivers are at their lowest or even dry up!

The “Hot Dry Season” – September and October

Although excessively hot, this is one of the most popular times to visit Botswana. From the middle of September, temperatures start to climb to above 40 degrees C. This can make the conditions quite challenging. However, modern lodges are usually well shaded, have swimming pools, fans in the rooms and their vehicles or boats are also well shaded for activities. It does not rain during these months although cloud and the odd thunderstorm may start to build up by the end of October. This lightning can sometimes start bush fires, although these are relatively slow spreading grass fires that can easily be avoided and are not rarely life threatening.

Mosquitos will still be less of an issue and insects will again largely be absent from lodges. However, in the daytime, the moisture in lodges can attract flies and honey bees, although it is rare for them to swarm out of control.

Now, having mentioned all the challenges of visiting in September and October, one must be made aware of why this is such a good time to visit! Basically, this is our best game viewing period and one will be rewarded with amazing wildlife congregations if you safari at this time – in fact we encourage it!

Why is this so:

The heat and lack of rain will have dried up all the waterholes, leaving the animals no choice but to gather where there is water. This is when it is wise to think about basing yourselves at lodges that overlook permanent rivers or pumped waterholes – the animals will come to you!

This means the herds of buffalo, elephant and other plains game swell in number on a daily basis as water and food become increasingly scarce. Predators take advantage of the deteriorating health of the animals, making kills and hunting behavior more common. Further, guides find it easier to track animals at this time of year as the lack of grass cover exposes the tracks more clearly. The bush also thins out making spotting that leopard that much easier!

October can also be classed as one of our “spring seasons” when a lot of acacia trees and other plants start to shoot new leaves and even flower. Birds also start



to breed as temperatures warm up in October. This would be a good time to visit the heronries (water bird breeding sites) in the Okavango Delta.

You can visit any park during the “hot and dry” season, but we usually encourage guests to spend time near permanent rivers or waterholes that attract game. Desert safaris, although though in the heat, are still remarkable! The Makgadikgadi zebra herds will be on the Boteti River at this time of year in big numbers.

The Okavango “flood” starts to drop in September, as the flood waters from Angola begin to subside. You can still do **boat safaris** in September most years, but by October there can be too many shallow sand banks.

The “Wet Season” – November, December, January, February, March

(Also known as the “Green” season, “Emerald” season or “Summer,” there is a bit of variation from year to year as to when the rain actually starts).

November usually brings the first thunderstorms as temperatures and humidity increase daily. Bushfires may also ignite due to lightning.

This is a fabulous time to be in the bush as most of the antelope (specifically impala) drop their young during the first 2 weeks of the month. By December, each impala herd brings their young out of hiding and into large nursery herds. This is therefore the best time to see young predators practicing their hunting skills on newborns, with the help of their mothers of course.

The first big significant shower of rain ignites the emergence of winged termite “alates.” Witnessing this event is rather spectacular as the sky is thick with millions of flying termites that are consumed by all manner of birds and wildlife.

The first migratory birds will have started to arrive in Botswana in September (maybe August), but by November, all of the “summer” migrants should be present. This is a good time to see large congregations of birds either at breeding sites, feeding on termite eruptions or gathering at reducing water bodies that trap fish.

Many canid species will also start to den at this time of year - namely Jackal and bat-eared foxes. The best place to maybe see puppies is in the Central Kalahari Games Reserve.

November is also a month of great change – the first rains usually bring about the first new shoots of green grass, several species of trees get new bright green



leaves and even flowers and cloud build up can bring relief from high temperatures.

Insect and mosquito activity increases dramatically in the wetter months. However, lodges rarely become uncomfortable because of this. You bring your own insect repellent, however this is provided in all lodge accommodation.

You can visit any park during this time of year, however, the changes from dry to wet conditions can seem more pronounced in the Kalahari Parks

By our “wet season”, most of the rivers in the lower reaches of the delta will have started to recede, as the flood “pulse” from Angola does not sustain itself much past August.

Remember: ***The Okavango “flood season” actually happens in our dry season. In our wet, rain season, the Okavango Rivers are at their lowest or even dry up!***

December can be very similar to November in terms of the above. Indeed, the first rains may not fall in November, but rather a month or two later! In which case all of these events can also happen in December. In fact, this is when the consistent rains usually start.

We like December because the arrival of consistent rain clouds brings a reduction in temperature and a flurry of life. Many bright flowers first emerge and the termite eruptions continue. Saturated ground and large rainwater puddles can spur the emergence of giant bullfrogs as they race to breed before the water disappears. (Remember that you can get good relief from heavy rain in modern lodges – they usually also provide umbrellas in the rooms and “ponchos” on game viewing craft in case you get caught out in the rain. However, you must still bring your own rain protection gear.

December can also be the month of animal dispersal, when the herds are no longer restricted to permanent rivers, but can drink from newly revived waterholes. For example, one might not find a single elephant along the Chobe River in December! We therefore usually encourage spending time in the Kalahari and Makgadikgadi Pans ecosystems during this time as the dispersal (or movements) of animals here, makes game viewing more productive.

At this time the Makgadikgadi zebra will be on the move. This is a good time to go and view them in their “wet season” range on the edge of the salt-pans.

January, February and March are probably our wettest months. However, there is considerable variation in rain from year to year (frequency and timing). Because of this, there is a belief that you cannot safari during this period. However, each time I do take people on safari during this season, we prove this belief wrong! Indeed, wet season safaris can be very productive indeed.



The flurry of flowering plants, breeding birds and migrating animals continues through these months. Vegetation conditions do change in the bush however: The most significant change being the length of the grass – tall grass makes it that much more difficult to spot animals.

Driving conditions also become more challenging as roads become inundated with rainwater. Most parks remain passable all year, however, if local rains far exceed the usual average, then the authorities have been known to close park gates to visitors. This only happens on rare occasions, mostly in Moremi and Khwai. The Kalahari parks are less susceptible to closure although they do have their own set of challenges when the roads become wet. Most lodges won't close due to excessive rain unless their airstrips become unusable. In which case they instead do transfers with helicopters to get the clients in. Lodges in private areas will not be susceptible to these possible park gate closures.

We also usually recommend safaris in the wet season to some of our frequent clients that safari with us on a yearly basis – many choose to safari at this interesting time of year to see animals in settings and conditions that are not possible in the dry season.

Photographers should also note that they may enjoy the dramatic dark clouds, rainbows and soft lighting that wet and cloudy conditions will provide!

Spring Season – April and May

(We sometimes also call this “shoulder” season. Many lodges will offer “mid” rate prices, as it is considered slightly “off-season” with regards to animal sightings)

Locals enjoy these months as you get the best of both – not too hot and not too cold. In May, the weather can in fact be described as “perfect,” with very little chance of rain, cloudless sunny skies and mild temperatures both day and night. In April, the grass can still be very long, making it harder to track and spot animals (not necessarily a factor in the “Kalahari regions”). The drying conditions soon makes for shorter grass and by May, drier conditions are the norm.

Rain from the previous months will have filled up the seasonal waterholes far from the permanent rivers. This means that the big herds will still be dispersed. Remember that there is a big dispersal variation year to year, as the rains may have failed: how many waterholes are still holding water? Did the deeper seasonal pans have enough rain to fill up? Some years yes and some years no! So this, in theory, can make the game viewing a little more challenging in these months.

However, a safari in “spring” never disappoints – the idea being to design the itinerary to suit this time of year. The greater Makgadikgadi, including Nxai Pan



and the Central Kalahari are magnificent at this time of year - still a touch of green and herds located out on the grasslands or moving in transition. One should make these areas the focus of the safari. Safaris to the Okavango, Linyanti, Kwando and Chobe regions are *STILL* highly productive in April and May – you get lower “shoulder” season prices (in lodges only, not on mobile safaris) and there will be less other tourist around!

The summer migrant birds will start to head back north in April, depending on the availability of their insect prey. Red-billed Queleas tend to start breeding (see “migrations”) although the location of these vast nest sites are hard to predict.

This is definitely also a time to focus on our wildebeest and zebra migrations which will be in “transition: between their wet and dry ranges. We often recommend locating to lodges out on the Makgadikgadi grasslands, Nxai Pan or Savuti.

Lastly, this is the “rutting” or mating season for many antelope, especially impala.

That is it! Talk to us if you still can't make up your mind!