



Chobe is renowned for its large population of elephants



Male giraffe feeding

CHOBE NATIONAL PARK

Chobe National Park covers about 11,700km² of the northern Kalahari, much of it impenetrable thorn-bush growing on deep sand. This is an old safari area: Livingstone visited it in the 1850s, as have countless big-game hunters since. It's famous for huge herds of elephant and buffalo, and large prides of lion that have learnt to hunt them; for a river that apparently flows both ways; and for the mysterious, disappearing Savuti Channel.

Understanding the wildlife migrations through Chobe is the key to getting the best game-viewing on your visit to northern Botswana. Chobe's animals move in complex, ancient patterns determined by the rain and available food. However, most head for open plains to the south and east during the green months (December to March). Then, gradually, from April to November, as the land dries out and the heat builds, they migrate back to rivers in the north and west.

Call us and we'll help you to plan your trip around these migrations, so that you get the best from these areas. There are private lodges in two areas of Chobe: the riverfront and Savuti Marsh; elsewhere the park is best explored using a mobile safari. Note that no walking safaris or night drives are allowed within the national park.



Ostriches never bury their heads in the sand

The Chobe Riverfront

In the north of the park, the Chobe riverfront area has long been renowned for its wildlife. The lion are common and nonchalant, the antelope prolific, and the herds of buffalo and elephant among the largest anywhere. The birdlife is also excellent, from the ubiquitous fish eagle to a myriad of herons and waders. The amazing fishing skills of African skimmers are just one highlight of the Chobe River, along with some sizeable hippos and crocodiles.

Over the years this area has become increasingly popular and busy. It is just a short road transfer from Victoria Falls, so it's the obvious choice if you want a couple of nights' safari from the Falls. All the camps within Chobe offer 4WD game drives and boat trips on the river.

Chobe Game Lodge occupies a stunning position beside the Chobe River. It is a luxury hotel in the bush, excellent despite its size. Its 48 rooms and four suites all face the river across manicured lawns. Each has en-suite facilities and air-conditioning. Tasty, buffet-style meals are eaten overlooking the large swimming pool, and activities are flexible.

Chobe Chilwero is set further back from the river on a hill outside the park. Its 15 large, air-conditioned chalets are the height of luxury, with indoor and outdoor showers, stand-alone baths and private balconies. The lodge has a swimming pool, an e-communication centre and a new 'Africology' spa.

The new camp here, **Chobe under Canvas**, moves between private campsites in this area. Its six luxurious tents have en-suite bathrooms, complete with a flush toilet and hot bucket shower, double beds and even butler service – but it still feels like camping!

Just west of the national park, **Muchenje** sits high on the escarpment overlooking the Chobe. It is 50km west of Kasane, in the Chobe Forest Reserve, and hence far from the busiest section of the park. Muchenje has ten comfortable chalets, each with a high thatched roof and en-suite showers and toilets. In addition to the normal

activities, Muchenje offers full-day 4WD safaris, walking safaris, and night drives in the forest reserve.

If the drives around Chobe's riverfront area are too busy for you, then consider lodges on the opposite bank of the river, in Namibia. **Impalila, Ntwala** and **Ichingo** (see page 33 for more details) are excellent small lodges on Impalila Island, offering seclusion and good value. Out on the flat, open floodplains, **Chobe Savannah Lodge** is the sister-lodge of Chobe Game Lodge and has 12 thatch-and-brick, air-conditioned bungalows. All these camps in Namibia offer water-based activities along both the Chobe and Zambezi rivers, as well as visits to local communities.

Savuti Marsh

Savuti is one of Africa's most famous big-game areas, with a unique atmosphere. It's also something of an enigma, quite apart from the mystery over the different spellings used for 'Savuti'.

Key to this area is the unpredictable Savuti Channel, which sometimes flows from the Linyanti's waterways and into the heart of Chobe National Park, flooding the Savuti Marsh. Over the last few centuries, it has appeared and then dried up again several times. When David Livingstone came through Savuti around 1851 it was flowing; by 1879 the channel had stopped and the Savuti Marsh was starting to dry out. The flow began again in the late 1950s, continuing until 1981 when it again dried



Fish eagles are a common sight along the Chobe River



Early-morning game viewing near Savuti waterhole

up. Last year, 2008, it started flowing again, but stopped short of the marsh.

Since the 1980s the 'marsh' itself has remained dry: a vast, open grassland dotted with the skeletons of drowned trees. Much game passes through Savuti on annual migrations between Botswana's dry interior and the rivers of the north and west – attracted by the area's particularly nutritious grasses. Zebra visit in large herds, accompanied by impala, wildebeest, giraffe, tsessebe, buffalo and elephant.

Some animals maintain permanent territories here. Leopard are always plentiful around the granite kopjes, the packs of spotted hyena and prides of lion are notoriously large, and a cohort of old bull elephants is always around. Activity often concentrates on Savuti's three waterholes, where the lion have made a speciality of killing sub-adult elephants.

You can visit Savuti on a mobile safari, or stay at one of the camps which overlook waterholes in the channel.

Savute Elephant Camp has 12 palatial tents spread along the channel, all partially screened off from the bush by wooden stockades. These are better equipped than most hotel rooms, with air-conditioning units, ceiling fans, mini-bars, hammocks and 'his and hers' washbasins in each.

Savute Safari Lodge also accommodates 24 guests, but in similarly large, modern, wood-and-thatch suites. One side of each is made of large glass sliding doors. The inside of each has recently been refurbished, the original bright colours now

replaced with a soft, neutral décor that is more in keeping with a lodge of this ilk.

Savute Under Canvas moves between its own campsites in the Savuti area. Like Chobe Under Canvas, this small camp has six very comfortable en-suite tents, with excellent food and butler service, and tries hard to retain the spontaneity of camping in a wild area.

Somewhat confusingly, the small **Savuti Camp** stands beside the channel, but about 30km northwest of Savuti Marsh, in the private Linyanti Reserve (see page 65).



Hyena occur in large clans around Savuti

