

WHEN TO GO

We're often asked 'when is the best time to go', and the answer is usually complex. It will depend on many factors, including your interests, where you want to visit and why you're travelling. One person's best time can be another's worst!

However, often a concern about the weather underlies the question, so we've put together a very rough guide to the climate in the various countries.

Remember, this comes from records and our experience, not from a crystal ball.

Africa's weather patterns are becoming increasingly unpredictable, probably due to global warming; we're seeing downpours in the middle of deserts and damaging droughts when rains should be falling.

NAMIBIA

Namibia's climate is generally very dry and pleasant as it receives a fraction of the rain experienced by countries further east – it's fine to visit all year round. Between about **December to March** some days will be humid and rain may follow, often (but not always!) in localised, afternoon thunderstorms. These are more common in the centre and east of the country, and more unusual in the desert.

April and especially **May** are often lovely months in Namibia: increasingly dry, with a real freshness in the air and greenery in the landscape. The air is clear and largely free from dust.

From **June to August** Namibia cools down and dries out; nights can become cold, dropping below freezing in some desert areas. As the landscape dries so the game in the north of the country gravitates more to waterholes, and is more easily seen by visitors. By **September and October** it warms up again; game viewing in most areas is at its best, although there's often a lot of dust around and the vegetation has lost its vibrancy.

November is a highly variable month. Sometimes the hot, dry weather will continue; at others the sky will fill with clouds and threaten to rain. If you're lucky enough to witness the first rains of the season, you'll never forget the drama.



The Ngorongoro Crater – the largest intact caldera in the world

THE CAPE

The southern Cape has its own weather pattern that's totally different from anywhere else in Africa – explaining why the Cape's flora is so unique! From around **November to March**, whilst it rains in the rest of southern Africa, the Cape is hot, sunny, dry, and generally perfect for a holiday. Christmas and New Year are lovely in the Cape, although as a result it gets exceedingly busy with holidaying South Africans.

From **April to August** it cools down and there's some rain; it can be beautiful and dry one moment, but blustery and wet the next. Rainfall peaks around June and July but the Cape's weather is notoriously changeable; locals say that you can have 'four seasons in one day'. Despite this, the Cape is still a very pleasant place to visit, just as long as you aren't expecting to sunbathe all day.

By **September and October**, the rain becomes a less common event; the sun comes out more and the temperatures start to rise. September is the start of 'spring', when vast swathes of fynbos burst into flower in Namaqualand (north of Cape Town).

The northern Cape, including the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, follows a weather pattern similar to that of Botswana: it's very different from the southern Cape.

BOTSWANA

Botswana's climatic pattern is typical of southern Africa, although its rainfall is lower than in countries further east. The rains in Botswana come mostly between **December and March**, when average minimum temperatures are in the low 20's. Some days will be bright and sunny, some will have afternoon thunderstorms, and some will just be grey.

April and May are generally lovely, with clear skies and green landscapes. Night temperatures drop during these months, especially in the Kalahari, whilst the Okavango and environs have less extreme, more moderate temperatures.

From **June to August** the night-time temperatures in drier areas can be close to freezing, but it warms up rapidly during the day, when the sky is clear and blue. This is 'peak season' for most safari locations: the land is dry in most areas so the animals congregate around the available water sources.

This continues into **September and October**, when temperatures climb again, further drying the landscapes and concentrating the game. This is the best time for big-game safaris – although October can feel very hot, with maximum temperatures approaching 40°C.

November is difficult to predict; sometimes a continuation of October's heat, sometimes cooled by the first rains; it's always an interesting month.

ZAMBIA, MALAWI & ZIMBABWE

Although there are climatic differences between Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe, these are mainly altitudinal, and the basic pattern is very similar to that in Botswana, Namibia and Mozambique.

The rains come mostly between **December and March** though the further north you are, the earlier the rains arrive and the later they leave. Eastern areas and higher areas generally receive more precipitation. This is Zambia's 'Emerald Season' – when most camps close and many unsurfaced roads become impassable.

By **April and May** most of the rain has faded, leaving a landscape that's green, but starting to dry out. Night-time temperatures begin to drop, especially in higher and more southerly locations.

From **June to August** the nights become much cooler, but the days are clear and warm. Most of Zambia's small 'walking bushcamps' open at the start of June, when the roads have dried out sufficiently to allow access. This is the start of the 'peak season' for these countries – with often cloudless days and continually increasing game sightings.

Into **September and October** the temperatures climb: the lower-lying rift valleys – Lower Zambezi, Mana Pools and Luangwa Valley – can get very hot in October. However, you'll see some superb game as the animals concentrate around

the limited water sources.

November is variable; it can be hot and dry like October, or it can see the season's first downpours. Often it's a very interesting month as you can see both patterns on successive days.

TANZANIA

Just south of the Equator, Tanzania is huge and its size means that the climate varies considerably within it. However, generally the main rainy season – the 'long rains' – is between about **March and May**. Afternoon tropical downpours are the norm, heavier and more predictable beside the coast and on the islands. The humidity is high and daily temperatures reach the low-to-mid 30°s.

June to October is the long dry season when rainfall is unusual, even on the islands. Temperatures vary hugely with altitude and location, but typically the sky is clear and the weather sunny – it's a great time to visit. During **November and December** there's another rainy season: the 'short rains'. These are much lighter than the 'main rains' and less reliable. If it has rained during the short rains, then it normally dries up for the months of **January and February**, which is Tanzania's 'short dry season', before starting to rain again in earnest in March.

See pages 206–207 for a full explanation of the timings of the Great Serengeti Migration.



Get the timing right and you may see something of the Serengeti's wildebeest migration

MOZAMBIQUE

Mozambique stretches for almost 2,000km and has a permanent tropical ocean current running north to south along its coastline. Despite its range of latitudes, the whole country broadly follows a southern African weather pattern, with the rains falling largely between **December and March**. This varies a little within the country, with the rains lasting a few weeks longer in the north than the south. Humidity can be uncomfortably high during this period.

Most of Mozambique's rain arrives on moist southeast trade winds. The country lies in the rain-shadow of Madagascar, giving it a relatively low annual rainfall and a great deal of protection from tropical storms and occasional cyclones which head towards it during this period.

By around **April or May** better weather spreads gradually from south to north: the rains subside, the sun comes out and the humidity drops.

June to October is the dry season, with often perfect tropical weather: clear skies, plenty of sun and almost no rain. This is the best time for most people to visit Mozambique, especially if they plan a safari. Although still tropical, **June, July and August** are Mozambique's coolest months; you'll need a light duvet at night, even though the temperature reaches over 30°C by day. During **September and October** it remains dry as daytime temperatures climb, though it cools down a lot at night.

November is less predictable. Sometimes the rains start this month, although many days remain sunny and hot. The rains generally start earlier in the north of the country.

RWANDA

Fractionally south of the Equator, Rwanda's relatively high altitude provides it with a remarkably pleasant tropical highland climate, albeit with plenty of rain. Temperatures vary considerably depending on altitude, but vary little from month to month in the same place. In the capital, Kigali, the average daily temperature is about 21°C.

Rwanda's long rainy season lasts from about **March to May**, when the rain is heavy and persistent. Then from **June to mid-September** is the long dry season; this is generally the best time to visit.

October to November is a shorter rainy season and it's followed by a short dry season from **December to February**. During both of Rwanda's dry seasons there is often light cloud cover which helps to moderate the temperatures, and occasionally also brings light showers.

SEYCHELLES

Lying 4°–11° south of the Equator, in the western Indian Ocean, Seychelles has a tropical climate: warm and humid with strong maritime influences. The temperature is consistently 24–32°C, there is no distinct dry season and there is some humidity at all times.

Many of the granitic Inner Islands have dramatic terrain; Mahé boasting hills rising to 900m. The rainfall increases with altitude, though it is the trade winds that really dictate the islands' climate.

From **May to October** the southeast trade winds (Southeast Monsoon) bring a relatively dry period. Reaching its peak in July/August, there is little precipitation and temperatures average 27°C, though seas can be a little choppy.

By **November** (pre-Northwest Monsoon), the winds start to change, bringing light, warmer winds and the start of the main rainy season. During **December to March** (Northwest Monsoon), Seychelles gets extremely wet, especially in December and January, though the vegetation is lush, the winds generally light and the sun at its warmest. This is also the cyclone season, though only the most remote southern islands are within the cyclone belt.

This period is followed by the calmest, warmest month, **April** (pre-Southeast Monsoon), as the winds die down and start to change direction.



Hyena snoozing in the cool mud

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
NAMIBIA												
Etosha												
Walking												
Game photography												
Scenic photography												
Birdwatching												
THE CAPE												
Big game in Kgalagadi												
Whale-watching												
Namaqualand flowers												
Beach holiday												
BOTSWANA												
Game in the north												
Game in the Kalahari												
Flood in the Okavango												
Walking safaris												
Birdwatching												
ZAMBIA, MALAWI & ZIMBABWE												
Big game safaris												
Walking safaris												
Luangwa River safaris												
Views of Victoria Falls												
Birdwatching												
TANZANIA												
Game in Southern Tanzania												
Big game in Tarangire												
The Migration												
Scuba diving												
Birdwatching												
RWANDA												
Gorilla viewing												
MOZAMBIQUE												
Bazaruto Archipelago												
Quirimbas Archipelago												
SEYCHELLES												

RAINFALL

- Dry season
- Transition or light rains
- Heavy rains

SPECIAL INTEREST SUGGESTIONS

- Overall best time
- Generally good time
- Ask us about this time!