

# KGALAGADI TRANSFRONTIER PARK

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In the north of the Cape, sandwiched between Namibia and Botswana, is a magical corner of wilderness. Here, Botswana and South Africa have joined forces to protect the wildlife on opposite sides of their border, forming the world's first transfrontier park: the Kgalagadi. This consists of about 38,000km<sup>2</sup> of the Kalahari which was previously divided between South Africa's Kalahari Gemsbok National Park and Botswana's Gemsbok National Park.

Being away from most major routes, this park gets few visitors; it's perfect for keen game-viewers. Springbok, blue wildebeest, gemsbok, red hartebeest and eland abound, while meerkats, leopards, and black-maned lions add to the entertainment. This is also one of Africa's best parks for cheetah, which thrive by hunting in its fossil river valleys and the surrounding Kalahari dunes.

If you take your game-viewing seriously, then the Kgalagadi is a real gem. However, we don't think that it works well for a brief visit; you need to spend at least three or

four nights here to get the best out of the park.

Access is easiest by flying from Cape Town or Johannesburg to Upington, where we can arrange a hire car. Alternatively you can visit as part of a self-drive trip between Cape Town and Windhoek. The Mata Mata border post, between Namibia and South Africa, reopened in recent years and thus made a great circular route a possibility – beginning in Windhoek, and including Sossusvlei, the Fish River Canyon and the Kgalagadi.

For many years, the SA National Parks Board ran only three 'restcamps' in this park. These were designed for self-driving visitors, with simple self-catering



Gemsbok prefer semi-desert conditions

accommodation dotted around village-like compounds, which include a shop, a small fuel station, a pool and sometimes even a restaurant.

Of these restcamps, **Twee Rivieren** is the largest and most developed. It's near the park's southern entrance and has the only restaurant. **Nossob** and **Mata Mata** are both further north and more basic (cook for yourself, equipment provided), but they do have hides to watch adjacent waterholes.

In addition to these original restcamps, six 'wilderness camps' have been built deep within the park. Small, remote and unfenced, these are very different to the restcamps: feeling simpler, more isolated and closer to the wildlife. Most take eight people when full. All require you to bring your own water, fuel and food – though cooking utensils, crockery and cutlery are



Tawny eagle in camelthorn tree



Meerkats on sentry duty in the Kgalagadi Transfontier Park

provided – and all the accommodation is en suite. For safety, each wilderness camp has a single armed game scout in residence.

**Grootkolk Wilderness Camp** has four simple tents overlooking a floodlit waterhole in the dunes, and is a favourite. **Urikaruus Wilderness Camp** is also good, with four cabins built on stilts overlooking the dry riverbed of the Auob. **Kielie Krankie Wilderness Camp** has four cabins built on top of dunes, with a waterhole below. By contrast, the larger **Kalahari Tented Camp** has 15 large, comfortable en suite tents and a swimming pool!

Two of these wilderness camps are accessible only by 4WD: **Bitterpan Wilderness Camp**, which has four tents overlooking a large pan, and Gharagab Wilderness Camp, with its four log cabins in the far north of the park.

Totally different again, **!Xaus Lodge** stands within a private reserve which is part of the national park, but is run by the San/Bushman communities who originally lived on this land – the Mier and Khomani groups. It has 12 thatched chalets perched on a dune, overlooking a large saltpan, and is the only camp in the park where all meals, guided game drives and walks are included in your stay.

Situated about 60km south of the Twee Rivieren Gate, outside the park, **Molopo Kalahari Lodge** is a useful stop when the park's camps are full – or if you're likely to arrive late. Its 38 en-suite air-conditioned rooms come in a variety of styles and are located amongst red dunes, typical of the Kalahari.



Over millennia the Orange River has cut an 18km gorge through the eastern part of Augrabies Falls National Park

## AUGRABIES FALLS NATIONAL PARK

Augrabies Falls National Park covers about 500km<sup>2</sup>, including the falls and narrow gorge where the Orange River cuts through ancient granites. In full flood (February to April) the Falls are spectacular and the noise is deafening. The local Khoi people originally called it 'Aukoerebis', meaning 'Place of Great Noise'.

The rest of this starkly beautiful semi-desert national park is vegetated with succulents, acacias and aloes – including the striking kokerboom (or quiver) trees. It harbours at least 46 mammal species, from klipspringers and gemsbok to Hartmann's mountain zebra and giraffe. Predators include black-backed jackals, caracals, bat-eared foxes, African wild cats and a population of leopards. Cape clawless otters thrive in the river, and rock dassies are everywhere.

It's a good park for birdwatching, notable for black storks, rock kestrels and Verreaux's (black) eagles. Look out for falcons which frequent the gorge: pygmy, peregrine and lanner falcons are all seen here. Also of interest is Broadley's flat lizard, locally known as the Augrabies flat lizard. Though it's endemic to the area, it's not at all rare; you'll see them everywhere around the falls on warm days, when the brightly coloured males spar and dance for dominance.

Drive yourself around Augrabies Falls: some roads suit 2WD, others require 4WD. Stay in the park at **Augrabies Falls Restcamp**, which is large but friendly, and has a well-stocked shop, a reasonable restaurant,

three swimming pools, a fuel station and 59 simply furnished chalets, all with en-suite bathrooms and self-catering facilities. Augrabies combines well with most self-drive trips that include the Kgalagadi, offering relaxed walking, birdwatching and gentle game viewing.

Just minutes away from Augrabies Falls National Park, **The Falls Guesthouse** has five modern self-catering suites. These are smartly decorated with en-suite bathrooms and verandas overlooking the gardens. Each has a fully equipped kitchen, although it's also possible to eat in the central dining room.

### UPINGTON

Upington isn't a destination of choice for many. However, it is the place to stock up on food supplies before you drive to the Kgalagadi – and, depending on your flight times, it may make a convenient overnight stop en route to/from Augrabies or the Kgalagadi. If so, consider the lovely **Le Must River Residence**, beside the Orange River on the edge of the town centre, or the large, central **Protea Hotel Upington**.



Kokerboom tree