



An elephant enjoying a drink

CHOBE NATIONAL PARK

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

In 2008, the Savuti Channel flowed for the first time in 25 years. Then, in 2010, it finally started to re-fill Savuti Marsh, thus re-creating an all-year water source in southern Chobe.

Understanding Chobe's wildlife migrations is key to getting the best game viewing here. Chobe's animals move in complex, ancient patterns determined by the rain and available food. Most head to the Kalahari's open plains during the green months (December to April), then gradually migrate back to the permanent waters in the north and west between May and November. Call us and we'll help you to plan your trip, so that you get the best from these areas.

There are private lodges in the Chobe Riverfront and Savuti Marsh areas; elsewhere the park is best explored on a mobile safari. Note that no walking safaris or night drives are allowed within the national park.

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.

Within the national park, **Chobe Game Lodge** occupies a stunning position beside the Chobe River. It is a luxury hotel which is 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 an 'Africology' spa.

Chobe under Canvas is a semi-permanent camp (open February–December) which moves between private campsites within Chobe. Its five smart tents have en-suite bathrooms, complete with a flush toilet and hot bucket shower, double beds and even butler service – it's highly luxurious camping!

West of the national park and 50km from Kasane, **Muchenje** sits in the Chobe Forest Reserve, high above the Chobe River and far from the park's busier eastern end. It has 11 comfortable thatched bungalows, including a large family suite; each has a high thatched roof and an en-suite bathroom. In addition to boating and half-day drives, Muchenje offers full-day 4WD safaris, walking safaris, night drives in the forest reserve and local cultural visits.

Close by, **Ngoma Safari Lodge** opened in 2011 – and early reports have been very positive. This exclusive property has eight spacious suites, all looking out towards the river. Each has an elevated bathroom with a large bath and shower, and a private 'sala' (day bed). Meals are often served al fresco, looking out towards the Caprivi Strip. Activities include day and night 4WD and walking safaris.

For an even more serene experience of the Chobe, consider a river cruise on the luxurious **Zambezi Queen**. All of its 14 en-suite cabins have a balcony and river views. There's a substantial lounge, a dining area with 360-degree views and even a small pool. Set-departure cruises last two or three nights, and include motorboat excursions, mokoro trips, fishing and game drives.

Alternatively, stay on the quieter side of the river, in Namibia. See page 60 for more details of **Impalila**, **Ntwala**, **Ichingo** and **Chobe Savanna Lodge** – which are good, small lodges offering more seclusion than is often possible on the Botswana bank. Or consider staying on an **Ichobezi Houseboat**; recent guests have returned full of praise!



Ostriches never bury their heads

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 of '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, the water 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 1982 when it again dried up. In 2008 it started flowing again; by June 2010 the Savuti Marsh was flooding and this seems to be continuing.

Even when dry, the marsh had been a real attraction: a vast, open grassland dotted with the skeletons of drowned trees. Many animals passed through here on their annual migrations, attracted by the marsh's

particularly nutritious grasses. Zebra visited in large herds, accompanied by impala, wildebeest, giraffe, tsessebe, buffalo and elephant. Now that the river is flowing, we'd expect game densities to be much higher.

Aside from the migrants, some animals have permanent territories here. Leopard are always plentiful around the granite kopjies; the packs of spotted hyena and prides of lion are notoriously large; and a cohort of old bull elephants is always around.

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

Savute Elephant Camp has 12 palatial tents spread along the Savuti 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, minibars, hammocks and 'his and hers' washbasins in each.

Savute Safari Lodge also accommodates 24 guests in similarly large suites – notable for their contemporary wall of sliding glass doors. The wood-and-thatch construction and soft, neutral décor combine to give the lodge a modern Scandinavian feel – which extends into the impressive thatched lounge with bar and library, swimming pool and a viewing deck.

Savute under Canvas is a mobile camp (open February to early September) which uses different campsites in the Savuti area. Like Chobe under Canvas (see page 100), this small camp has five 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** also stands beside the Channel, but is about 30km northwest of Savuti Marsh, in the private Linyanti Reserve (see page 103).



Hyena occur in large clans around Savuti

