

HWANGE NATIONAL PARK

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Bordering Botswana, Hwange National Park is Zimbabwe's largest game park, extending for over 14,000km². Within this it encompasses a variety of vegetation zones, where the game and birdlife differ substantially. Outside the north of the park is a contiguous area devoted to wildlife, which stretches to the Zambezi National Park and the Zambian border.

Hwange's south is covered with Kalahari sandveld: an arid and largely flat sand-sheet overlaid with acacia and terminalia woodlands, and interspersed with patches of open grasslands (or 'vleis') – the remains of fossil river valleys. Dotted around, you'll also find some marvellously still, shady teak forests – now sadly rare elsewhere. The Kalahari has few natural sources of water, but after the rains many shallow calcrete pans do hold water, and some are now topped-up year-round by artificial pumps. These create a focus for the game, especially the large herds of elephant for which Hwange is famous.

On the northern side of Hwange, the Kalahari sands give way to hard, stony hills and plateaux, where ephemeral streams and rivers run through extensive mopane woodlands. A few have been dammed, creating a series of permanent small lakes which the animals love.

Despite the country's woes, Hwange's game densities remain good. Elephants are particularly numerous, and large buffalo herds remain, as do giraffe and a range of antelope: from kudu to roan, sable, impala and waterbuck. Gemsbok are sighted very rarely, but there is still a small population of black rhino in the north of the park. Lion, leopard and spotted hyena are the main predators; cheetah are also present, although not often seen, but Hwange is a stronghold for wild dogs, which are usually more visible.

Birdwatching can be great in Hwange, with a network of permanent water sources and high concentrations of dry-country raptors including tawny, Wahlberg's, martial and bateleur eagles. All of Hwange's camps offer 4WD game drives and walking safaris – many led by the crème de la crème of Africa's professional safari guides.

THE HIDE

Very close to the north-east side of Hwange, **The Hide** is a well-established old favourite. It has been owned and cared for by the same Zimbabwean family for years. It now has ten smart, modern, tented chalets; all have been rebuilt recently, and include a bath and an outdoor shower. The camp has a reputation for great guides, who offer walking safaris readily, and its location adjacent to the park allows night drives as an option. Safaris can be very active here if you choose, with up to four activities per day – plus several game hides to enjoy!

As part of a stay at The Hide, the adventurous can book (in advance) to sleep out for the night in a tree-house known as the **Dove's Nest**. Within a large leadwood tree in the national park, this has a toilet and shower on the ground floor, a viewing platform above that, and a gauze-and-canvas bedroom at the top.

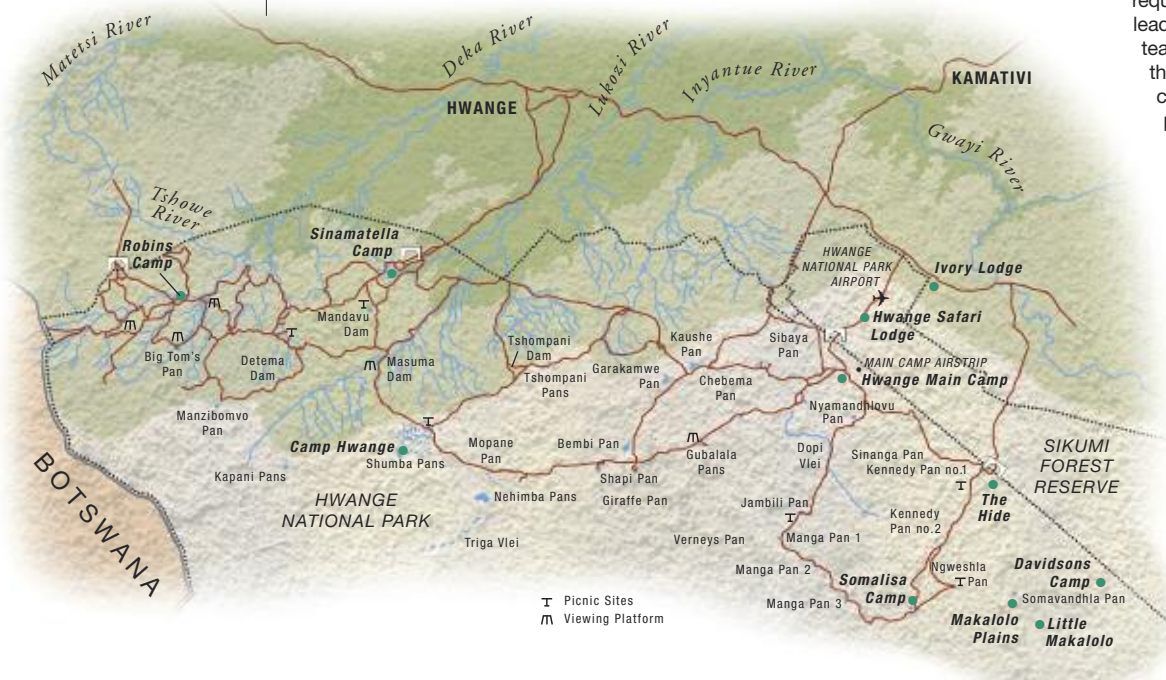
SOMALISA CAMP

Deeper into the park, **Somalisa Camp** is a classic safari camp with six lovely tents spread out in a large arc under a canopy of camelthorn trees. The en-suite bathroom at the back of each tent is open-air, complete with a bucket shower that is filled on request. Natural paths through the woodland lead to the tented mess area, where the team is friendly and the food excellent. In the dry season, elephants frequent the camp, often coming to drink at an old plunge pool that stands right in front of the dining area. Somalisa's guides are very good, and conduct walking safaris and drives within the national park.

New for 2012, **Somalisa Acacia** is a smaller private camp, built in similar style (with three twin/double tents and one family unit) about 1km from Somalisa. Its own private dining area and splash pool helps it to offer a more exclusive experience for a family or group of friends.

THE LINKWASHA & MAKALOLO WILDERNESS AREAS

The Linkwasha and Makalolo Wilderness Areas are two adjacent private concessions in the national park, south of Ngweshla Pans.





Within this large area are three sister camps: Makalolo Plains, Little Makalolo and the new Davison's Camp.

With nine tents, all raised on platforms and linked by high boardwalks, **Makalolo Plains** is a relatively old-style camp. It has comfortable, if a little lack-lustre, en-suite accommodation.

A much smarter option is the smaller **Little Makalolo**, which has six high-quality contemporary tented chalets bounded by canvas walls and vast mesh windows. Impressive use of solar energy, first-class food and a very attentive team make this perhaps Hwange's most elegant safari camp.

Close to Hwange's eastern boundary, **Davison's Camp** is relatively new. It aims to offer similar activities and experience to the Makololo camps, without the same level of luxury, or cost. We think it's succeeded quite well. Its comfortable, clean en-suite rooms are tastefully decorated and the main area is open and breezy.

CAMP HWANGE & HWANGE MOBILE CAMP

In the north of Hwange, the rugged hills around the old Sinamatella Camp form a very different environment to the Kalahari's flat plains to the south and west. In this relatively remote corner of the park we have worked closely over the last few years with a top guide who owns a small tented camp. **Hwange Mobile Camp** (formerly known as Lukozi Mobile Camp) comprises a handful of tents which are either 'luxury' (4m x 7m walk-in tents with proper beds, and an en-suite bathroom) or 'semi-luxury' (3m x 3m dome tents, with en-suite long-drop toilets sharing a nearby bucket shower). Often this is set up for 2-6 guests travelling in a private party, although it will also cater for a larger group or family. The camp includes a chef, a tracker and a 'camp hand' – as well as a top-rate professional guide. This camp is all about the experience, so everything is flexible. Expect plenty of walking and a guide who is totally at home tracking black

rhino on foot, sitting beside an approaching elephant, or explaining detailed animal behaviour on a game drive.

Hwange Mobile Camp is a great option for old Africa hands who like walking safaris and appreciate top guiding, but don't require luxurious accommodation. It is also sometimes possible to move this little camp – allowing us to organise a five- or six-night mobile safari with the same camp team and expert guide, but visiting two different areas of Hwange.

In this same area, new for 2012, the same guide is setting up **Camp Hwange**. This is the park's newest camp, and it will retain a distinctly 'bush' feel, with just six large Meru-style tents overlooking an adjacent waterhole. Each has real beds, solar lighting and an en-suite bathroom containing a flush toilet and a bucket shower. Camp Hwange offers 4WD game drives and walking safaris with the same top-quality guides who have been such a hit at the mobile camp!

Somalisa's plunge pool has become a major attraction for local elephants



Honey badgers can be pugnacious