



ON SAFARI IN BOTSWANA

**Life Here is Good
for Lovers of the Outdoors
and Natural History**

by David Skillan

I stand on the deck of my spacious tent at Xigera, a beautifully appointed camp in the Moremi Game Reserve, which is in the world-famous Okavango Delta. It's about 8 am, the sky is an azure blue, and it's sunny and already hot.

Five black-faced vervet monkeys, one with a tiny baby, are playing on the wooden walkway that connects the various tents with the lounge and dining area. A mourning dove coos close by, and in a tree a few yards away a tiny malachite kingfisher stares intently into the clear water of the delta. Two shy bushbuck does peer at me through the undergrowth before leaping away. I turn around and spy a small herd of red lechwe, a species of beautiful swamp antelope, grazing beyond the tree line. It's quiet until a baboon barks from the top of a tree.

I am back in my beloved Africa, on safari in Botswana with a dozen other adventurers—my tour members. It's day six of our safari. Tomorrow we will take a 40-minute flight in two chartered light aircraft to another gorgeous camp.

As I survey the peaceful scene, a green pigeon flies to a sausage tree and a gecko runs up the wall of my tent. As always when in Africa—no matter which of the many countries I visit—I am content. Africa does that to just about everyone who is lucky enough to visit. Life on safari is good, especially for lovers of the outdoors and natural history.

We spent our first three days at Kalahari Plains Camp, a modern facility that runs on solar energy, with friendly, eager-to-please local staff. It's one of the few tourist camps in the Kalahari Desert. After the rains, the desert is lush and green. On our first day, we came across a magnificent pair of mated lions, and



then a cheetah. Later we saw three cheetahs on the plain, within sight of the camp. We also saw a honey badger, several black-backed jackals, half a dozen ostriches, a few small herds of blue wildebeest, a couple of warthog families, countless springboks and oryx (also known as gemsbok), and numerous multicoloured birds. And we took an escorted walk with a San Bushman to learn about plants, shrubs, and the lifestyle of the San people. The first modern humans are thought to have appeared in this part of the world; DNA testing suggests that everyone on Earth descends from them.

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before dissipating into the desert sands.*

Here at Xigera, deep in the heart of the Okavango Delta, we have seen a pride of eight lions, lots of southern giraffes, and a number of common zebras. We have even glimpsed the relatively rare Pels fishing owl, which sleeps in the tall fig trees near the camp. People come from far and wide to see this bird.

This afternoon we will ride in a morokoro through a channel flanked by dense papyrus reeds. Perhaps we'll see—or at least hear—a hippo or two. If we do, we'll give it a wide berth, for hippos are extremely dangerous and much feared. They attack people who get too close, and are known to kill more people in Africa than any other animal.

The water in the delta is probably the purest in the world. It comes from the highlands of Angola to this remote area of savannah, woodland, and floodplain dotted with islands, where it dissipates into the desert sands.

No matter how often I visit this wondrous place—and I visit every January—I always find it exciting and stimulating. Like most visitors to this part of the world, I feel privileged to be here. ➔



*For information about David Skillan's annual safari in Botswana,
please visit www.skillansafaris.com/david-skillan-tours.html.*