

# Chobe National Park (Botswana)—A Safari Paradise in Africa! Absolutely Stunning!

## Level B1-B2

In the far north of Botswana, where the Chobe river flows slow and wide, there exists a place that feels older than memory: The Chobe National Park.

Covering an area of approximately 11,700 square kilometres, the park offers stunning views and visions of earth before arbitrary boundaries and mass tourism.

Entering the park feels like encroaching upon a land preserved from human eyes. Yet, there are constant reminders of the modern world: cars, cameras, boats and boots.

Our encounters with the wild animals are hurried for we must not disturb their rhythm. Most of all, we have to remain quiet and observe with respect.

This is not our land but theirs and we always have to remember that or bear the dire consequences.

The animals are free. They can go wherever they want and they can do whatever they want, including hunting.

During daytime, everything is quiet. Under the blazing sun, a pride of lions lie under the shade. One stray lion strolls back to his group. The lions look cute and regal. However, let's not forget. These are ruthless predators. For example, they prey on elephants and antelopes.

Farther on, we stumble upon a herd of small antelopes, conveniently nicknamed the McDonalds of the savannah!

They graze on the grass, peacefully unaware of the dangers around them. It is easy to cut and isolate this scene and remain in the beauty of the present.

Later on, we see some kudus. Their long, spiralling horns are truly fascinating. The white, vertical lines on their hides set them apart from other antelopes. However, it is their playful nature that captures my attention. I could stay here all day and observe this raw beauty.

It feels like the animals have been placed there, just like pieces of a natural puzzle. It is impossible to imagine them elsewhere. They fit perfectly, right where they are.

The savannah stretches as far as the eye can see. The guide continuously points at the land of the living: here lies a crocodile underneath those calm waters. Look, open your eyes! A warthog just spotted the African buffalo and now it's running away! Did you know? The African buffalo is one of the most feared animals in the savannah!

What about King Lion? I learn and I unlearn and receive the new knowledge with humility.

Elephants are abundant here and they can be spotted in large numbers. Sometimes, one spots a lone elephant, standing majestically and defying time. Sometimes, one sees whole families treading through the grass, unbothered and all conquering.

We look and stare with awe. It is true that we have seen elephants before. However, we have never seen elephants in their element, stomping their way through the grass with abandon. They eat grass, drink water from the river and spread water on their bodies to keep fresh.

A mother hippopotamus charges at us menacingly as our boat advances. Our guide carefully pulls us out from danger. Hippos can kill.

This combination of serenity and lurking danger keeps us on our toes. We know that we must be careful at all times.

Africa's beauty lures us into its interior. We see giraffes and come across a lion. He is alone and seems unbothered by the constant streams of cars. Humans pointing and humans taking pictures. At some point, I am sitting too close to this lion and our eyes lock for what seems like ages.

The guide says the lion does not see us individually. He sees the car and the people in it as one entity. My husband says: "Oh, the lion has seen you Sweetie!"

I stop filming the lion and stay lowkey. As a matter of fact, I dare not imagine what could happen if this peaceful lion turned rogue. I am relieved when the jeep starts moving again. Phew! That was a close shave!

During the boat ride, we furtively see heads of crocodiles and hippos before they disappear into the water.

My body is filled with delicious terror, this constant tension that tells you that this idyllic trip could easily turn into a horror movie.

My fears almost become true when the boat's engine stops. All of a sudden we all become quiet. We go back to our heads and we imagine what could happen with all the wildlife we have been observing. Two coast guards come and ask us what is wrong. Our driver explains and the guards leave. We are left alone. We are left to our own devices.

Luckily enough, after some interminable minutes the engine starts and our hearts are filled with joyful apprehension again.

Then, I remember that shortly before the engine stopped, I asked our guide and driver what would happen if the engine stopped.

His answer had been very descriptive: "Oh, the hippos will come into the water and cut the boat into two halves. You will all have to swim to the riverbank." We had laughed and created different scenarios where the water seemed safer than the land.

All in all, a trip to Chobe National Park is likely to be unforgettable.

I felt as if I had been dropped into Eden. Sometimes, I willed myself to shut the car and boat engines out and merely focus on the visual.

The vast expanses of land, the clear blue skies dotted with clouds that looked like cotton, the herds of animals that seemed oblivious to our piercing gaze.

It was a meeting of two worlds where for a brief moment we were allowed to see what life must have been like before modernity.

We could see how fragile all this was, especially with the coming and going of cars, boats and tourists.

How long would this last? Were the animals and nature paying a heavy price for our admiration and love that took too much?

Only the future will tell.



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