

How to Beat the Crowds in Botswana's Okavango Delta

Written by Sarah Khan
October 26, 2015

It's not even November, so that means there's plenty of time to book that spring safari, right? Think again: If the Okavango Delta in Botswana is on your bucket list—and if it isn't, it really ought to be—you're already cutting it pretty close.

Botswana's appeal as a classic safari destination is timeless:

It boasts both a great mix of topographical diversity, as well as a staggering range of activities—from elephant-back rides to river cruising—all in a fairly compact region. The Okavango Delta, with its iconic lodges, should be the first place you visit. The only catch is booking a trip before the masses do.



“If you're thinking of going next year, November-ish is the time to book it,” says Dennis Pinto, managing director of Micato Safaris. “Botswana traditionally is very hard to get space into, the camps are small, which is part of the appeal. We've always had more demand than supply.” Micato is launching a new [Cape Town to Okavango Delta itinerary](#) in March, allowing visitors to traverse the Okavango Delta by foot, by four-wheel drive, and mekoro canoe, to try to meet that demand.

While June through October is traditionally considered high season in Botswana, industry insiders prefer the rainy months: “February and March are normally the wettest months, but by far the best season in the Kalahari,” says Cherri Briggs, president of Explore Inc., who has previously lived in Botswana for many years. “As soon as the rains start, it’s an incredible place—wildflowers, cheetah hunting in the open plains, and oryx and other exotic antelope trolling the landscape,” says Briggs who also cautions against letting a little bit of moisture scare you away: “It’s a welcome rain, not a grey, gloomy rain,” she says. “The early rains are incredible as the clouds build up, creating gorgeous displays in the sky, and then it lets loose—usually just for a few minutes.”

Fortunately, a host of new lodges and eagerly awaited re-openings mean that travelers have a few more options to choose from these days. Last year, AndBeyond’s Sandibe Okavango Safari Lodge completed a rebuild that recast it in a contemporary air, with sinuous suites that envelop their inhabitants like a cocoon suites that blend seamlessly into the environment. The 12-tent Belmond Eagle Island Lodge, set on its own island in the heart of the Delta, reopens next month with mekoro, barge, and even helicopter safaris among its activities. Come April, Desert & Delta Safaris will unveil its update of Camp Okavango: The entire property will be elevated, maximizing views in all directions.

But the biggest news next year comes from Wilderness Safaris. The new nine-tent Qorokwe is set on a private concession overlooking a lagoon that’s a hit with hippos. Also on deck: the operator will be staggering the renovations of its beloved Mombo and Little Mombo camps, and opening the temporary Mombo Trails Camp to accommodate guests during the the update.

As if all this weren’t enough of an incentive, traveling to Botswana just got a bit easier, particularly if you were hoping to tack a little wine-and-beach break onto your trip: Beginning March 11, South African Airlink will launch direct flights to Maun from Cape Town, meaning flying through Johannesburg is no longer your only option.