



TOPICS

BOTSWANA'S ZEBRA MIGRATION



The mass zebra migration of Botswana occurs twice a year, as herds of zebra move first from north to south, then back from south to north. They move with the seasons and the rainfall, always in search of fresh grazing land. The zebra will cover huge tracts of land, walking over 300 miles during the course of the migrations. Up to 30,000 animals will be on the move at any one time. While it's not Africa's largest migration, it is the largest in southern Africa, and the longest migration of any land animal in the world.

THE BEST TIME AND PLACE TO EXPERIENCE BOTSWANA'S ZEBRA MIGRATION

Botswana's zebra migration can technically be experienced across the country. However, much of the route passes through remote, largely inhospitable land that's difficult to travel through. Conveniently though, the migrations start and end in two of Botswana's most spectacular national parks: Chobe National Park in the north, and Makgadikgadi Pans National Park deep in the interior to the south. The majority of visitors to Botswana will go on safari during the dry season, generally from May to November, when there is little migration taking place. During this period, you can see the herds of zebra in Chobe National Park and in the Okavango Delta where there is plentiful water. But you won't see the mass migration taking place.

The best time to see this natural spectacle of mass migration is actually during the off-season, when it rains, and when most tourists tend to stay away from Botswana. Things might get more than a little wet and muddy, but it's an incredible opportunity to see the zebra herds moving across the land by the hundreds.

Rather than attempting to see the migration in the north, it's better to head south and to do so at a time when most other tourists will be leaving Botswana completely. The best place to watch this magnificent migration is within Makgadikgadi Pans National Park, and the best time to watch it is December to January and March to April when the zebra are arriving or leaving.

THE ROUTE OF BOTSWANA'S ZEBRA MIGRATION

From May to November, the zebra will be in the north of Botswana. As the rain begins to fall at the end of November and the start of December, the zebra begin their long migration towards the interior of the Kalahari Desert. They will be on the move until January, when they reach the salt pans of Makgadikgadi. That's where they will stay until they repeat the long return journey again at the end of March, to make it back to the wet north in time for the dry season that begins again in April and May.

HOW TO TRAVEL TO MAKGADIKGADI PANS NATIONAL PARK

Makgadikgadi Pans National Park is best accessed from the small town of Gweta, which lies around 40 kilometres east of the park entrance. There are lodgings available in the village here and it's a good base to organise 4WD tours across the salt pans, as the road here will remain open even during the worst rains. Gweta can be accessed from Francistown, which in turn is connected to Botswana's capital, Gaborone.

A more intense and exciting experience is to spend a few nights' camping out in the various luxury safari camps that are found on the edge of the park. There are several of these luxurious sites, offering tented accommodation in beautiful settings. Many have their own airstrips, allowing guests to arrive and depart even if the roads in are flooded or impassable. Spending the night under the stars in Makgadikgadi Pans National Park before heading off on a game drive in the early morning to spot the huge herds of zebra migrating is a unique experience that few other tourists to Botswana ever have the opportunity to see.

WHAT TO BRING AND WHAT TO EXPECT

The best time to see Botswana's zebra migration is during the wet season. That means that it's more than likely that you will experience a torrential downpour, and you're guaranteed to get wet and muddy. Ensure you pack a lightweight waterproof coat because although it will be rainy, it will be hot and humid too. Don't forget your camera and, if you have them, bring a pair of binoculars. But make sure to keep your equipment safe in a dry bag when you aren't using it. Take a few warm clothes and try to keep them dry, because, despite the hot weather, an early morning drenching could still leave you feeling cold when you set out on safari.

The weather can make for an unpredictable travel experience, and as you are setting out to experience wildlife in its rawest form, be prepared to make last-minute changes to itineraries, to find roads closed and to wake up at the crack of dawn to have the best viewing opportunities.

