



Botswana

The Okavango Delta, the Kalahari, more elephants than any other country and a peaceful democracy built on diamonds, all in the heart of southern Africa.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Gaborone

POPULATION

About 2.4 million (2022 census: 2,359,609)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

English. Setswana is the national language and the one most people speak at home

CURRENCY

Botswana pula (BWP), divided into 100 thebe

AREA

About 581,730 km²

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary republic. The President is head of state and of government and is elected by the National Assembly

HIGHEST POINT

Otse Hill, about 1,491 m, is the figure most often given; nearby Monalanong Hill is sometimes measured a few metres higher

MAIN RIVER

The Okavango, about 1,600 km in total. It rises in Angola, crosses Namibia and ends inland in the Okavango Delta instead of the sea

NEIGHBOURS

South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia. The border with Zambia is only a short stretch of the Zambezi River near Kazungula

DRIVES ON THE

Left

CALLING CODE

+267

A 45-minute trip to Botswana

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Botswana together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 1847: Livingstone's mission at Kolobeng; 1965: Gaborone becomes the capital; 2024: Olympic gold in Paris. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Seswaa and Phaletshe. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Dumela rra" (Hello (to a man)), "Dumela mma" (Hello (to a woman)), "Dumelang" (Hello (to a group)). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/botswana/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Botswana and its cities



- Gaborone (South-East, near the South African border): The Three Dikgosi Monument, Main Mall and the government enclave, Kgale Hill, with views over the city, The setting of the No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency novels
- Francistown (North-East): Old gold mines around the town, The only city in Botswana with an English name, A busy trading and railway centre
- Molepolole (Kweneng, west of Gaborone): A large traditional kgotla, The Scottish Livingstone Hospital, A gateway to the Kalahari
- Maun (Ngamiland, in the north-west): Scenic flights and trips into the Okavango Delta, Safari and air-charter companies, The Thamalakane River
- Serowe (Central District): The royal graves of the Khama family, Khama Rhino Sanctuary nearby, Swaneng Hill School

- Kasane (Chobe, in the far north-east): Boat safaris on the Chobe River, The Kazungula Bridge to Zambia, Where Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton remarried in 1975
- Palapye (Central District): Morupule Power Station, Ruins of Khama III's old capital, Phalatswe, A stopover on the main north to south route
- Selebi-Phikwe (Central District, in the east): Copper and nickel mining history, A modern planned town, The Botswana Defence Force eastern garrison
- Lobatse (South-East, on the South African border): The Botswana Meat Commission, Botswana beef, Lobatse Stadium
- Kanye (Southern District): Pharing Gorge, a hiding place in the 19th-century wars, Kgwakgwe Hill, Two dams in the village
- Ghanzi (Ghanzi, in the western Kalahari): Cattle ranches and beef, San culture and crafts, A gateway to the Central Kalahari
- Shakawe (Ngamiland, in the far north-west): Fishing on the Okavango Panhandle, The border crossing to Namibia, Trips to the Tsodilo Hills

A short history of Botswana

Botswana's story runs from the rock painters of Tsodilo to the Tswana chiefdoms, whose leaders met their people in the kgotla, an open-air village assembly, then through eighty years as a British protectorate to independence in 1966. Since then the country has held regular multiparty elections, and in 2024 power passed peacefully to the opposition for the first time.

1847 **Livingstone's mission at Kolobeng**

The Scottish missionary David Livingstone built his third and last mission at Kolobeng, west of today's Gaborone, among the Bakwena of Kgosi (chief) Sechele I. It had a church and a school, and its ruins are now a national monument.

1852 **The Battle of Dimawe**

Boer commandos from the Transvaal attacked Sechele I and the Bakwena at Dimawe Hill. The Boers took the hill, but Sechele's counter-raids soon drove them back, and the Tswana kept their land.

1885 **The Bechuanaland Protectorate**

Britain declared a protectorate over the land of the Tswana, partly to block German and Boer expansion. The chiefs kept much of their authority, and the territory was governed from Mafeking, a town outside its own borders in today's South Africa.

1895 **Three chiefs travel to Britain**

Khama III, Sebele I and Bathoen I sailed to Britain and persuaded the government not to hand their land to Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company. They are honoured today as founders of the nation.

1897 **Francistown is founded**

A settlement grew near the Monarch gold mine in the north-east, in the area of the Tati goldfields, and was named after the English prospector Daniel Francis. It is now Botswana's second city.

1902 **Khama III founds Serowe**

Kgosi Khama III moved the capital of the Bamangwato people to a new site, Serowe, in a fertile valley. Serowe later became the birthplace of the first president, Seretse Khama.

- 1948** **Seretse Khama marries Ruth Williams**
The heir to the Bamangwato chieftainship married an English office clerk in London. Under pressure from apartheid South Africa, Britain banished the couple in 1950, and they were allowed home only in 1956. The dispute helped push the country towards elected government.
- 1965** **Gaborone becomes the capital**
The seat of government moved from Mafeking to the newly built town of Gaborone, today's Gaborone. The same year the first general election was held and the protectorate gained self-government.
- 1966** **Independence**
On 30 September 1966 the Bechuanaland Protectorate became the independent Republic of Botswana, with Seretse Khama as its first president. 30 September, Botswana Day, is still the national holiday.
- 1967** **Diamonds are found at Orapa**
A team of De Beers geologists discovered diamonds at Orapa, a year after independence. The mine opened in 1971, and diamond income paid for roads, schools and clinics across the young country.
- 1976** **The pula is introduced**
On 23 August 1976 Botswana's own currency, the pula, replaced the South African rand. Pula means 'rain' in Setswana, a precious thing in a dry land, and the day is still remembered as Pula Day.
- 1982** **The Jwaneng mine opens**
After nine years of study and building, the Jwaneng diamond mine south-west of Gaborone began production. It is run by Debswana, a partnership between the government and De Beers, and is often called the richest diamond mine in the world.
- 2001** **Tsodilo becomes World Heritage**
UNESCO added the Tsodilo Hills, with their thousands of rock paintings, to the World Heritage List. It was Botswana's first World Heritage Site.
- 2014** **The Okavango Delta joins the list**
On 22 June 2014 the Okavango Delta became the 1,000th site inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

2024

Olympic gold in Paris

The sprinter Letsile Tebogo won the 200 metres at the Paris Olympics, Botswana's first Olympic gold medal. He was 21 years old.

What people eat in Botswana

Everyday food in Botswana is simple and filling: a stiff porridge of sorghum or maize, called bogobe or phaletshe, served with a relish of meat stew, beans or cooked wild greens. Beef is the favourite meat, followed by goat, and free-range 'Setswana' chicken is the dish a host cooks to honour a guest. At weddings, funerals and national celebrations, big three-legged iron pots bubble over wood fires with seswaa, the pounded meat that is the national dish, served with samp and beans or sorghum porridge. Many dishes, such as fat cakes, maize porridge and mopane worms, are shared with neighbouring countries in southern Africa.

Seswaa

All of Botswana; also called loswao in the south

The national dish: beef or goat meat, often from tough cuts such as the neck and legs, simmered for hours with just water and salt until it falls apart, then pounded with a wooden spoon into soft shreds. It is usually cooked by men in a three-legged iron pot for weddings, funerals and Independence Day, and served with bogobe, samp or maize porridge.

Phaletshe

All of Botswana, and across southern Africa as pap

A stiff porridge made from white maize meal cooked in boiling water and stirred until thick enough to hold its shape. It is the everyday starch on many tables, eaten with meat, chicken, greens or seswaa, and a softer version with milk and sugar is eaten for breakfast.

Ting (bogobe jwa ting)

All of Botswana

Sorghum or maize meal that is left to ferment for a few days before it is cooked, which gives the porridge a pleasant sour taste. With milk and sugar it is a breakfast dish; without them it is eaten with meat or vegetables for lunch or dinner.

Bogobe jwa lerotse

All of Botswana; the Kalanga call it tophi

Sorghum porridge cooked with lerotse, a local yellow cooking melon, and often sour milk. It is soft, slightly sweet and sour, and is a traditional wedding dish, when big pots of it are served alongside the meat.

Setswana chicken stew (koko ya Setswana)

All of Botswana

Free-range village chicken, called koko ya Setswana, slow-cooked in a three-legged pot over a wood fire until tender. It is thought to be much tastier than shop-bought chicken, and cooking one for a visitor is a sign of special hospitality. It is served with phaletshe or dumplings.

Dikgobe

All of Botswana

Samp, which is dried maize kernels broken into pieces, cooked slowly with beans until thick and creamy. Dikgobe is a comforting everyday meal and a fixture at weddings, where it is served with seswaa.

Serobe

All of Botswana

A dish of tripe and intestines of a goat, sheep or cow, washed carefully, cut into small pieces and boiled until soft; for goat or sheep, the trotters go in too. It is a popular dish at ceremonies and is eaten with phaletshe or sorghum porridge.

Letlhodi

All of Botswana

Mung beans, a small green bean grown in Botswana, boiled until soft and often cooked into a thick stew. It is a cheap and nourishing dish, eaten with porridge, and letlhodi is also sold dried in shops and markets.

Morogo (morogo wa dinawa)

All of Botswana, and across southern Africa

Leafy greens, often wild or from bean plants, boiled and seasoned, sometimes with onion and tomato. Morogo wa dinawa is made from bean leaves, which are often dried in the sun so they can be eaten all year round.

Mopane worms (phane)

The mopane woodlands of northern and eastern Botswana, and neighbouring countries

The large caterpillars of the mopane emperor moth, collected from mopane trees, squeezed clean, boiled and dried. They are eaten as a crunchy snack or softened again and cooked in a tomato and onion sauce, and they are rich in protein.

Magwinya (fat cakes) (magwinya)

Across southern Africa

Balls of soft yeast dough deep-fried until golden, like a doughnut without a hole and without much sugar. They are sold hot from roadside stalls in the morning and eaten plain, with jam, or with soup or a stew.

Madila

All of Botswana

Fresh milk left to ferment into thick sour milk, much like yoghurt or sour cream. It is eaten on its own, poured over porridge, or stirred into bogobe jwa lerotse.

Dithotse

All of Botswana

Roasted melon seeds, usually from the lerotse cooking melon. They are dried, roasted and cracked open with the teeth as a snack, much as sunflower seeds are eaten elsewhere.

Bojalwa jwa Setswana (bojalwa jwa Setswana)

All of Botswana

The traditional home-brewed beer of Botswana, made from fermented sorghum. It is thick, cloudy and slightly sour, and among the Kalanga a similar beer is made from millet. It contains alcohol.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Wash your hands before and after the meal. A bowl of water is often passed round for this.
- If you eat with your hands, as many people do with porridge and meat, use your right hand.
- When you are a guest, wait for your host to start eating before you begin.
- Accept food or a drink with both hands, or with the right hand while the left hand touches the right arm. It is a sign of respect and thanks.
- Food is often shared from common dishes, especially in villages. If you really cannot eat more, decline politely rather than simply refusing.

Seswaa

The national dish: beef or goat meat, often from tough cuts such as the neck and legs, simmered for hours with just water and salt until it falls apart, then pounded with a wooden spoon into soft shreds. It is usually cooked by men in a three-legged iron pot for weddings, funerals and Independence Day, and served with bogobe, samp or maize porridge.

Ingredients

- 1.5 kg beef on the bone, such as shin, neck or brisket (or goat)
- 1 onion, halved (optional)
- About 2 litres water
- 2 teaspoons salt, or to taste

Method

1. Put the meat in a large heavy pot, ideally cast iron, add the onion and cover with water.
2. Bring to the boil, skim off any foam, then cover and simmer gently for 3 to 4 hours, topping up with hot water, until the meat falls off the bone.
3. Lift out the bones and onion, add the salt and let most of the liquid cook away.
4. Pound and stir the meat with a sturdy wooden spoon until it breaks into fine shreds, moistening it with a little of the cooking liquid.
5. Serve hot with sorghum porridge, maize porridge or samp and beans.

Bogobe jwa lerotse

Sorghum porridge cooked with lerotse, a local yellow cooking melon, and often sour milk. It is soft, slightly sweet and sour, and is a traditional wedding dish, when big pots of it are served alongside the meat.

Ingredients

- 500 g peeled, seeded yellow cooking melon or firm pumpkin, cubed
- 1 litre water
- 200 g sorghum meal (or fine maize meal)
- 250 ml sour milk (maas) or buttermilk
- A pinch of salt

Method

1. Put the melon in a pot with the water and simmer for about 20 minutes until very soft, then mash it into the water.
2. Sprinkle in the sorghum meal a little at a time, stirring hard to prevent lumps.
3. Cover and cook on low heat for about 25 minutes, stirring now and then, until thick and cooked through.
4. Stir in the sour milk and salt and cook for a few more minutes.
5. Serve warm, on its own or with seswaa.

Dikgobe

Samp, which is dried maize kernels broken into pieces, cooked slowly with beans until thick and creamy. Dikgobe is a comforting everyday meal and a fixture at weddings, where it is served with seswaa.

Ingredients

- 250 g samp (broken dried maize kernels)
- 250 g dried sugar beans or cowpeas
- 2 litres water
- 1 onion, chopped, fried in 2 tablespoons oil (optional)
- 1 teaspoon salt

Method

1. Soak the samp and beans together overnight in plenty of cold water, then drain.
2. Put them in a large pot with the water and bring to the boil.
3. Simmer gently, half covered, for 2 to 3 hours, stirring from time to time and adding hot water if it gets too dry, until both are soft.
4. Stir in the salt and the fried onion, if using, and mash lightly so the mixture becomes creamy.
5. Serve on its own or with seswaa or a meat stew.

Magwinya (fat cakes)

Balls of soft yeast dough deep-fried until golden, like a doughnut without a hole and without much sugar. They are sold hot from roadside stalls in the morning and eaten plain, with jam, or with soup or a stew.

Ingredients

- 500 g plain flour
- 7 to 10 g (1 sachet) instant dried yeast
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- About 350 ml lukewarm water
- Vegetable oil for deep-frying

Method

1. Mix the flour, yeast, sugar and salt in a large bowl.
2. Add the water little by little and knead for about 8 minutes into a soft, slightly sticky dough.
3. Cover and leave in a warm place for about an hour, until doubled in size.
4. Heat the oil in a deep pan to about 170 °C. Pull off golf-ball-sized pieces of dough and fry a few at a time for 3 to 4 minutes, turning, until golden and cooked inside.
5. Drain on kitchen paper and eat warm. Take great care with hot oil, and never leave the pan unattended.

Useful phrases

Dumela rra

doo-MEH-lah RRAH · Hello (to a man)

Dumela mma

doo-MEH-lah MMAH · Hello (to a woman)

Dumelang

doo-meh-LAHNG · Hello (to a group)

O tsogile jang?

oh tsoh-KHEE-leh JAHNG · How are you? (literally: how did you wake up?)

Ke tsogile sentle

keh tsoh-KHEE-leh SEN-tleh · I am well

O amogetswe

oh ah-moh-KHEH-tswah · Welcome

Ke a leboga

keh ah leh-BOH-khah · Thank you

Tswée-tswée

TSWEH-tswah · Please

Ke kopa tshwarelo

keh KOH-pah tshwah-REH-loh · I am sorry

Intshwarele

in-tshwah-REH-leh · Excuse me

Leina la me ke...

LAY-nah lah meh keh · My name is...

Leina le gago ke mang?

LAY-nah leh KHAH-khoh keh MAHNG · What is your name?

A o bua Setswana?

ah oh BOO-ah seh-TSWAH-nah · Do you speak Setswana?

Ga ke tlhaloganye

khah keh tlhah-loh-KHAHN-yeh · I do not understand

E ke bokae?

eh keh boh-KAH-eh · How much is this?

Ke kopa...

keh KOH-pah · I would like...

Tsamaya sentle

tsah-MAH-yah SEN-tleh · Go well (goodbye)

Sala sentle

SAH-lah SEN-tleh · Stay well (goodbye)

Pula!

POO-lah · Rain! (a blessing and a toast)

Things you might not know

- 1.** The name Botswana means 'land of the Tswana'. In Setswana the prefix tells you the rest: one person is a Motswana, the people are Batswana and the language is Setswana.
- 2.** Pula, the name of the currency, means 'rain' in Setswana, and 'Pula!' is also the national motto and a popular toast. The small coins are called thebe, which means 'shield'.
- 3.** As of the 2022 KAZA aerial survey, Botswana had an estimated 131,909 elephants, more than any other country in the world.
- 4.** The Okavango River never reaches the sea. It spreads out into the Okavango Delta, where almost all of its water evaporates or is taken up by plants.
- 5.** The Okavango Delta was the 1,000th site ever added to the UNESCO World Heritage List, on 22 June 2014.
- 6.** The flood in the Okavango Delta is highest between June and August, in Botswana's dry winter, because the water takes months to arrive from the rains in Angola.
- 7.** For its whole 80 years as a British protectorate, Bechuanaland was run from Mafeking, a town outside its own borders, in what is now South Africa. Gaborone was built as a new capital in the mid-1960s.
- 8.** At independence in 1966 Botswana had only 22 university graduates and was one of the poorest countries in the world. Diamond income helped pay for schools, roads and clinics.
- 9.** Orapa is the world's largest diamond mine by area, and its name is said to mean 'resting place for lions'. As of September 2026, the Jwaneng mine is often described as the richest diamond mine in the world.
- 10.** About 70 percent of Botswana lies in the Kalahari, a sandy savanna rather than a desert of bare dunes.
- 11.** The Central Kalahari Game Reserve covers 52,800 km², which is larger than the Netherlands and almost a tenth of Botswana.
- 12.** The Makgadikgadi Pans are what remains of an ancient lake that was once larger than Switzerland.

13. Mma Precious Ramotswe, the heroine of Alexander McCall Smith's novel *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* (1998), opens her detective agency in Gaborone.
14. In August 2024 the sprinter Letsile Tebogo won the 200 metres at the Paris Olympics, Botswana's first Olympic gold medal.

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Botswana, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Seswaa or Phaletshe? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- The pula is introduced (1976). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- The Jwaneng mine opens (1982). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen Okavango Delta, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Botswana, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Botswana?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. The Makgadikgadi Pans are the remains of an ancient lake.

- A) True
- B) False

2. What is ting?

- A) A sweet melon drink
- B) Strips of dried meat
- C) A bean stew
- D) A sour porridge made from fermented sorghum or maize

3. Where were diamonds discovered in 1967, a year after independence?

- A) Jwaneng
- B) Lobatse
- C) Orapa
- D) Kasane

4. The Central Kalahari Game Reserve is larger than the Netherlands.

- A) True
- B) False

5. Which Botswana mine is the world's largest diamond mine by area?

- A) Orapa
- B) Selebi-Phikwe
- C) Morupule
- D) Jwaneng

6. What does the word 'pula' mean in Setswana?

- A) Rain
- B) Sun
- C) Money
- D) Cattle

7. Baines' Baobabs stand in which national park?

- A) Nxai Pan National Park
- B) Moremi Game Reserve
- C) Central Kalahari Game Reserve
- D) Chobe National Park

8. 'Tsamaya sentle' is said to a person who is arriving.

- A) True
- B) False

9. In the Okavango Delta, what is a mokoro?

- A) A hot-air balloon
- B) A dugout-style canoe
- C) A riverside lodge
- D) An open safari truck

10. Who became the first president of Botswana at independence in 1966?

- A) Khama III
- B) Seretse Khama
- C) Sechele I
- D) Bathoen I

11. Which dish of slow-boiled, pounded beef or goat meat is Botswana's national dish?

- A) Magwinya
- B) Serobe
- C) Dikgobe
- D) Seswaa

12. The Bechuanaland Protectorate was governed from Mafeking, a town outside its own borders.

- A) True
- B) False

Quiz answers

1. True

True. The salt pans are what is left of Lake Makgadikgadi, which was once larger than Switzerland.

2. D) A sour porridge made from fermented sorghum or maize

Tsing is a sour porridge made from fermented sorghum or maize: the meal is fermented for a few days before cooking. With milk and sugar it is eaten for breakfast.

3. C) Orapa

De Beers geologists found diamonds at Orapa in 1967. Jwaneng was found later, in 1973, and opened in 1982.

4. True

True. The reserve covers 52,800 km², larger than the Netherlands and almost a tenth of Botswana.

5. A) Orapa

Orapa is the largest diamond mine by area. Jwaneng is often called the richest, Selebi-Phikwe mined copper and nickel, and Morupule is a coal mine.

6. A) Rain

Pula means rain, precious in a dry country. It is the name of the currency, the national motto and a popular toast.

7. A) Nxai Pan National Park

Baines' Baobabs grow in Nxai Pan National Park, on a small island in Kudiakam Pan, and are named after the artist Thomas Baines, who painted them in 1862.

8. False

False. Tsamaya sentle means 'go well' and is said to someone who is leaving.

9. B) A dugout-style canoe

A mokoro is a dugout-style canoe, narrow and pushed along with a pole through the shallow channels of the delta.

10. B) Seretse Khama

Seretse Khama, heir to the Bamangwato chieftainship, led the country from 1966. Khama III, Sechele I and Bathoen I were 19th-century chiefs.

11. D) Seswaa

Seswaa is meat boiled with just salt for hours and then pounded. Serobe is tripe, dikgobe is

samp and beans, and magwinya are fat cakes.

12. True

True. The protectorate was run from Mafeking, now Mahikeng in South Africa, until the capital moved to the new town of Gaberones, today's Gaborone, in 1965.

Botswana visa page

Name: _____ Date: _____



Next stops

Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____
Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____

Play the interactive version, collect a stamp in your passport:

<https://worldstroll.com/countries/botswana>