

VISITING BOTSWANA (Travel tips/Quick Checklist) LIST OF REQUIREMENTS AND ALSO SOME THINGS TO REMEMBER

Following a visit to the northern part of Botswana, herewith a (not so) brief list of important things to remember!

1. You need the following:

- i. Valid Passports for all adults and children alike. Children under 18 MUST have an unabridged birth certificate (apply in time as it takes some time to get one from Home Affairs). Passports must not expire within 6 months of the visit and must have at least one blank page for every country you will visit. South African passport holders do not need visas for tourism less than 90 days. Botswana do not allow temporally/emergency passports (including those from South Africa) unless you have a specific, upfront visa issued for it.

ii. Vehicle and trailer documents:

Firstly, a certified photocopy of your vehicle e-Natis vehicle registration certificate (RC1) (also for trailers). Many South African banks take in vehicle registration documents when financing vehicles—just call them for a certified copy of your registration certificate (it takes about three days).

Secondly, if your vehicle is under bank finance or you are not the registered owner of the vehicle or trailer, a letter from the bank or owner (with ID) authorising the cross border of the vehicle. This letter together with a copy of the RC1 registration certificate were accepted in Botswana, Namibia and Zambia. Remember to make a plain paper copy of any thermal fax paper versions. If your vehicle is not under finance you must still bring its (certified) registration document(s) with. Same applies to rental cars (with authorisation letter from rental company).

Thirdly, A Letter from your vehicle insurance company confirming by letter (fax) that your vehicle is insured and for which countries. This will typically cover all Southern African countries excluding Tanzania and Angola (you will have to get special insurance for your vehicle when visiting those countries).

- iii. South African card-type drivers' licenses are accepted — no need for South Africans to get international drivers licenses for Botswana, Zambia and Namibia at least! NB Tip: Make a certified photocopy of your passport and driver's license and keep it in a separate place in our vehicle – if you lose a wallet or something then you have a back-up for the many road blocks you will come by!
- iv. All South African registered vehicles and trailers must have a “ZA” sticker on the back.
- v. Two red warning triangles (with red reflectors) inside your vehicle (especially for Zambia/Namibia) and also reflector jackets (yellow, red or lime green). Apparently some checkpoints are now asking for fire extinguishers in Botswana.

(Also note the special reflector requirements for vehicles entering Zimbabwe, including a fire extinguisher).
- vi. You MUST pay road levies in Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia — these are obtained at border posts and cost approximately the equivalent of 100—350 Pulas per vehicle depending on where you want to travel to. Trailers typically cost an additional 30 to 100 Pulas. There is sometimes a per person fee of between 35 and 60 pula.

If the border officials don't offer the road tax, ask for it, because you will have to show these road tax documents at the road blocks you will come across (and will be fined if you don't have it.)

Botswana border posts now refuse SA Rands and USD. Must have Pulas. At some border posts you can still pay with Rand (but with a steep exchange rate of 100 Pula = R200) but it varies between border posts. In December we could not pay with rands at Zeerust. Rather have Pulas. Also remember a pen or two to write with at the border post!

- vii. Botswana, Namibia and Zambia do not require special 3rd party insurance (as do Mozambique and Zim) as they only have a road tax. It is therefore important that your vehicle is insured through a SA Insurer.
- viii. Botswana traffic officials are starting to enforce a by-law prohibiting loose luggage and stuff on the back seat of vehicles unless it is secured by a net. Same applies to luggage on a roof-rack – must be fully secured with a net or canvas)
- ix. It is important that you declare all valuables on the SARS Customs Declaration Form when leaving SA as this form is often checked upon returning (ask for it if they don't offer it). Remember to declare all major electronic equipment, GPS's, laptops, cameras, binoculars, fridges and especially diesel/petrol in Jerry cans, etc. It is recommended to use up diesel/petrol in Jerry cans prior to returning to SA as these often create unnecessary explanations/problems at border posts.
- x. Keep ALL receipts/documents (i.e. the SARS form) in a single file as you are required to show them at Police checkpoints and even at Border posts when returning. Officials get irritated when you don't have them close by.

- xi. Check your vehicle licence annual expiry date – renew it beforehand if it is going to expire during your trip!
 - xii. NB Remember that any border post you cross actually consists of TWO border posts, one each for the two countries and that you have to register and get documented at both sides! Don't just drive through after the first one!
 - xiii. Most border posts have different open times during summer/winter. In winter Martin's Drift border post is open 08:00-18:00 (summer 06:00-22:00?). Things go SLOWLY in Africa and you must in general plan for at least 1 hour to pass through both sides of any border post. Even South Africa's fancy new border post at Zeerust was slow because of lack of staff actually working (long queues) but it is at least a lot better than at Bait Bridge!! The SAPS Police officials at the border post tried to elicit cold drinks and food from us (sad sight).
2. Check with your medical aid or health insurance company that you have medical aid cover in Botswana/Namibia. Many do, but just make sure.
 3. Main roads are mostly tarred and in reasonable condition (you don't need a 4x4 to travel between major towns). Watch out for the occasional pot-hole! Zambia/Zim is a different story and you need to be careful with their many potholes (the road from Gazankulu to Livingston is however in reasonably good condition and passes through a nature reserve. Also the road from Livingston to Katima Molilo via the new bridge).

Lesser roads in Botswana are virtually all 4x4 (lots of sand) and I don't think you should risk it with a 4x2 vehicle (not even with a diff-lock and most certainly not in the summer rainy season). Some 2-spoor tracks have very high middle sections and I have noticed that Unimogs and other big 4x4's have damaged some of these smaller roads to such an extent that trailers will be dragged along their axels and low clearance, soft roader 4x4s cannot drive on them at all.
 4. When driving remote off-road and sandy roads, the time it takes to drive them is much, much more important than the actual *kilometres*. Some new GPS maps (such as Tracks4Africa) now include this information. Check this carefully as failing to do so can leave you stranded in the wilderness by nightfall, far from your destination.
 5. Avoid driving alone in Botswana as a breakdown can be tough to deal with on isolated roads and also the long stretches of main roads between towns (no cell phone reception/no help/no water!). Always have extra drinking water, basic spares and tools with you (including a spare fuel and air filter, fan belts and putty to plug leaks, etc). Also have a good quality tow-rope with you (not a local hardware shop "nylon ski rope" or a local supermarket "tow-rope" (= inferior quality!)
Important: The 4x4 rule "Never drive remote roads alone" is of critical importance in Botswana and Namibia.
 6. Driving at night in Botswana is very dangerous (*I cannot emphasise this enough!*). There are literally thousands of cattle and game roaming free with no road-side fences and hitting such an animal at night can not only be lethal, but will most certainly damage your vehicle. Good quality driving lights (also with a wide angle spread) are essential and even then I don't think that it can be safe driving faster than 70 km/h at night. Near Nata we came across two pitch black elephants in the road—be careful and don't be drawn into driving faster by the end of the day when you are tired or when getting close to your destination. Ask your passengers to be alert and to assist you with looking out for animals. Kudu for instance will often tend to jump at you from the side, across the vehicle's lights.

Better still, plan your trips to arrive at your destination before nightfall.
 7. The speed limit on open roads is 120 km/h but you will often come across speed limits varying between 60 to 80 km/h when approaching villages and crossings. We have come across a few speed traps (all radar/laser based) in these lower speed zones - so be careful—you will get caught if ignoring them (even in very small villages!) and spot fines are rather hefty I understand (i.e. > R500). Insist on an official receipt.
 8. Road side toilet facilities (i.e. at garages) are generally in very poor condition and most of the time simply filthy. Remember your own toilet paper (for the whole trip!) and physical hygiene protection for toilet seats.

When driving through Nata I recommend that you stop at Nata Lodge (appr 10 km south/before Nata) and rather have the courtesy of buying a cup of coffee in their restaurant just to use their clean facilities (after 200 km from Francis Town you will want to do it anyway!).

Look out for well-known garages such as Engen, BP that appear looked-after. They also tend have "pay-to-use" toilets (2 Pulas) – these are better and cleaner but remember to keep your Pula change for this! We found clean toilet facilities at Martin's Drift Petrol Station, Francistown, Nata Lodge (NOT the town itself), Maun, Kasane.
 9. Petrol and diesel are both less expensive in Botswana than in SA (lower taxes)—there is an excellent garage (with convenience shop) just across the Martin's Drift border in Botswana where you can fill up for less than in SA. On this topic, diesel and petrol are sourced from South Africa and are generally available in all major towns in Botswana—one must however remember that some of these towns are more than 300km apart and it is important that you plan your routes and fuel.
 10. There are occasionally smaller filling stations in between towns, but they are likely to have low pump rates and dirty tanks—so don't risk planning to use them if not an emergency (we came across three Dutch intern doctors stuck with a

dirty diesel problem). Kasane apparently has at times fuel supply problems (Zimbabweans buying fuel there). Gweta and Sehitha are also often without diesel and petrol. At least one pre-filled 20 litre emergency can is strongly recommended in case you are forced to drive to next town for fuel.

11. ATM's for cash withdrawals can be found in larger towns and even some villages, although I recommend that you only draw money during office hours in case something goes wrong with the transaction. Some SA banks require you to register your card for international cash withdrawals. Also watch out for "scanning" and other defrauding devices fitted to ATM's and don't accept 'friendly help' at ATM's when drawing cash.
12. You can use credit cards in bigger stores and increasingly at garages for petrol. It appears that Visa cards maybe more widely used than MasterCard. I hardly saw any American Express or Diners Club signs.
13. Inform your bank's Credit Card Division of your travels prior to leaving and also ask them to authorise your Garage/Petrol Card for SADEC country fuel purchases even at South African supplied garages, such as Shell, BP, Engen, etc. (we often found it to be the case in Namibia, although less in Botswana). You can often pay with credit cards for fuel, but check this first prior to filling up. Always have cash (Pulas/Rands) available as Plan B!

It is recommended to temporarily double your day limit for fuel purchases on Petrol Cards as most SA banks only allow one full tank's worth per day and will decline second transactions. Credit cards are just easier.

14. There are nowadays surprisingly many South African convenience shops in Botswana's bigger towns (not small ones). Shops such as Spar, Shoprite, OK, Garage Quick Shops, etc are frequently found and were well stocked. We even got fresh veggies, milk, meat, personal hygiene stuff, etc in the larger shops (Namibian shops also sell beer!). Prices are only 10 – 25% more expensive than in SA and we could pay with credit cards in most places.

Note: If I knew this upfront we would have taken less tinned food, beer, cold drinks and bottled water with us and rather have bought them over there as required. This would have saved precious space and weight in our vehicle (and avoid bringing lots of unused food all the way back to SA!). However, plan for such purchases only in bigger towns.

15. There are veterinary check points (road blocks) and you will often be checked for meat or fresh dairy products. Botswana is serious about protecting itself against Foot and Mouth Disease (found in Zimbabwe, etc). Do not bother to have lots of meat with you—there is a real chance of it being confiscated, especially when driving back from the north! There are even veterinary "red zones" inside Botswana and you will sometimes not even be allowed to move meat bought inside Botswana, i.e. especially from the north to the south. We did however manage to take meat from SA all the way to Vic Falls, but not back south. There are very strict controls close to the northern borders of Botswana/Zim and all our meat (even vacuum-packed) and milk/cheese will be confiscated when entering Botswana from Katima Molilo (Namibia). Buying meat inside Botswana is unfortunately not that easy and we could buy meat only at supermarkets in bigger towns (i.e. Gaborone, Palapye, Kasane, Maun, Katima Molilo).
16. It is possible to drive from Johannesburg to Nata during day time (winter), but then you must leave Martin's Drift by not later than 12:00. If you want to drive to the north (Kasane) you will need another 3 hours (at night 5 hours). As most of the 300km road between Nata and Kasane is dead straight and with pot holes and many animals—be careful that tiredness don't overcome you! It is recommended that you don't try to drive further than Nata.

A note about driving from Gauteng to Namibia (i.e. to Buitepos/Zelda's Farm) – this is a 1,100 km drive and be mindful of the times that the border posts close. Unless you leave Gauteng *very* early (i.e. before 3:00) you may not make it in time before the Buitepos border post closes. Have the details of Khalahari Arms Hotel/campsite in Ghanzi at hand as a Plan B.

17. The ferry between Botswana (Kazangula near Kasane) and Zambia is unreliable. Plan for delays at the ferry/border post (typically 1.5 hrs.). Entering Zambia is pretty expensive (i.e. R1,000 for family of 4 with a trailer). The ferry costs appr US\$20 (\$25 with trailer). Also have a Plan "B" if the ferry is broken i.e. to go from Kasane to the Vic Falls Bridge via Zimbabwe. The whole ferry ordeal is however worthwhile (an "experience") and the Zambian road to Livingston is also reasonably good and goes through a nature reserve (no fee).

Border fees to Zim: You have to pay a "Carbon tax" of appr. US\$25.00 p.p , Road tax of \$35 per vehicle and \$10.00 per trailer (cash only) and also US\$10 in cash at the boom gate (Yes!!). The carbon tax could be paid with a credit card.

18. There are a limited number of good camping sites along major routes and you don't have to make reservations ahead of time (although you can if you want to, especially during peak periods or if you want stay in a chalet). We can recommend the following camp sites (which all have warm water showers): Martin's Drift, Itumela (Palapye – about 3km off the main road), Nata Lodge, Toro Lodge (Kasane), Drotsky's Cabins, Maramba Lodge (Livingstone, Zambia).

On the Trans-Kalahari Corridor road, the best overnight accommodation is just across the border in Namibia (Zelda's Farm), but check your time carefully as you have to leave SA very early to get there before dark. Alternative is the Kang Ultra Stop Guest House chalets or the Kalahari Arms Hotel in Ghanzi (there are a number of good places in Ghanzi).

Vic Falls Campsite was good.

I personally recommend visiting the Vic Falls from the Zim-side rather than from the Zambian-side (very primitive, limited

view).

19. Bigger towns apparently have clean drinking water from taps, but I don't think it can be relied upon to be always safe...don't risk upset stomachs on a bush trip! Rather use bottled water (which can be easily bought in Botswana) or use water sterilising tablets if you have to use local water (buy these in SA before you leave). Also check every time with campsite owners if they have safe water (some use unsafe river water rather than boreholes).
20. There are not many pharmacies in the rural areas of Botswana/Zambia—rather buy your medicines in South Africa. If you use prescription/chronic medicines, rather obtain enough for your trip prior to leaving SA (arrange it with your Medical Aid).
21. Make sure you have a well thought through medical emergency kit to suit your family's particular needs (for adults and your kids alike). Kids (and some adults!) are often much more adventuress on these trips than normal so don't forget medicines for small wounds, scratches, sprained ankles, etc!
22. Malaria remains a problem in countries north of South Africa and it is strongly recommended to consult your doctor before leaving South Africa. We came across surprisingly many mosquitoes in the north for mid-winter—so be careful! Prevention against being bitten by mosquitoes in the 1st place is important and you are urged to also use anti-mosquito spray (or cream lotion) which must be used generously in the morning but especially in the afternoon and evening. Also wear long trousers, closed shoes and long-sleeved shirts after dusk. We also burnt anti-insect coils/candles every evening.
Yellow fever certificates are not required for Botswana/Namibia/Zimbabwe when entering from South African borders.
23. Although it is difficult to give guidelines on how much cash you need, I would recommend at least 2,000 Pulas per week (Jun 2016) for a family of 4 (excludes accommodation and fuel). Border crossings must now be paid in Pulas (cash only) although Rands are accepted at inflated exchange rates. Pulas can be obtained from some South African Banks.
For Botswana/Namibia it is often the easiest to draw cash from ATM's in larger towns. Remember to use 4-digit Pins for your cards as far as possible.
Zambia Kwachas cannot be obtained from SA banks and you have to change money in Zambia (be careful of road side money traders—they will rip you off if you don't know the exchange rates!). South African Rands are widely accepted in Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe (also a bit in Zambia although they prefer US\$), but again you must check the exchange rate offered! We could pay the ferry at Kazangula to Zambia with Rands.
24. We found winter night temperatures colder than expected—remember warm clothes/jackets for the night and light weight but warm blankets to put on top of sleeping bags. Day temperatures are mild to hot so also remember enough short sleeved clothes for day-time!
25. A map-based GPS is strongly recommended (unless you only drive on main roads). I have found Tracks4Africa (for Garmin) to be the best (Garmin's own topo Garmaps are also getting better). Personally I also prefer to use a good paper map and Tracks4Africa's and InfoMaps are all good. See: <http://www.tracks4africa.com/>, <http://www.infomap.co.za>, etc. Ask Kevin Bolton's Warehouse, Safari 4x4, etc for GPS and maps advice if you are not sure.
26. Cell phone reception (same GSM type as South Africa) is limited to towns and larger villages only – virtually no road side reception. 3G data access limited to larger towns only. Watch out for very expensive data roaming costs. Use a local Sim card rather, although registration is cumbersome and they now need proof of physical address as well.
27. As there is limited cell phone reception, Google Mobile Maps are of little use unless you pre-load maps. Watch out for expensive data roaming costs if your cell phone attempts to download maps - rather avoid using your cell phone maps program at all and disable data roaming on your phone if you can!

Thanks also for the many contributions so far! Please let me know if you want to change or add something (especially after your trip!?)

Disclaimer: Although we try to verify information, no responsibility whatsoever can be accepted for the correctness of the information presented here (procedures often change – please check it personally). Use all information at your own risk.

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Christiaan Mostert support@thinkingstyles.biz

South Africa

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(Victoria Falls, Zambia, Caprivi, Okavango Swamps, Chobe, Trans-Kalahari Corridor, Kgalagadi *Transfrontier* Park; Kubu, Caprivi)