

# Botswana Gem

**Cate Mackenzie explains why you might want to save visiting Botswana for a rainy day.**

**I**n Botswana's Okavango Delta there is a special time of year called the Emerald Season that occurs during the rainy summer months, from late November through to April. Few people realise, despite this being the wet season, that this is a time with its own special magic. Rain promotes lush growth that sparkles green under hot skies, plains are carpeted with tall grasses, and parched land is flushed with thickets and forests in full foliage. Visitors are comparatively scarce despite it being a less expensive time of year to visit.



Lions fighting over a kill



Giraffe and young

The rains are greatly welcomed by the locals, and the days are actually beautiful and warm between bouts of heavy showers. As long as you have a good sense of humour and don't mind getting drenched in an occasional downpour, it is easy to appreciate the wet weather wildlife encounters.

Admittedly, animals hidden in thick vegetation are harder to find and may be seen less often, but when you do stumble across game the waiting is worthwhile. Animals disperse from waterholes due to increased surface waters, and the abundant food coincides with the birthing of herbivores. It is wonderful to find huge animal nurseries full of tiny newborns tottering around on their wobbly legs, or minute warthogs emerging nervously from burrows.

The proliferation of vulnerable animals is reflected in increased predator activity, and their population can grow as they may also time birth to coincide with plentiful food. With a bit of luck and patience, spectacular sightings may come your way, such as the time I landed in the pouring rain just in time to see lions stalk and kill a warthog at the end of the airstrip. On another occasion, after an hour's drive through the rain I was rewarded with a pack of endangered wild dogs. I sat and watched as they huddled together, raindrops dripping from their forlorn faces.

Boat and mokoro trips are still possible on permanent watercourses where you pass through a maze of streams and narrow channels overhung with thick papyrus, gliding across glassy waters, watching fish in the clear depths and hearing the wind rustle through towering reeds. Once, after a storm had abated, I

took a boat to Gudigwe Island's yellow-billed stork colony only to be halted abruptly by three bull elephants swimming across our path. Not bad for a rainy afternoon.

Without a doubt, birding in Botswana is exceptional and it is home to many beautiful species throughout the year. Several migratory birds arrive in the summer months from across the continent and beyond, including swallows, rollers and even Steppe buzzards from as far as Russia. Flocks of pratincoles and skimmers swoop low across water, white-fronted bee-eaters re-excavate nests, and little bee-eater colonies cram onto small perches, swaying in the breeze.

Bird behaviour can be intriguing, and mating displays and colourful breeding plumage are prominent during summer. Male weavers fuss over their intricate nests and the aerial displays of red-crested korhaans provide endless amusement as the males call out, then rocket several metres high before plummeting back to earth. Seems rather daft to me!

One final positive outcome of the weather are the remarkable sunsets. Each time the sun slips beyond the horizon, the sky takes on a life of its own with striking colours and striations ever-changing through the cloud formations. So, when you next plan a trip to Botswana it is well worth discovering the Emerald Season for yourself. Not only is it more affordable, you can have an unpredictable, though thoroughly magical experience of your own in the rain.

**Cate Mackenzie**  
Botswana Specialist



▲ Hippopotamus feeding



## WEB PLUS

[www.audleytravel.com/botswana](http://www.audleytravel.com/botswana)  
Details of travel to Botswana



Okavango Delta ▼



Female leopard and cub



Little bee-eaters



## FACT FILE

A nine-night trip incorporating three Delta camps and including return flights starts from £3,295 per person. Please contact Cate or Roger on 01993 838 530.

