

# Botswana



## KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1966
Population:	1,950,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	3.6% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 98
Official languages:	Setswana, English
Time:	GMT plus 2hr
Currency:	pula (P)

## Geography

Area:	582,000 sq km
Coastline:	none
Capital:	Gaborone

The Republic of Botswana is a large, roughly circular, landlocked plateau in the centre of Southern Africa, bordered by South Africa, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

**Main towns:** Gaborone (capital, pop. 230,900 in 2009), Francistown (96,300), Molepolole (72,100), Selebi-Phikwe (57,200), Mogoditshane (56,300), Maun (56,000), Serowe (52,300), Mahalapye (49,100), Kanye (48,400), Mochudi (46,700), Palapye (35,100), Lobatse (33,700), Tlokweng (30,400) and Ramotswa (21,700). Most of Botswana's main settlements are in the south-east of the country.

**Topography:** The average elevation of the country is 1,000m. To the south-east are hills, the highest being 1,491m Otse Mountain near Lobatse. In the north-west are the Tsodilo Hills, famous for rock-paintings. Also in the north-west, the Okavango river flows into an enormous inland delta, home of a great variety of wildlife. To the north-east is the salt desert of the Makgadikgadi Pans. However, about 85% of the country consists of the tableland of the Kalahari desert, a vast sandveld.

**Climate:** Botswana lies across the Tropic of Capricorn. The climate ranges from semi-arid through subtropical to temperate. Eastern Botswana is temperate, with enough rainfall to support arable farming, but rainfall decreases and temperature range increases westwards and southwards. Summer (October to April) is the rainy season and is very hot. Rainfall varies from 650mm per annum in the east to 230mm in the south-west. May to October is usually dry. In winter the nights can be cold and sometimes frosty, especially in the desert. Mean maximum temperature at Gaborone is 32.5°C. From August, annual seasonal winds cross the Kalahari from the west, raising dust and sandstorms.

## did you know?

Novelist and human rights campaigner Unity Dow was appointed a High Court judge in 1998, the first woman to hold the post.

Botswana is one of seven landlocked Commonwealth countries, all of which are in Africa and, with population density of 3 per sq km, it is among the most sparsely populated states in the Commonwealth.

Botswana was the largest producer of gem-quality diamonds in the world in 2009.

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issues are overgrazing, desertification and limited resources of fresh water.

**Vegetation:** Mostly dry savannah with grasslands and thornbush to semi-desert and some true desert. Acacia, bloodwood and Rhodesian teak trees in the forest in the north-west. Forest covers 21% of the land area, having declined at 1.0% p.a. 2000–07. Arable land comprises 0.7% of the total land area.

**Wildlife:** Wildlife is protected in the three national parks and five game reserves, extending to 105,000 sq km or 18.5% of the total land area. The Okavango Delta supports a world-famous variety of water-birds and attracts thousands of animals in the dry season. The Chobe National Park, also in the north, has more than 50,000 elephants. The Gemsbok National Park abuts South Africa's Kalahari Gemsbok NP, which together make one of the world's biggest wilderness regions. The country has recorded 164 species of mammals, six of which are threatened with extinction.

**Transport:** There are 25,800km of roads, 33% paved. The north–south highway links South Africa with Zambia. The Trans-Kalahari highway, completed in 1998, links Botswana to Walvis Bay on the Namibian coast, shortening the route between Johannesburg and the Namibian capital, Windhoek, and opening up the hitherto inaccessible western regions of the country.

The 888-km railway line runs north–south along the eastern side of the country from Plumtree in Zimbabwe to the border with South Africa. Exports from Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Southern Africa use this line to reach the South African ports of Durban and Richards Bay. Local railway lines service Botswana's mining industries.

Air services operate to several regional destinations plus regular domestic flights between Gaborone and Francistown, Maun, Selebi-Phikwe, Ghanzi, Pont Drift and Kasane.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km: 3  
 Life expectancy: 55 years  
 Net primary enrolment: 87%

**Population:** 1,950,000 (2009); 60% lives in urban areas; growth 1.5% p.a. 1990–2009, with rapid growth in urban areas; birth rate 24 per 1,000 people (46 in 1970); life expectancy 55 years, down from a peak of 63 years in the early 1990s, as a result of AIDS (52 in 1970).

Around 80% of the people are of Setswana-speaking origin and most of the rest of Kalanga-speaking origin. Bushmen (i.e. San or Basarwa), Herero, Mbukushu, Yei and Mazezuru, whites and others constitute the balance.

**Language:** Setswana is the national language; English is an official language.

**Religion:** Most people are Christians (72% in 2001 census) or hold traditional beliefs. Traditional religions incorporate some Christian practices.

**Media:** The government-owned *Daily News* is published in English and Setswana, and *Mmegi* is an independent daily. There are several privately owned weeklies including *The Botswana Gazette*

(Wednesday, since 1985), *Botswana Guardian* (weekend) and *The Midweek Sun*.

Botswana's media has a long tradition of lively public debate. Press circulation is limited to urban areas and radio is the main source of information for most people. Radio Botswana is the public service, broadcasting in Setswana and English. Public service TV, Botswana Television, was launched in 2000. There are a number of privately owned radio and TV stations.

Some 9% of households have TV sets (2006). There are 63 personal computers (2008) and 62 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

**Education:** Public spending on education was 7.9% of GDP in 2009. There are 12 years of school starting at age seven, comprising seven years of primary and five of secondary. The private sector provides about one-third of secondary places. Some 87% of pupils complete primary school (2005). The school year starts in January. The Brigades movement, now established throughout the Commonwealth, was founded in Serowe by Patrick van Rensburg to provide vocational training in skilled trades for early school-leavers.

There are about 30 vocational and technical training centres, four teacher-training colleges, two colleges of education and one university, the University of Botswana. A second public university, the Botswana International University of Science and Technology at Palapye, was due to open and admit its first students in March 2011. The Institute of Development Management accepts students from throughout the region. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 115:100 (2006). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 95% (2008).

**Health:** There are some 30 hospitals and more than 500 clinics and health centres. Malaria is endemic in northern Botswana. 95% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 60% have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Infant mortality was 43 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (118 in 1960). In 2009, 24.8% of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive. Full AIDS control and prevention programmes are now in place.

**Communications:** Country code 267; internet domain '.bw'. There are very few public phone boxes. Mobile phone coverage is generally confined to the most populous areas. Gaborone and Maun have a number of internet cafes. There are post offices in all towns and the larger villages.

There are 74 main telephone lines and 961 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

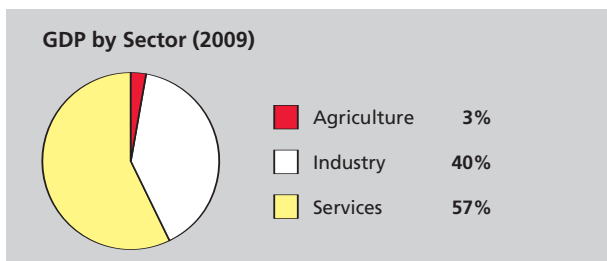
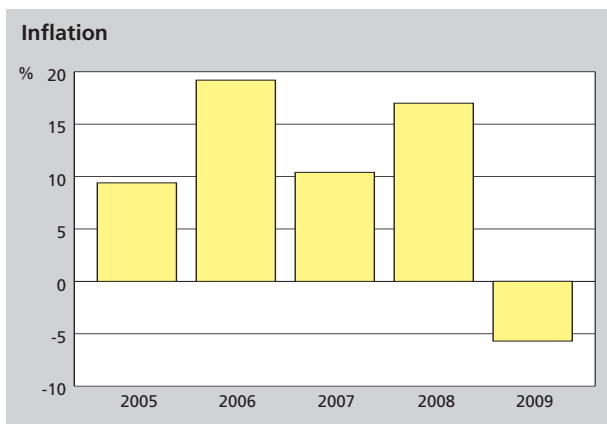
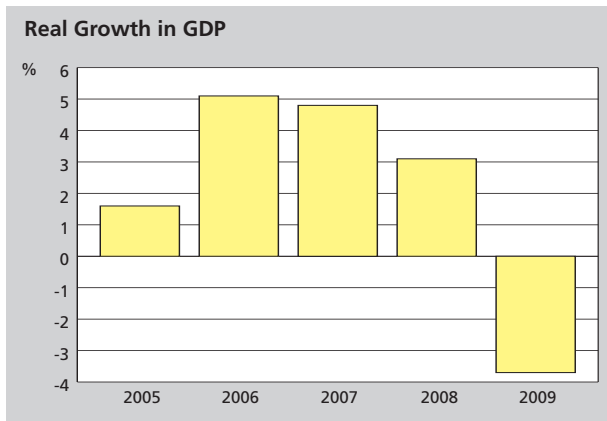
**Public holidays:** New Year (two days), Labour Day (early May), Sir Seretse Khama Day (1 July), President's Day (Monday and Tuesday in July), Botswana Day (30 September), Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Religious festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday, Easter Monday and Ascension Day.

## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2009

GNI:	US\$12.2bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$6,260
GDP growth:	2.2% p.a. 2005–09
Inflation:	9.7% p.a. 2005–09



**Overview:** Botswana has benefited from a stable social structure and a wealth of natural mineral resources; it has an unbroken record of parliamentary democracy and one of Africa’s highest sustained records of economic growth since independence. However, the economy is dependent on mining and agriculture, and has had to cope with the vagaries of the diamond market and frequent droughts. During 1999–2003, only the year 2000 was free of drought. It is also strongly influenced by economic trends in South Africa, the economic giant of the region.

Mining started near Orapa in 1967 only a year after independence. The country is among the world’s largest producers of diamonds. Minerals – notably diamonds, copper and nickel – generate most of the government’s revenue and provided the financial base for welfare projects and the development of manufacturing. Since the 1990s the government has encouraged foreign investment in export-oriented industries, especially in manufacturing, and notably car assembly (which started in 1994, boosted exports for the rest of the decade and then ceased production in 2000 when the South African investor company went into liquidation); textiles; and

diamond jewellery (the first jewellery factory was established with Indian investment in 2010).

The economy generally grew well in the 2000s: by 5.1% in 2006 and 4.8% in 2007. But during 2008 (3.1%), in the face of the global downturn, world demand for diamonds and eco-tourism slumped, and the Botswana economy moved sharply into recession, shrinking by 3.7% in 2009 but recovering strongly in 2010, with rises in world commodity prices.

**Trade:** Exports of goods and services account for 46% of GDP (2008). Main commodities exported are diamonds (by far the largest export), copper, nickel, textiles/clothing, beef and soda-ash.

## Constitution

**Status:** Republic with executive president  
**Legislature:** Parliament of Botswana  
**Independence:** 30 September 1966

Under the 1965 constitution, Botswana is a republic with an executive president chosen by the National Assembly for the concurrent five-year term. After the 2004 general election, the Assembly had 57 members directly elected by universal adult suffrage plus the president, speaker, attorney-general and four members nominated by the president. The 35-member Ntlo ya Dikgosi (formerly known as the House of Chiefs) advises on tribal matters; 30 of the members are elected by senior tribal authorities and five members appointed by the president.

The Botswana Democratic Party has ruled that the party leadership is only to be held by only one person for two full terms.

Substantive constitutional amendments require a two-thirds majority of the Assembly and major amendments, a national referendum. Constitutional amendments approved in April 1997 retained the system by which the president is elected by parliament but allowed the vice-president automatically to succeed in the event of the president’s death or resignation during his term of office. It also reduced the voting age from 21 to 18.

Local elections for the nine district councils, two city councils and four town councils are held – also on a party basis – simultaneously with general elections.

## Politics

**Last elections:** October 2009  
**Next elections:** 2014  
**Head of state:** President Seretse Khama Ian Khama  
**Head of government:** the president  
**Ruling party:** Botswana Democratic Party

Although the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) had easily won every election since multiparty democracy was established in 1965, in the general election of 1994 the main opposition party, the Botswana National Front (BNF), won 13 seats (37% of the vote) as against the BDP’s 27 seats (54%), with the smaller parties failing to win any seats.

In November 1997 at the age of 73, President Sir Ketumile Masire announced he would retire as head of state on 31 March 1998. On 1 April Festus Mogae, who had served as vice-president since 1992, was sworn in as president. He also became leader of the

BDP. The only new member of Mogae's first cabinet was Ian Khama (son of former President Sir Seretse Khama), who retired as commander of the Botswana Defence Force to take up the key post of minister of presidential affairs and public administration and was appointed vice-president in July 1998, and was elected as chairman of the BDP in July 2003.

In the October 1999 general election, the BDP was again successful, increasing its number of seats to 33, with 57% of the votes, while the BNF held six seats, with 26% of the votes. There was an increase in the numbers of female and younger parliamentarians.

In October 2004 the BDP won with 44 of the 57 seats in the enlarged assembly and 52% of the votes and Mogae was returned for a second term as president. The BNF took 12 seats and 26% of the votes, and Botswana Congress Party (BCP), one seat and 17%.

On Festus Mogae's retirement in April 2008, Ian Khama became the country's fourth president. In October 2009, he led the BDP to

victory in the general election, taking 45 seats and 53% of the votes. The BNF took six seats (22%), the BCP four (19%), the Botswana Alliance Movement one (2%) and independents one. Khama was shortly afterwards sworn in again as president.

## International relations

Botswana is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, African Union, Non-Aligned Movement, Southern African Customs Union, Southern African Development Community, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Botswana hosts the headquarters of the Southern African Development Community in Gaborone.

## Traveller information

**Local laws and conventions:** Photography of airports, official residences and defence establishments is prohibited. It is good

## History

The earliest inhabitants of Botswana were San or Basarwa (Bushmen) who have been in the area an estimated 30,000 years. Their nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle has left few traces except rock paintings (there are some 3,500 paintings at 350 sites in the Tsodilo Hills). More technologically advanced and powerful pastoral and agricultural Bantu groups moved in from the north-west and east around the first and 2nd century AD. The first Setswana-speaking group, the Bakgalagadi, arrived sometime in the 14th century. While there was plenty of land, the different peoples coexisted peacefully but in the early 19th century, Mzilikazi (a captain of Zulu chief Shaka) broke away and led a Zulu force northwards. The local people were scattered and forced into more arid lands.

The upheavals of the region were greatly exacerbated when, from around 1836, the Boer Trekkers, escaping British rule, began to arrive and displace other groups. In the 1840s British missionaries David Livingstone and Robert Moffat established stations among the Bakwena; Moffat translated the Bible into Setswana.

In 1872 Khama III became chief of Bamangwato, one of the tribes of the Batswana group. A capable general and administrator, he secured immunity from Matabele raids and increased order and stability. To avoid Boer rule, particularly after the discovery of gold at Tati, Khama asked for British protection; this was given in 1885. The terms were that Khama retained control of administration, law and justice, while Britain was responsible for security.

The territory south of the Molopo river was annexed to the Cape Colony in 1895 while the rest remained under British protection as Bechuanaland. A capital was chosen at Mafikeng, a town settled almost exclusively by Tswana-speaking tribes. At Mafikeng, which was actually in South Africa, outside the Protectorate, the now global boy scout movement was started by Lord Baden-Powell. Bechuanaland successfully resisted pressure to grant

mining concessions to the British South Africa Company and also (in 1909) successfully resisted becoming part of South Africa.

Over the next half-century, the country languished: it became a provider of cheap labour for South Africa's mines, education and welfare were neglected, and the administration came entirely into colonial hands.

In 1923 Khama III died; his son and successor, Sekgoma, died after being in power only two years. Three-year-old Seretse Khama then inherited the leadership, with his uncle, Tshekedi Khama, as Regent.

Seretse Khama's accession in 1950 changed the tone of Bechuanaland politics. While studying law in London, he married a white English woman. This was rated as a serious breach of tribal custom in Botswana, and also in racially segregated South Africa and Rhodesia. Seretse Khama was forced to stand down as chief of the Ngwato. The UK yielded to pressure and held him in exile until 1956. On his return to Bechuanaland, Seretse Khama campaigned for change and in the 1960s founded the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). Its policy sought a non-racial and democratic but traditional society in which chiefs and traditional courts still had a role.

In 1960 a representative legislative council was set up; there was now a formal negotiating mechanism and independence was achieved in a series of peaceful moves. Central authority was strengthened, the position of the chiefs and African courts defined. The seat of government was transferred from Mafikeng to Gaborone. In the pre-independence elections of 1965, the BDP won 28 of the 31 elective seats. The country achieved independence as a republic on 30 September 1966 with Seretse Khama as president.

Seretse Khama led the country from 1965 until his death in 1980, when he was succeeded by Dr Quett Masire, formerly vice-president, who was knighted as Sir Ketumile Masire in 1991.

practice to seek permission before photographing local people. Drug-taking and smuggling is an offence, and punishments can be severe.

Most people in Botswana follow traditional life patterns.

Casual clothing is acceptable but not worn for meetings. Office hours are Apr–Oct: Mon–Fri 0800–1700; Oct–Apr: Mon–Fri 0730–1630.

**Immigration and customs:** Passports are required by all and must be valid for at least six months after the intended departure date. Visitors must also have outgoing travel documents and sufficient funds to finance their stay.

Visas are not required for most Commonwealth and EU countries, nor for the USA. For those wishing to stay longer than three months, applications must be made to the Chief Immigration Officer prior to arrival.

Visitors are advised to have some sort of identification on them at all times. A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required by all those travelling from an infected area.

A permit is needed for the importation of firearms and ammunition, boats and aquatic equipment. All animal souvenirs or 'trophies' are subject to National Trophy Law, which strictly regulates the sale, possession or export of animals or their durable parts. Travellers carrying such items will need to present a government permit or receipt from a licensed store on departure.

**Travel within the country:** Traffic drives on the left and car hire is available in the larger cities. An international driving permit is recommended. The speed limit is 60kph in urban areas and 120kph in rural areas. Particular care must be taken if driving after dark (wildlife and stray livestock) and during the rainy season. In rural areas, there are long distances between petrol stations, and reserve fuel and water and emergency supplies are recommended on longer journeys.

Flying is an efficient way to travel around the country and chartered flights are available.

A bus service links Gaborone, Francistown and Maun. Taxis are found in most major towns, but visitors must agree on the tariff before getting into a taxi. Botswana Railway (BR) runs a daily service between Francistown, Gaborone and Lobatse.

**Travel health:** The public health system is good. All main towns have chemists, and pharmaceutical supplies are readily available. Comprehensive health insurance is essential, however, and should include cover for evacuation to South Africa for serious medical treatment. Visitors will need protection against malaria, especially in northern Botswana, together with insect repellent and suitable clothing to prevent mosquito bites. Hepatitis A, tetanus and typhoid vaccinations are recommended. There is a risk of rabies, and to prevent bilharzia visitors should only swim in well-chlorinated pools. Tick bite fever can be a problem and regular checks must be taken after rural walks.

Tap water is considered safe, but outside of cities visitors should observe routine precautions and drink either boiled or bottled water. Milk is pasteurised.

**Money:** Local currency is the pula (1 pula = 100 thebe). American Express, Diners Club, Mastercard and Visa are widely accepted. ATMs are available in larger cities and towns, and travellers cheques should be in pounds sterling or US dollars to avoid extra exchange rate charges. Banking hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1700 and Sat 0815–1045.

There were 1,553,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

## Further information

Government of Botswana Portal: [www.gov.bw](http://www.gov.bw)

Commonwealth Secretariat: [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)

Click here to find out more about the  
**2011 Commonwealth Yearbook**



Click here to find out more about  
**Botswana**

