

Botswana Desert Calendar

This Desert calendar is designed to illustrate the highlights associated with each month of the year. We are often asked 'which is the best time of the year to come to Botswana?'. There is no simple answer as this ultimately depends upon your individual interests and likes or dislikes! The calendar will provide you with a better understanding of the events and climate throughout the year, and hopefully allow you to best decide on your perfect safari date!

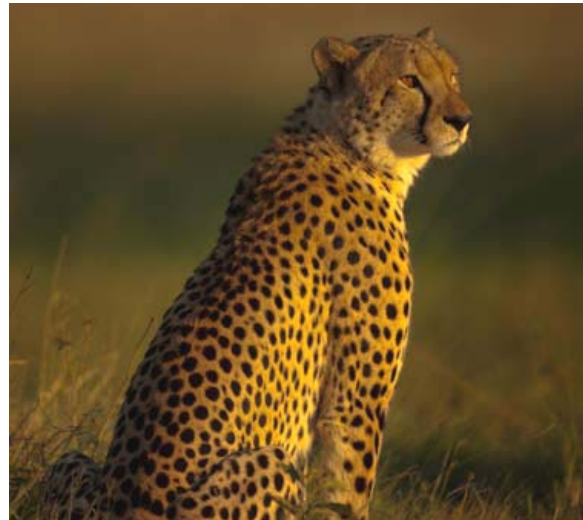
January

The short grasses on the fossil river valleys begin to grow rapidly in the middle of the rainy season, attracting the herds of gemsbok, springbok and red hartebeest onto the valley floors. The salt pans are inundated with rain water and at Nxai Pan, 1000's of zebra inhabit the pan providing a constant source of protein for the resident lion prides. At this time, the grass is at its most nutritious and the mammals of the Kalahari, adapted to long periods with minimal grazing and no water, revel in this time of plenty. Spectacular afternoon thunder storms and warm days are the norm in January with daytime temperatures in the mid 30°C and night times in the low 20°C. Periods of heavy rain, low cloud cover and drizzle can occur at this time of year and temperatures can drop notably as a result.



February

The Bat Eared fox young and other canids begin to forage for the first time as they accompany their parents and provide entertaining viewing as they attempt to hunt anything that vaguely resembles prey. The Katydid grasshopper populations are at their peak during their mating season and their distinct 3 phrase call dominates the hours of night. The predominant desert predators, lion and cheetah, are seen often as they inhabit the pans and river valleys, hunting the grazing herds at their leisure. The rains continue with afternoon thunderstorms and dramatic skies. Temperatures range in the region of 40°C but due to the cooling rain showers and breezes, the average is often mid 30°C with warm nights in the low 20°C. Both very wet and very dry spells are possible within the month of February.



March

A late summer afternoon, the male barking geckos emerge to woo the females with a short 3-4 syllable barking sound. The heliotropium, otherwise drab plants, now begins to flower and its pungent smell in the early morning and late afternoon is one of the most memorable characteristics of the Kalahari. At Nxai Pan, the zebra have begun to move again, drifting in smaller herds towards the permanent water sources and winter grazing along the Boteti River, in the Makgadikgadi. Very occasional showers are possible but the rains have now passed and the nights and early mornings feel fresher as the Kalahari hints at the winter to come. Temperatures are in the mid 30°C with warm nights in the low 20°C.



April

There is a distinct chill in the night air now, together with the distinct chirp of the rain locust. Any surface water left from the rains has already dried up and while there is still good grazing on the open pans, mammals, birds and reptiles are preparing for the long dry season ahead. At Nxai Pan, the numbers of mammals at the water hole continues to grow as the rain fed water holes are mostly dry. Large numbers of elephant congregate around the water hole and provide insights into the dynamics between individual elephants and other species as they try to access the life saving water. While daytime temperatures remain over 30°C, for the first time in the year, night time temperatures drop to below 20°C.



May

The gemsbok females now separate themselves from the herds as they prepare to give birth to young that look nothing like the adults. During the game drives, the young calves, which more closely resemble a red hartebeest or tsessebe, may be seen for brief periods when they come out of their hiding places to suckle. The Tsamma melons, from which many bird and animals will receive sustenance during the harsh dry season, start to ripen and the large amounts of these ground creepers, covered with fruit, create an almost alien landscape. The atmosphere is increasingly dry, and the nights cooler with temperatures averaging 15°C, while daytime temperatures, though still warm, have lost their edge and maximum temperatures seldom exceed 30°C.



June / July / August

The traditional yellows and greys of the Kalahari landscape dominate as any sign of the rains have passed. The Silky Bushmen grass on the edges of the pans sparkles in the dawn light after the first frost of the year. This is winter in the Kalahari and has to be experienced to be believed. It is a time of harsh and arid beauty when one can truly understand the incredible adaptations made by a multitude of species of plants, birds, mammals and reptiles in order to survive. No surface water exists in this 'thirst land'. The many species that survive here - including human beings - have adapted to utilise varied sources of drinkable liquid including the early morning dew, succulent plants, natural springs and even the blood of their prey. This is the Kalahari of legend. At this time, the larger herds disperse into smaller groups as they spread out into the desert seeking out grazing or browsing. The predators will follow them and survival of the fittest best describes the mentality of desert inhabitants during the dry season.

Daytime temperatures eventually rise to a pleasant mid 20°C but the temperatures at night can fall to below 0°C! Gloves, thermals and hats are the standard for early morning and evening drives!



September

The end of August sees a very rapid change in temperature and in the blink of an eye, the winter is a distant memory. At this time the first of the famous black-maned lions begin to call again with a sense of urgency as they gather the pride females. After the last few months of a mostly solitary life for the pride members, foraging for scarce prey over vast areas, it is time to renew bonds and to reclaim the pride's territory. The rising temperatures signals the beginning of the end of the dry season and while the hottest time of the year is yet to come, many plants and grasses begin to flower and grow new shoots in anticipation of the rains. Daytime temperatures can rise to mid 30°C, though night time temperatures are still a comfortable 15°C.



October

This is the hottest month in the region and no where is this dry heat as brutal as the Kalahari! Temperatures can soar into the mid to high 40°C and night time temperatures are over 20°C. Even the winds are hot and not a drop of moisture is left in the soil or plants as these desert winds scour the landscape. Mammals are generally active in the early morning and early evening in an effort to conserve as much energy as possible. Strangely, the Kalahari at this time is a patchwork of greens, yellows, whites and greys as the newly flowering acacias and yellow grasses create a vivid contrast to the lighter sands and dry bushes. The harsh and stunning landscape and extremes of temperature are what one expects from a desert. Thankfully, this spiritual environment can be experienced in the knowledge that the crystal clear swimming pool, outside showers and ice cold drinks are never more than a few steps away! Water is even provided should you wish to take a spontaneous bucket shower while out on a day trip!



November

One morning, you wake up, the air smells different and the light blue sky has taken on a different hue. While difficult to describe, there is a subtle difference from the last few months. The inhabitants of the desert clearly notice this change too. Springbok will not be feeding but instead will jostle with each other and prong, seemingly excited and reptiles and insects are seen more regularly as they become increasingly active. There is a tension in the air which increases through the month as the first clouds appear on the horizon. The night skies are lit with brilliant displays of lightening and massive cloud formations and people and animals alike can smell the rain on the wind. This promise alone will prompt the herds to once again begin to return to the ancient valleys in increasing numbers.



December

The rains arrive. With these first drops comes an almost tangible release. The smell of the first raindrops on dry African soil is one that you will never forget. Almost overnight, the landscape changes: colours are bright and vivid as the dust is washed away, hundreds of wild flowers begin to appear and the bush turns a brilliant green. The pans are once again filled with energetic grazing herds and as always, the predators are nearby and thrive in this time of plenty. Late afternoon thunderstorms and heavy showers are the norm. The rains also result in lower relative temperatures with day times reaching mid 30°C while night temperatures are on average 20°C.

