**Botswana**

**Botswana** is a country in the centre of Southern Africa. The territory is roughly triangular –approximately 600 miles (965 km) from north to south and 600 miles from east to west – with its eastern side protruding into a sharp point. Its eastern and southern borders are marked by river courses and an old wagon road; its western borders are lines of longitude and latitude through the Kalahari, and its northern borders combine straight lines with a river course. Within the confines of Botswana’s borders is a rich variety of wildlife, including many species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish.

Before its independence in 1966, Botswana was a British protectorate known as Bechuanaland. It was also one of the poorest and least-developed states in the world. The country is named after its dominant ethnic group, the Tswana (“Bechuana” in older variant orthography). Since its independence the Republic of Botswana has gained international stature as a peaceful and increasingly prosperous democratic state. Gaborone is the capital of Botswana.

**Land**

Botswana is bounded by Namibia to the west and north (the Caprivi Strip), Zambia and Zimbabwe to the northeast, and South Africa to the southeast and south. The Zambezi River border with Zambia is only several hundred yards long. The border along the main channel of the Chobe River up to the Zambezi was disputed with Namibia until a 1999 ruling by the International Court of Justice favoured Botswana. The point at which the borders of Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe meet in the middle of the river has never been precisely determined.

**Relief**

Botswana extends from the Chobe River (which drains through the Zambezi to the Indian Ocean) in the north to the Molopo River (part of the Orange River system, which flows into the Atlantic) in the south. To the east it is bordered by the Limpopo River and its tributaries, the Ngotwane (Notwani), Marico (Madikwe), and Shashe.

The country is divided into three main environmental regions. The hardveld region consists of rocky hill ranges and areas of shallow sand cover in eastern Botswana. The sandveld region is the area of deep Kalahari sand covering the rest of the country. The third region consists of ancient lake beds superimposed on the northern sandveld in the lowest part of the Kalahari Basin.

**Drainage**

Drainage through the marshes of the Okavango delta is complex and imperfectly understood. The perennial Okavango River runs southward into its delta across the Caprivi Strip from the highlands of Angola. Most of its water evaporates from the 4 000 square miles (10 000 square km) of the delta wetlands. Floodwater reaches down through the eastern side of the marshes to the Boteti River, which flows sporadically to Lake Xau (Dow) and the Makgadikgadi Pans (also roughly 4 000 square miles in area). Less and less water flowed through the western side of the Okavango marshes during the 20th century, so that the 70-square-mile (180-square-km) Lake Ngami—famous a century ago—is today dry and almost unrecognizable as a lake.

**Soils**

The soils of the eastern hardveld consist of moderately dry red loamy *mokata* soils on the plains, or mixed chalky and sandy *chawana* soils, with brownish rocky *seloko* soils on and around hills. *Seloko* soils are considered best for grain crops. The fertility of all soils is limited by the amount of rainfall, which is sometimes inadequate on the hardveld and regularly unable to support any cultivation on the sandveld.

The alluvial soils of the ancient lake beds include gray loamy soils in the wetlands, gray-green saline soils on the pans, gray clayish soils to yellowish sandy soils around the wetlands, and very chalky light gray soils around the pans. There are also areas of gray to black cracking clay in former wet areas, such as those around Pandamatenga.

**Elephants**

Botswana has become home to an estimated 160,000 – 170,000migratory elephants; currently home to potentially some 35% – 50% of the whole wild African elephant population.

Bacteria found in water is believed to have caused the deaths of more than 300 elephants in Botswana. Scientists fear toxins being produced by tiny organisms in water and soil could be occurring more frequently due to climate change driving up temperatures. However, they admit there are still "many questions" which need answering because other animals in the same areas as the elephants appear to have been unharmed.

Some cyanobacterial blooms are the most powerful natural poisons known, posing serious health risks for people and animals. Scientists are increasingly concerned about their potential impact as climate change leads to warmer water temperatures, which allows most cyanobacteria to form. In neighboring Zimbabwe, the carcasses of about 25 elephants were found near water sources.

The animals still had their tusks, ruling out poaching and deliberate poisoning. It is believed the elephants could have ingested the bacteria while searching for food.

**The People: Who's Who**

All of the citizens of Botswana are collectively referred to as Batswana (plural form) or Motswana (singular form), and can be grouped into two broad categories: the Setswana-speaking people and the non-Setswana-speakers. Over 60 percent of the population traces their heritage to one of the Setswana-speaking groups:

* **The Bangwato,** who constitute the largest of the Setswana-speaking groups, come from Serowe.
* **The Bakgatla, Bakwena, Barolong and Bangwaketse** come from the southern regions around Gaborone, Kanye and Molepolole.
* **The Batawana,** who broke away from the Bangwato, settled further north around the southern edges of the Okavango.
* **The Babirwa** come from the Tuli Block.
* **The Batswapong** come from the eastern regions around Selebi Phikwe.
* **The Bakgalagadi,** who are one of the oldest groups, live in the central regions of the Kalahari around Ghanzi and Kang.

**Food**

Because of their high protein and fat content, reproductive termites are a sought-after food source in the rural areas. They leave their mounds after the first rains and are collected with the aid of lanterns and candles, which attract the insects in their thousands.

**Cattle**

Cattle, and to a lesser extent goats and sheep, have always played an important social and economic role within Batswana society. Animal husbandry was central to the **survival and success of most groups**, other than the Basarwa and Bayei.

Cattle in particular are kept, not only for food and clothing, but also as a measure of wealth. The larger their herd's size the greater the influence an individual or family has within the community. Cattle are also traditionally used as the primary means of exchange.