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24 November 2020

## NEWSFLASH

### HOSTING GUESTS ONCE MORE

The gradual easing of restrictions and opening up of travel in Botswana, Namibia, Rwanda and Zimbabwe is a positive step for the tourism industry! It will provide a much-needed boost to the benefit of our staff, communities, partners and ultimately to the effective conservation of the wildlife and areas in which we operate.

There are challenges of course in the current climate, and after nearly seven months of closed borders with various lockdown levels and unable to host guests, we had to make some strategic decisions from both an economical and practical perspective. For the next few months we will therefore consolidate bookings and take a phased approach as we start to resume normal operations.

- Already hosting guests: Bisate, Magashi, Mombo, King's Pool, Qorokwe, Jacana, Little Kulala and Doro Nawas
- From 10 December: Kalahari Plains
- From 15 December: Vumbura Plains South + 1 family unit from North (hosted at South), Jao, Linkwasha and Davison's

Thank you for your assistance, patience and understanding in this regard. In the first few months of 2021, we hope to add further camps and from April onwards, our full inventory in all regions is available to book.

## TRAVEL IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

### IN-CAMP TESTING IN BOTSWANA

Subject to onward destination and/or airline requirements, guests may need to have a negative COVID-19 Real Time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) test prior to their departure from Botswana. As an added service for our guests, the Wilderness team in Botswana have made the necessary arrangements to provide COVID-19 testing in camp. This is currently possible at our operational camps in the Wilderness portfolio, as well as for guests we have booked at the andBeyond, African Bush Camps and Great Plains camps.

- Testing will be conducted by a private entity called Diagnofirm. Helicopter Horizons will fly the necessary medical personnel into the camps to take samples.
- Swabs will be taken in the morning of one of the last nights' in camp and then sent to Gaborone for testing. Results are expected the following day, though this cannot be guaranteed. If there is a false positive, then the test needs to be re-run. There is an element of risk regarding possible delays and additional costs incurred as a result, but we will do everything in our power to assist.

- Guests will be given forms in camp which they need to complete with key personal and medical information.
- Operations will manage the testing schedule and advise camps of timings, who in turn will make the necessary arrangements with the guests.
- Results will be emailed to Guest Operations at Wilderness Safaris Botswana (who have been given authority by the guest to get the information), as the results need to be printed out in colour.
- On their exit from Maun/Kasane and prior to onward departure, the guests will be handed their negative RT-PCR test certificates.
- The cost of this service is USD 330.00, Pula 3300 or ZAR 4600 per person – depending on currency quoted. The cost of the test is USD 100, P 1000 or ZAR 1400 per person while the balance is the cost of the helicopter service.
- If guests do not wish to get tested in camp, then the alternative is to fly into Maun/Kasane, have the test and spend at least one night in Maun/Kasane to await results – all costs for their account. We recommend Maun as that is where the Diagnofirm is based – in Kasane the only facility available is the government hospital.
- For parties of 6 or more guests in a booking (departing from any Wilderness Safaris camp in Botswana except Kalahari Plains camp), **Wilderness Safaris Botswana will absorb the cost of the helicopter and only charge for the RT-PCR test will be for the guests account – USD 100, Pula 1000 or ZAR 1400 per person.** Note that the standard rate including the helicopter services will apply at and Beyond, African Bush Camps and Great Plains camps so please charge accordingly for larger parties.
- Unfortunately for guests staying at Kalahari Plains, we are unable to offer the helicopter service and guests would need to spend the requisite night/s in Maun to have a test and wait for results. It makes sense therefore to have Kalahari Plains at the beginning of your itineraries where possible.
- Currently, no testing is possible on a Saturday or Sunday, so this will need to be taken into account when planning an itinerary. Should this change, we will advise. Diagnofirm, with support from the tourism industry, has also approached the Ministry of Health to request the necessary licensing for Diagnofirm to process swabs in Maun. If approved, this would speed the testing process up tremendously.
- Should a guest test positive in camp, we have an established response protocol in place, created by our medical advisors, Park Doctor and in line with local Ministry of Health requirements. Guests are able to speak to a medical professional at all times, and our Wilderness24 team will facilitate local medical response if needed.

#### COVID-19 TESTING AT OR TAMBO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, JOHANNESBURG

Travellers departing South Africa from OR Tambo may now get tested and collect their RT-PCR certificate at the airport prior to departure. The National Health Laboratory Service ([www.nhls.ac.za/](http://www.nhls.ac.za/)) is operating three mobile COVID-19 test units in clearly identifiable vans located opposite the InterContinental Hotel, in front of the Police Station, on the lower level of the airport complex. The service is available 24/7 according to Port Health Services, at a cost of R600 (€33.16) per person – cash, cheque cards and credit cards are accepted, except American Express. Children under five years do not require a test.

Results are available in four to six hours and the traveller is advised by SMS that the test result and certificate are ready for collection. After testing, travellers can wait for the SMS at the airport or nearby, collect the certificate, and proceed to fly, or the test may be done a day or two prior to departure if preferred, and the certificate collected on the day of departure. Please refer to this article for further information: <https://www.tourismupdate.co.za/article/247-covid-19-testing-or-tambo>

#### USEFUL TOOLS

Available on the Info Centre on the Wilderness Window in the COVID-19 folder, as well as on the Wilderness Safaris website under the Travel Updates by Region section, a selection of documents have been compiled to assist you when planning itineraries or addressing queries from clients. As all COVID-19 information is subject to change, they will be updated as and when there are developments so the online version should be referred to at all times.

- Region-specific COVID-19 Requirements for Entry & Travel – this is a summary of entry requirements plus information related to testing for each of the following regions in which we operate: Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

- [Regional Access](#) - in an environment where options may be limited, we have compiled a summary of the current commercial scheduled air and other access information for our key. A number of countries are included due to the roles that various countries play regarding access. For example, you could fly into Harare with Emirates from Dubai or Airlink from South Africa, connect with Fastjet to Victoria Falls and either stay in Zimbabwe or transfer across to Botswana to link up with Wilderness Air into the Delta.
- [Health & Safety Protocols](#) - for both yours and the travellers' peace of mind, we have summarised our health and safety protocols for the Wilderness Safaris camp, air, touring and transfer operations.
- [FAQs](#) – this addresses frequently asked questions in relation to COVID-19 and our operation.

## TIMING OF TESTS & TRANSIT/ONWARD TRAVEL REQUIREMENTS

We are aware of the confusion around the timing of negative COVID-19 Real Time Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) tests. We are not at liberty to interpret information the authorities have provided, but did ask the medical fraternity for input. In a nutshell, the time-frame of 72 hours for most regions (exceptions being 48 hours for Zimbabwe and 120 hours for Rwanda) is from the time the swab was taken and the time you hand your certificate over to authorities on arrival at the immigration gate of your destination country. It does mean that tests may be required en route and itineraries will have to take that into account.

There also seems to be some discrepancy between authorities and airlines regarding transit or onward travel requirements. Airlines do not wish to be held responsible should a traveller be refused entry, so they may require a negative certificate prior to boarding. Similar to yellow fever and birth certificates where it made sense to err on the side of caution, it may be of benefit to have a test as required at the start of the journey, and another when heading home (with possibly one or more in-between depending on duration of the trip or number of countries visited). We appreciate there are costs involved for the tests, however, this should outweigh the inconvenience and possibility of having to purchase new flights or additional accommodation due to being turned away. We do believe there will be more clarity in the months ahead but in these early days of travel in a COVID-19 environment there are still some grey areas.

## CAMPS & ACTIVITIES

### DUMATAU & LITTLE DUMATAU

Despite our best intentions through the COVID-19 lockdown, seven months of closed borders have unfortunately delayed the opening of the new Dumatau and Little Dumatau. While the main structures are almost complete, we were unable to get the special artisans into camp to complete the finishing touches and the installation of an expanded solar array to power the camp. We need to allow for sufficient time to accommodate the completion of the project so the revised opening date for both camps is now 2 April 2021. We look forward to sharing more details on both Dumatau and Little Dumatau in the months ahead and hosting guests once more at this iconic destination in the Linyanti from April 2021.

### WATER LEVEL & ACTIVITY UPDATE FOR BOTSWANA

- [Linyanti](#) - no boating activities are currently possible from Kings Pool.
- [Qorokwe](#) - water levels are still good. They are still offering the one hour mokoro excursion but in front of the main area of camp, it is dry. Activity-wise they are doing game drives (morning, afternoon and night) plus walks. In terms of game for the past two weeks, they have seen wild dog, cheetah, leopard, lion and great general game.
- [Mombo](#) - water is receding in the channels around Mombo although there has been some decent rain. The game viewing has been spectacular of late, with the big five being seen occasionally.
- [Kalahari Plains](#) – there has been a lack of rain in the area but hopefully that will change in the months ahead. General game has been decent and we are heading into the peak period for the Kalahari...the summer months.
- [Vumbura](#) – activities are as normal with both boats and mekoro on offer. Although the flood water has dropped, there is still plenty of water in the channels.
- [Jacana](#) - The water level around Jacana has dropped and it is too low for mokoro excursions. There is still water around Pelo and for the time being, it will be possible to run mokoro trips in this area. Currently, levels are too low for boating from Kubu lagoon, and as they name implies, there are lots of hippo in the lagoon!

## TEMPORARILY ON HOLD - SCHEDULED HELICOPTER TRANSFERS IN RWANDA

Akagera Aviation will be suspending their pay per seat/scheduled helicopter flights with effect from 1 November 2020 until June 2021 when high season starts. This is as a result of decreased sales volume and increased operating costs, however, should volumes justify it, they will consider re-opening sooner. All scheduled flights booked and confirmed before 1 November 2020, will still operate. Note that private helicopter charters are not affected and will continue as usual.

## GORILLA TREKKING AND COVID-19

Do take note of the following with regard to itinerary planning in Rwanda.

- It is safer for the gorilla, if visitors go tracking as soon as possible after testing negative. This is because gorillas are susceptible to the same diseases as we are and we must do what we can so they do not contract COVID-19.
- This means that all travellers visiting Volcanoes National Park and tracking gorillas, are required to schedule their visit/track within 72 hours of receiving a negative test result.
- If your visit/s falls more than 72 hours after the initial test on arrival, you will be required to take another COVID-19 test before going gorilla tracking.
- While we have traditionally kept gorilla tracking for the end of the itinerary, as the highlight, this new requirement will mean that itineraries should begin with Volcanoes National Park and gorilla tracking.
- If it is not possible to visit Volcanoes National Park first i.e. guests travel to Magashi beforehand, we will assist with the necessary testing arrangements, at additional cost.

## WILDERNESS AIR

### FLYING IN BOTSWANA

- The new Maun Airport is operational and provides a far nicer experience for our guests. While some facilities still need to be implemented (such as restaurants on the departure side), the whole facility is now air-conditioned, and there is ample space, additional check-in counters, larger departure and arrival areas, etc.
  - All passengers are screened – they have their temperatures taken by both the Botswana authorities and Wilderness Air and need to complete a variety of forms.
  - Our standard circuit ex Kasane will only operate from 1 December 2020 when Airlink start flying in, and the road borders with Zimbabwe open. Should you require access from Kasane to the Linyanti or Delta in the interim, you will need to opt for sole use charters.
  - Note that due to the current State of Emergency, Maun and Kasane Airports are not operating as per normal at weekends. Should you have guests flying into/out of these airports on a private charter, or we need to fly guests into and out of camp on the weekend to connect with their self-drive arrangements and/or charters, a surcharge will apply for airport access. This service needs to be pre-booked and arranged with authorities. The cost is P 900 per party – whether for 2 passengers or 20. Please contact your Journey Specialist for assistance.
  - During this period of lower occupancies, similar to the camps, Wilderness Air will be maximising loads on aircraft to operate effectively and in a financially viable way. This means that on occasion, there will be waiting periods between connections.
  - Having negotiated some really competitive rates with their partners, Wilderness Air Botswana is able to assist with private charters between Maun or Kasane and Cape Town/Johannesburg/Durban/Livingstone/Lusaka/ Victoria Falls/Nairobi/Kigali/Windhoek.
  - Wilderness Air is aware of the volatile nature of the return to operations for the scheduled airlines – who are also consolidating flights or changing times. They will do everything possible to ensure our guests are accommodated/assisted as necessary, by being flexible regarding their own flight times.
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