

## Episode 65: Botswana by Canoe

### Summary

While in Botswana, Nick and Wendy did an overnight camping trip in a canoe in the Okavango Delta. In this conversation they talk about the canoes, the camp and the animals they saw.

### Transcript

Nick: Today Wendy and I are talking about the latest trip on our southern African adventure, which is Botswana, and in particular a trip by canoe that we took in Botswana.

But before we start, let me remind you that you can get a special offer of 10 US dollars in italki credits with your first purchase by visiting <http://go.italki.com/englishin10minutes>. Just like with our podcast, with italki you will learn authentic English the way it's really spoken as you reach fluency.

So, moving on to Botswana. And Wendy, this actually was a country that we didn't plan to visit originally.

Wendy: No, it wasn't on our itinerary. I mean, we had a pretty loose itinerary<sup>1</sup>. We didn't have, umm, a really clear idea of exactly what we were going to be doing every day for three months that we were in Africa. But, yeah, we thought we knew at least which countries we were going to visit, and we had decided to leave Botswana off the list. I think mainly because we thought it was going to be really expensive, because it does have the reputation. And it's true that it does have a lot of very high-end<sup>2</sup> lodges where you can pay hundreds of dollars a night or even thousands of dollars a night, which of course is way out of our budget. And so we thought that it wouldn't be the right place for us, but in fact, I think it's probably been my favourite country so far on the trip.

Nick: Yeah, I think there's a couple of things about it, which is, firstly, like you said, we hadn't really figured out the practicalities. And in the north of Botswana there's an area where there are borders for five different countries close to each other. And we thought that we could go, or that we would go, from Zimbabwe perhaps directly to Namibia. Namibia has this very unusual corridor that links it with

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<sup>1</sup> loose itinerary: when you don't have a lot of bookings or plans

<sup>2</sup> high-end: expensive, top of the range (at the high end, cost-wise, of the choices). Low-end can be used as the opposite.

Zimbabwe and maybe Zambia as well. Umm, and so we thought we didn't need to go to Botswana, but it turned out that even in terms of practicalities, it was probably easier to come down to Botswana and then to go to Namibia from there. And the other thing is that apart from being expensive, umm, or having the reputation, umm, of being expensive, the other thing about Botswana is that it's known pretty much only for its safaris and it doesn't really have other attractions, necessarily. Or that was, again, the reputation. And originally we had only planned to do just one safari in Kruger at the very beginning of our trip and then we thought, 'OK, we'll get that out of the way<sup>3</sup>, we'll do that, and then we'll be done with it.' It turns out that now we do safaris all the time.

Wendy: Yeah, well I think we may have just recently done our last one on the trip, but we did do several, uhh, while we were travelling through southern Africa, because they're wonderful, and they've been definitely the highlights of the trip for me - seeing all these animals in their natural habitat, in the wild. And every experience is different. You see different animals or you see them doing different things or in different settings. And so I don't regret at all doing more than one safari and the ones that we did in Botswana were some of the best and also had this, uhh, unique twist<sup>4</sup> of being in a canoe as you mentioned.

Nick: Right, so what we did firstly was we went to Chobe National Park in Botswana. That's in the north, it's very close to Zimbabwe. And in fact that was the cheapest safari that we've done in Africa, so that goes against this reputation that we've been talking about of Botswana as an expensive country. But then we went down to a place called the Okavango Delta and did this canoe trip. And so the Okavango Delta is a unique place, it's a fascinating natural area. So it's a river delta, which is the mouth of the river, but it's unusual in that it's an inland delta. Usually when you think of river deltas you think of a river like the Nile, and so the delta is in the north of Egypt as the river flows out into the Mediterranean. Or if you look at the Mekong in south Vietnam, it flows out into the South China Sea. Umm, but this is an inland, so you don't have that coastal aspect at all, and it just creates this very unusual and beautiful landscape where you have all of these different channels or different little tributaries<sup>5</sup> of this river, uhh, in this kind of savannah environment, almost.

Wendy: Right, yeah. And it's maybe hard to get a full grasp<sup>6</sup> of what it's like when you're on the ground. They do offer scenic flights that you can do by helicopter or by a small plane. But, again, that was kind of out ... beyond our budget. And so what we did instead was we got right into the middle of it and we went inside a tiny little canoe and, uhh, travelled through these vary narrow channels surrounded

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<sup>3</sup> get that out of the way: do it as early as possible and be finished with it (usually for something you don't want to do)

<sup>4</sup> twist: a different or peculiar aspect

<sup>5</sup> tributaries: small rivers that flow into a larger river

<sup>6</sup> grasp: understanding, comprehension. It's a noun here but can also be a verb.

by reeds on either side and going right through the water and being right down at the ground level - or, I guess, the water level, umm, in among the animals and the landscape.

Nick: So these canoes are called *makoro* in the local language, or *makoros* in the plural. And it's quite well set-up, they have an association of the *mokoro* guides and the *mokoro* polers\*. And what they do is, you get in the canoe, you're sitting down. They have these kind of plastic chairs, or they've taken, essentially, the seat of chairs and taken off the legs and then you can put the chairs in the canoe and then the tourists sit in the canoe. And then the guide or the poler is at the back and he has a long pole, and he uses that to propel<sup>7</sup> the canoe forward. He or she, in fact, because there are quite a lot of female polers as well. So they have this association with guides and polers, so you'll have guides and if you're going to stay overnight, which is what a lot of people do, and that's what we did, you also have other polers who will bring supplies and will bring camping equipment and things like that. Actually I was a little bit embarrassed to be honest, because we had up to nine people, uhh, who were involved in our trip and it was just the two of us, along in fact with the owner of the company, umm, the tourist company or the travel agency. And so they came ... she came to see the ... just to see the operation and make sure it was all working well. But there were nine polers who were responsible for setting up our camp and cooking our food and doing all that. And so, that was ... we're not used to being waited on<sup>8</sup> by all these people, and so as I said I was a little bit embarrassed about that, but it's quite a big operation to set this all up.

*\*poler: not a real word, but used in this instance to refer to people who use poles to guide the makoros down the river channels.*

Wendy: Yeah, and I had no idea how big of an operation it would be. So it is camping, and it's not luxury camping, or *glamping* (glamour camping) as it's sometimes referred to, you know, this glamourised version of camping. It's not that, but they do still bring a lot of equipment, much more than we would bring if we were just camping by ourselves and trying to fit everything inside of a backpack. So they have fairly large tents, I mean, you're able to stand up inside the tent, that's how large it is. Uhh, what else did they bring? There's a toilet, so it's a compost, uhh, long drop toilet, but they set that up as well as a temporary structure. And then they bring a big long table and chairs for everyone and it's ... oh, and there's a big canopy as well because it gets very, very hot in the middle of the day. So I really appreciated having that canopy that they set up over the table and chairs area so that you could have a little bit of shade<sup>9</sup>, uhh, to sit in. So, yeah, it is a big operation. There are lots of people involved, even though it is kind of

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<sup>7</sup> propel: cause to move

<sup>8</sup> waited on: have attendants or servants doing things for you

<sup>9</sup> shade: a place where there's no sunlight, caused by a shadow. Shade and shadow are not interchangeable.

roughing it<sup>10</sup>, you know, because you are still camping out in the middle of the wilderness.

Nick: Yeah, and it's ... they bring everything in and take everything out. So there's no permanent structures or anything at the campsite, so that's why it requires all of these people to bring all of this equipment and supplies. So we spent probably a couple of hours floating down, uhh, one of the channels of the Okavango Delta in the canoe. And we got to our little island, which was our campsite. And we were greeted with elephants.

Wendy: Yeah! There were three elephants that were in the water right there, right next to our campsite. And we actually had to move right past them, very, very close to them to get to the campsite because they were in the water right next to this channel. And it's a very, very narrow channel that the canoe has to pass through. And so it was a little bit scary, but I didn't feel that we were threatened, I didn't feel that the animals were being aggressive at all. And our guide was OK with passing through, so we trusted his judgement. And it was amazing to be so close to these animals. And they actually stayed at our camp the whole time. They were still there, even the next morning when we woke up.

Nick: Yeah, the three that we saw right at the beginning were part of a herd of five, and, like you said, they were there the whole time. And actually as we left the next day, some of them crossed the channel that we were on right in front of us. And so we just sat there in our canoe and watched these, you know, amazing elephants right in front of us crossing the channel. And we also saw a lot of zebras.

Wendy: Yes, a lot.

Nick: And so we did a walking trip, uhh, with our guide and they don't always see animals or don't always see the same animals. It's not a huge safari area in this delta. There's another national park a little bit further which is where you see more animals. But we got quite lucky: we saw these elephants all the time, and we saw quite a few herds of zebras and also wildebeest, and so it was yet another great animal experience for us in Africa.

Wendy: It was. It was fantastic!

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<sup>10</sup> roughing it: travelling in a cheap and non-luxurious way. See also Episode 22a.

## Comprehension Questions

1. What two reasons did Nick and Wendy give for not originally planning to visit Botswana?
2. Why did Wendy say it was worthwhile doing multiple animal safaris?
3. Why was Nick a bit embarrassed about the camping situation?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. After lunch in summertime, she often sits under the tree in the \_\_\_\_\_ and reads.
2. "Should we go to the bank or the beach first?"  
"Let's go to the bank first and \_\_\_\_\_. Then we can enjoy ourselves at the beach."
3. He grew up in a wealthy family with servants so he's used to being \_\_\_\_\_. He doesn't know how to do anything by himself.
4. It's a great lodge because anyone can stay there. It offers something in every price range from budget camping to \_\_\_\_\_ rooms.
5. We're going to France for two weeks but we haven't made any bookings. We have a very \_\_\_\_\_ and we'll just decide what to do when we get there.
6. It's a pizza restaurant with a \_\_\_\_\_. They give you the dough and all the ingredients and you make your own pizza and put it in the oven.
7. The Amazon River has a lot of major \_\_\_\_\_ in Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia and Ecuador. That's one reason the Amazon is so large.
8. He just started working here two weeks ago, so he doesn't have a complete \_\_\_\_\_ of what the company is all about yet.
9. They don't have much money and they don't mind \_\_\_\_\_, so when they went to Africa, they hitchhiked and camped the whole trip.
10. If you're on a sailboat and there's enough wind, the wind will fill the sails and that will \_\_\_\_\_ the boat forward. If there's no wind, you have to use the motor.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Would you like to do a canoe-camping 'roughing it' trip like this one? Why or why not?
2. Wendy mentioned *glamping* (glamour camping). Does this sound like something you would like? Why or why not?
3. How do you think you would feel to be sitting in a canoe and have elephants only ten metres away from you? What emotions would you feel?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. Because it has the reputation of being expensive and because the main highlights are animal safaris, which they already did in South Africa.
2. Because you see different animals each time, or the same animals but doing different things and in different settings.
3. Because the trip required nine people to bring supplies, set up camp etc just for Nick and Wendy.

### Exercises

1. shade
2. get that out of the way
3. waited on
4. high-end
5. loose itinerary
6. twist
7. tributaries
8. grasp
9. roughing it
10. propel