



Empowering Botswana
Through Tourism



CHOBE GAME LODGE | SAVUTE SAFARI LODGE | CHOBE SAVANNA LODGE | LEROO LA TAU

CAMP OKAVANGO | XUGANA ISLAND LODGE | NXAMASERI ISLAND LODGE | CAMP MOREMI | CAMP XAKANAXA



desertdelta.com

EMPOWERING THE PEOPLE OF BOTSWANA THROUGH TOURISM

Desert & Delta Safaris

EMPOWERING
THE PEOPLE OF
BOTSWANA
THROUGH TOURISM
our Journey Together



Desert & Delta Safaris

WITH MANA MEADOWS

ABOUT

DESERT & DELTA SAFARIS

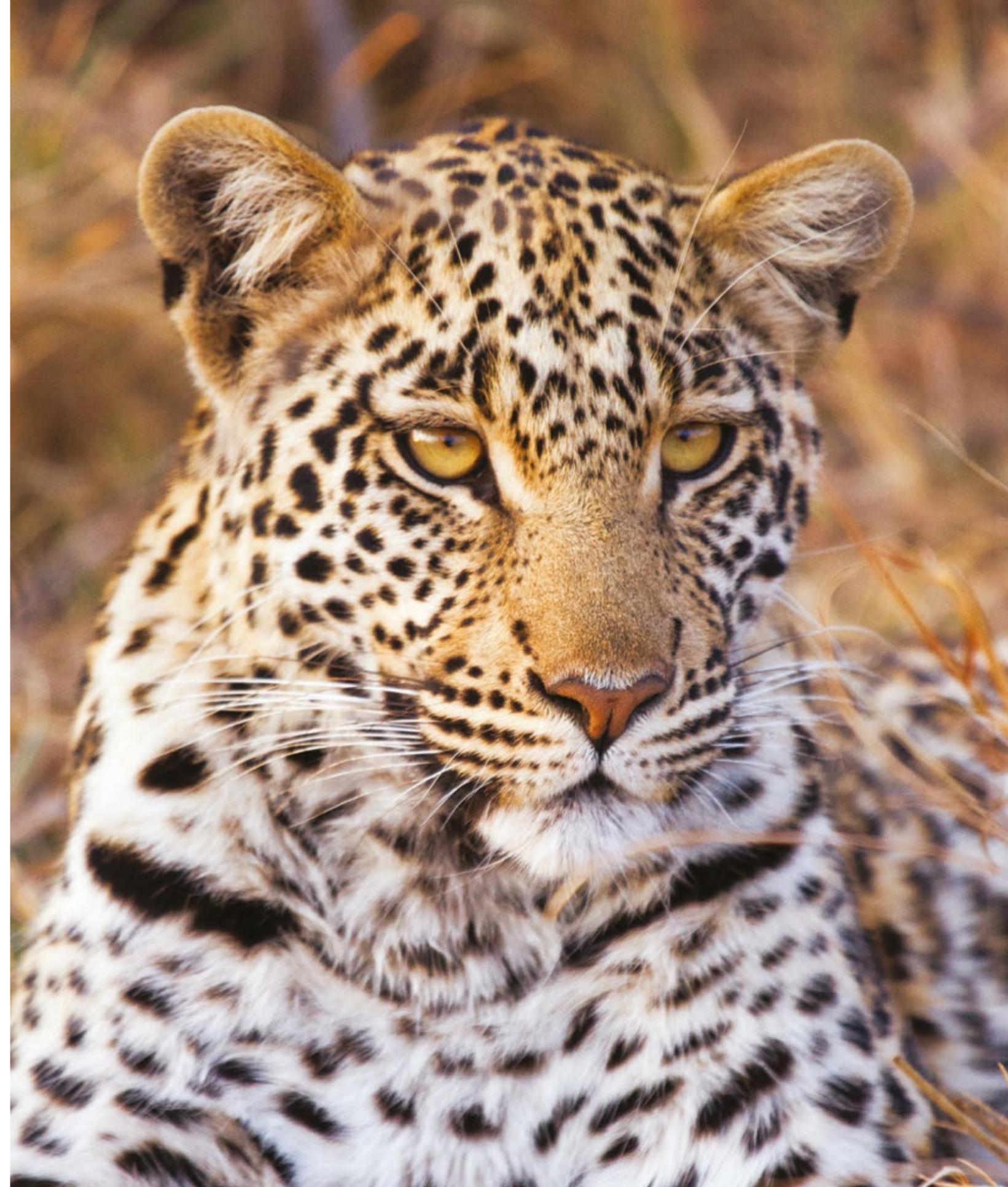
One of Botswana's most recognizable safari brands, Desert & Delta Safaris was established in 1980 when work began in the remote Okavango Delta to craft the groundbreaking Camp Okavango and Camp Moremi. In 1992 these pioneering camps were acquired by a consortium of tourism operators which included Chobe Holdings, the owner of the iconic Chobe Game Lodge. Since then Chobe Holdings has grown to include the boutique safari brand Ker & Downey Botswana as well as providing local flight connections through its integrated air charter company, Safari Air. In 1997 Chobe Holdings became the first tourism company to list on the Botswana Stock Exchange providing a mechanism for broad-based ownership within the tourism sector. Desert & Delta Safaris is proud to be a part of one of Southern Africa's most successful safari operations.

Today Desert & Delta Safaris own and operate nine premier safari properties, all managed by local citizens. Our pioneering approach has ensured that our properties are located within Botswana's prime wildlife destinations, famous for their diversity of experiences which are delivered through the genuine hospitality of empowered local people.

In doing so we care about every one of our staff, all of whom play a key role in delivering these memorable experiences. As a company our foundations are built on what we refer to as the CARES Philosophy. We care about our staff's health, their well-being and their future potential as individuals. We care about their families and the communities they come from and finally, as a company rooted in Botswana, we care about the citizens of our country and fully developing their potential.

Cognizant of the privilege of operating in the heart of pristine wilderness environments, we care about our natural heritage. We care about being eco-conscious driving sustainable and innovative initiatives within our daily operations which protect and limit the impact our business has on the areas in which we work. As a lodge operator responsible for crafting memorable often once in a lifetime experiences we care about our guests and the experiences they have in Botswana.

With 40-years in the safari industry we know that by caring for our people and our environment – we ensure that our guests will enjoy an all-encompassing Botswana safari. Furthermore, by practicing our CARES Philosophy we assure our travellers that their travel spend with us is being utilized in an accountable and responsible manner.





DEDICATION

BY WALTER SMITH

Operations Director, Desert & Delta Safaris

This company, Desert & Delta Safaris, is not simply defined by the structures of our incredible properties. Nor are we defined by the immensely beautiful locations where the adventures and discoveries of our guests takes place. We are not defined by the state-of-the-art equipment, systems, procedures or operational efficiencies that have lead us to become a worldwide leader in our industry.

No, these are all important features which ultimately contribute to our functionality, but in no way define our progression and success.

DESERT & DELTA SAFARIS IS DEFINED BY OUR PEOPLE.

To the Botswana Government, to all Batswana, to the global travel industry, to our customers, to our travel agents and ultimately our visitors and guests, you have allowed us to build and develop a company which has embraced the development of our people.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO HAVE, IN SOME WAY OR OTHER, PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN ENSURING WHAT WE AS A COMPANY ARE TODAY.

I salute my colleagues within the company leadership and our holding company Chobe Holdings for your vision and tenacity. I applaud the groundsman, the cleaning staff, the laundry ladies, the scullery people, the chefs, maintenance crews, our guides, our camp managers, our operations staff, our marketing and reservations people, our admin and finance people, our mechanics and workshop crews and every single person past and present who has, in some way or other, allowed us to become the company that we are today. You are what ultimately defines us as a company.

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO YOU.



FOREWORD

BY BOGOLO JOY KENEWENDO

Former MP Botswana Government: Minister of Investment, Trade & Industry | International Economist

We take immense pride in the natural beauty in our country; the once hidden gem of Africa. Botswana's beauty is an open secret that we boast about, and one that has afforded many opportunities for a livelihood to Botswana from all walks of life. The wildlife, including tourism sector, though undervalued is one of the most important parts of the Botswana economy; contributing 4.6% to GDP in 2019, employment of approximately 31,267 people or 3.2% of formal employment, over 10% of total exports. There is notably still a big growth opportunity for Botswana's wildlife sector, which even in the face of digitisation, maintains a positive growth trajectory. This book will take you on a journey demonstrating that in order for companies to reap these benefits, they need a conscious investment plan; one that focuses on empowering their employees and the surrounding communities' enterprises. It goes without saying that investing in women is a matter of smart economics, the multiplier effect is high, the returns will be significant both on the balance sheet and across society. Desert &



Delta Safaris realised these quite early and what they have achieved over the years in empowerment is commendable. They now bask in this pride that shines and leaves a lasting mark on its guests.

For most, this is not just a sector of the economy, it is a way of life; and a piece of that life is shared with whomever reaches beyond their comforts and takes a chance in ours. That is why, over and above the beauty of our nature, we pride ourselves particularly in the people that make Botswana, as it is the people that allow the environment and indeed businesses to thrive.

It is through them that we are able to enjoy the pristine wildlife. They are the care takers; culturally groomed over centuries to be the astute conservationists that take us through what can only appear to some as an 'out of this world' experience.

Travel Botswana and experience hospitality second to none! Botswana, Our pride, your destination!

PULA! *Bogolo Kenewendo*

Ms Bogolo Kenewendo was the youngest female to be appointed as member of Parliament and Cabinet Minister in Botswana. During her term, she was the youngest Minister in Africa. She is a youth and gender activist and founder of Molaya Kgosi Trust; a women empowerment initiative. Today she heads up her own economic advisory company, Kenewendo Advisory, consulting around the world with a focus on PanAfrican development. She is an avid traveller and a nature lover.

www.kenewendo.com



PREFACE

Before I started working on this book I had heard a lot about Desert & Delta Safari's ethos of 'people-first'. In a travel industry traditionally dominated by the words 'wildlife' and 'conservation', it was refreshing to find a tourism model that was more holistic, focusing first on empowering *people*.

This foundation had its base in Chobe Holdings CEO Jonathan Gibson's insistence, in the early 1980s, that tourism could, and should, provide wide-scale employment for Botswana's citizens, which would also help to secure the future protection of its wild areas.

So when James Wilson, Desert & Delta Safari's Marketing Director, first chatted to me over a pub lunch about the company, its 40-year-old history and why its story needed to be told, I was interested.

In the months that followed I was to spend time with many members of the Desert & Delta family, getting to know chefs, safari guides, housekeepers, directors, camp managers, waiting staff and many more.

I met inspirational people like high school dropout Ernest Chaba, who, enabled by managers who saw his potential, moved from groundsman to Desert & Delta Safaris Assistant General Manager.

I spent several afternoons with senior guides Florence Kagiso and Leeng Lynn Tabalo, (two out of the first five female guides to qualify in Botswana) whose careers soared when they found respect and belonging in a system that recognised them as equals – almost unheard of for female guides in the early 2000s. Today they are part of a team of over 20 female guides employed solely between Desert & Delta Safaris and Chobe Game Lodge (which currently employs over one third of all female guides in Botswana).

Through casual campfire chats or more structured discussions, I gained a greater sense of a culture built around inclusivity and enablement. Staff members were eager to share their stories, wearing their pride in the company like badges on their uniforms. Ernest, Leeng and Florence were not exceptions, they were the norm. They

represent just a handful of accounts I heard from the many members of the Desert & Delta community who you will meet in the following pages – people whose lives changed when they were given the opportunity, and who cared for the company the same way it cared for them.

Since beginning my work on the book in September 2019, I spoke to 47 people, with interview backdrops extending to mokoros, electric game vehicles, workshop benches, office boardrooms and even the Chobe Game Lodge recycling plant, where I perched on a crate near the tin can crusher listening to Desert & Delta Safaris' veteran and Environmental Ambassador Albert Ndereki, who helped lay the foundations of Chobe Game Lodge (even before it was part Chobe Holdings) in 1971.

Tourism companies can and should be forces for positive change in their communities, their countries, their continents. Now, more than ever, travellers realise that genuine responsible travel – not just convenient catch-phrases – is crucial if the industry is going to benefit and sustain a country's people and landscapes.

Desert & Delta Safaris knew this from the beginning. They were well ahead of their time. This is their story. The story of how they empowered rural Batswana, often from backgrounds with few education opportunities, into management positions in a Botswana Stock Exchange-listed business. The story of how they embraced a philosophy that enabled deep-rooted local development, creating the necessary in-house systems to achieve diversity and transformation. The story of how they changed the way women are perceived in the industry (especially the guiding profession). The story of how, at Chobe Game Lodge, they have been one of Africa's environmental leaders in green energy.

But most of all, it is the story of how one company has believed in its people – and, in turn, how its people have believed in it.

Mana Meadows

CONTENTS

1.

The **Birth of an Industry** and the **Birth of a Company**

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS :
1960-1980

After the completion of Camp Okavango in 1980, Jessie Neil went on to build Camp Moremi in the Moremi Game Reserve and “Desert & Delta Safaris” was born – and with it, one of Botswana’s earliest luxury safari circuits.

- 24

2.

Building a **Community**

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS :
1981-1997

By 1992 Desert & Delta Safaris, as we know it today, had officially been formed. Now was the time to put philosophy into practice: community ownership as a company culture.

- 38

3.

Growing a **Business**

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS :
1988-2013

Desert & Delta Safaris was building a culture that was open-door; one that valued the empowerment of local people above all else. The outline had been drawn, and now the shading in had to begin.

- 51

4.

The **CARES** Philosophy

The CARES philosophy is the foundation on which Desert & Delta Safaris is built, highlighting our core values in developing human potential and building a sustainable tourism model.

- 60

5.

Responsible Tourism means **Local Career Development**

Company growth should equal growth in employees’ opportunities. In 2014, the company became the first luxury safari circuit to have its camps wholly managed by Botswana citizens.

- 76

6.

Developing Responsible Tourism through **Female Empowerment**

Chobe Game Lodge’s all-female guiding team and the promotion of women into senior management positions is testament to Desert & Delta Safaris commitment to empowering women in the travel.

- 96

7.

Preserving the **Environment** through Developing **Local Citizens**

With the establishment of Africa’s first electric powered safari fleet at Chobe Game Lodge as well as a variety of environmental management initiatives, Desert & Delta Safaris maintains that local citizens ultimately hold the key to protecting the country’s heritage.

- 110

8.

A Journey to the **Future**

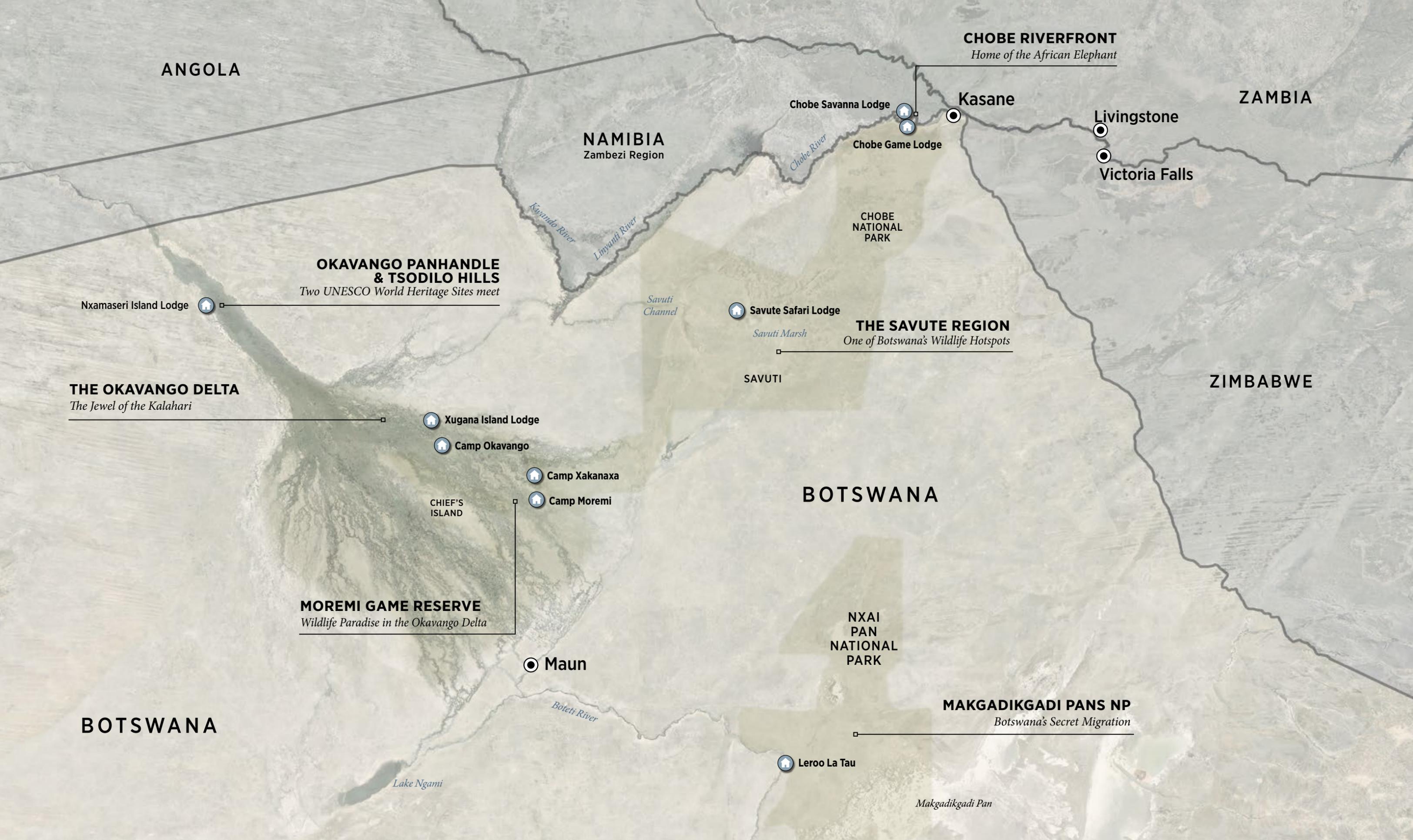
Commercial success has ensured the longevity of Desert & Delta Safaris, but at the heart of the company’s success is its commitment to the development of its people. It is therefore no surprise that one of its next immediate objectives is also people-centric.

- 123

Empowering Botswana Through Tourism

With a 40-year-old history, Desert & Delta Safaris is considered the most established safari circuit in Botswana. At the heart of what we do is developing the human potential of tourism in this remarkable country by offering a true wilderness experience in some of the most pristine conservation areas in Africa.





ANGOLA

CHOBÉ RIVERFRONT
Home of the African Elephant

ZAMBIA

NAMIBIA
Zambezi Region

Kasane

Livingstone

Victoria Falls

Chobe Savanna Lodge

Chobe Game Lodge

CHOBÉ NATIONAL PARK

OKAVANGO PANHANDLE & TSODILO HILLS
Two UNESCO World Heritage Sites meet

Nxamaseri Island Lodge

Savuti Channel

Savute Safari Lodge

THE SAVUTE REGION
One of Botswana's Wildlife Hotspots

Savuti Marsh

SAVUTI

ZIMBABWE

THE OKAVANGO DELTA
The Jewel of the Kalahari

Xugana Island Lodge

Camp Okavango

Camp Xakanaxa

Camp Moremi

CHIEF'S ISLAND

BOTSWANA

MOREMI GAME RESERVE
Wildlife Paradise in the Okavango Delta

Maun

NXAI PAN NATIONAL PARK

MAKGADIKGADI PANS NP
Botswana's Secret Migration

BOTSWANA

Boteti River

Leroo La Tau

Makgadikgadi Pan

Lake Ngami



Botswana – A True Natural Wilderness



offering Outstanding Safari Encounters



in Remote Luxury Camps & Lodges



LEROO-LA-TAU

with Unrivalled Hospitality



CHAPTER

1

The birth of an
INDUSTRY
and the
BIRTH OF
A COMPANY

When the first seed of the Desert & Delta Safaris brand was planted in the late 1970s, Botswana's photographic tourism industry was still very young.

That seed, planted in 1976 on a secluded island on one of the most beautiful parts of the Okavango Delta, finally bore fruit in 1980, when work on the very first Desert & Delta Safaris' camp – Camp Okavango – began. When the company's second property, Camp Moremi, was completed five years later, one of Botswana's first photographic safari circuits was born.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

1960-1980





POST-INDEPENDENCE – 1960s

Post Botswana's independence in **1966**, the country had one of Africa's smallest economies with very little infrastructure. Its tourism industry almost entirely consisted of hunting safaris where wealthy overseas trophy-hunters stayed in rustic bush camps on concessions largely leased by professional hunters of European descent.

The up-and-coming Chobe riverfront safari area had started to attract local and regional photographic tourists, but there were few international visitors.

The Okavango Delta (previously marked as the "Okavango Swamps" on overseas maps) was not yet known as a tourism destination. Instead, from the **1950s up until the mid-1970s**, the "swamps" supplied a relentless international trade in crocodile skins, feeding a worldwide obsession with reptile leather, which only ended when crocodiles came under CITES protection (under Appendix 1, the most restrictive control) in 1975. The Okavango's reputation for scenic splendour would only begin in the 1980s, from where it would gain increasing worldwide recognition, eventually becoming a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014.

EARLY 1970s

The newly-built Chobe Game Lodge, at the time owned by Southern Sun and not yet in the Desert & Delta Safaris stable, was putting Botswana on the tourist map in the **early 1970s**. Two visits by film star Elizabeth Taylor to this lodge (culminating in her marriage to Richard Burton in 1975 at the lodge) further helped highlight the scenic and wildlife-rich Chobe area.

MID-1970s & 1980s

In the mid to late 1970s, companies began adding photographic camps to their concessions, and a few companies started camps that were solely photographic in nature.

1980: ENTER DESERT & DELTA SAFARIS

Out of this new surge of interest in photographic camps, Jesse Neil, a wealthy Texan who had fallen in love with the Okavango Delta through previous hunting trips there, decided to set up one of the first permanent safari camps in the Okavango Delta. After the completion of Camp Okavango in 1980, she went on to build Camp Moremi in the Moremi Game Reserve. Both camps were registered under the same company and "Desert & Delta Safaris" was born – and with it, one of Botswana's earliest luxury safari circuits.

During this period, friends and business partners Jonathan Gibson and Ian Green were also considering a foray into Botswana's safari industry. Southern Sun's iconic Chobe Game Lodge had been closed since 1977 due to hostilities in neighbouring Zimbabwe.

DEREK FLATT

MANAGING DIRECTOR,
DESERT & DELTA SAFARIS 2006 – 2016

***On Botswana's tourism
industry in the 1970s:***

In the late 70s Derek Flatt started piloting for Air Kavango – a small charter company that mostly flew hunting clients in and out of remote camps scattered across Botswana. He did the odd scenic flight (flying guests over the Delta) but he mostly transported hunting clients to and from camps around the country. “There were only a handful of photographic camps in the country,” remembers Flatt. “And the way things were, they could never operate profitably because of the transport issue. How do you get people in and out? So, the main tourism industry was the hunting industry.” He credits Jon Panos, a Johannesburg-based businessman, with starting up Botswana’s first photographic circuit – with two Okavango-based camps and one camp in Savute. “I think he was the father of all this...” says Flatt. “And he turned it into a very successful business. And that really was the kick-start because people started looking at aeroplanes as ‘this is the way to go’.”

***On his early involvement
with the new-born Desert
& Delta Safaris:***

Flatt was working for the charter company that flew materials to the new Camp Okavango as they set up the extremely remote tourism site. Prior to air transport, materials had to be driven to Xakanaxa and then boated to Camp Okavango – the entire camp was built like that. There were no airstrips, and Derek remembers landing on a “patch of floodplain with markers put on it... But when Jesse opened the camp to the public, things got serious and a proper airstrip had to be built.”

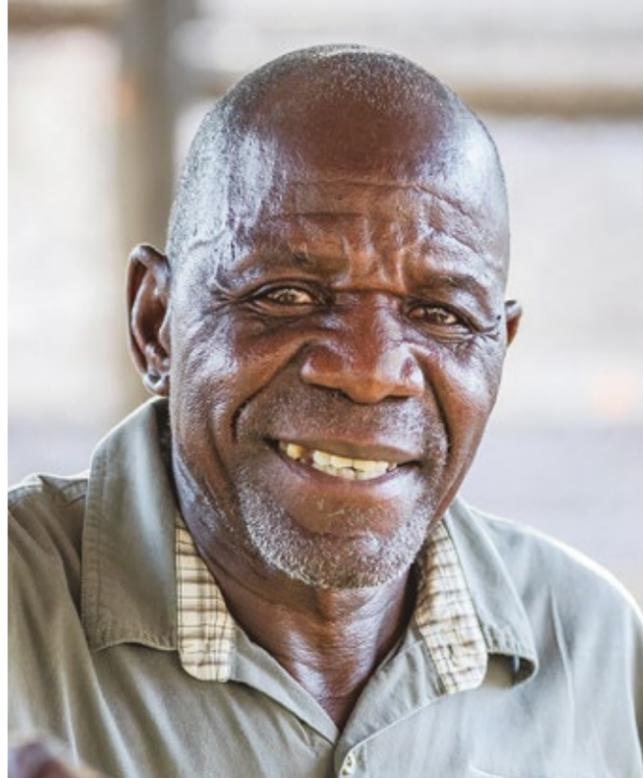
*Mosiako Bashe, Communications & Operations
(far left), and Derek Flatt (former managing director).*



MEMORIES
AND
STORIES

FROM
DESERT & DELTA
SAFARIS
PIONEERS





ALBERT NDEREKI

BACK OF HOUSE MANAGER, CHOBE GAME LODGE

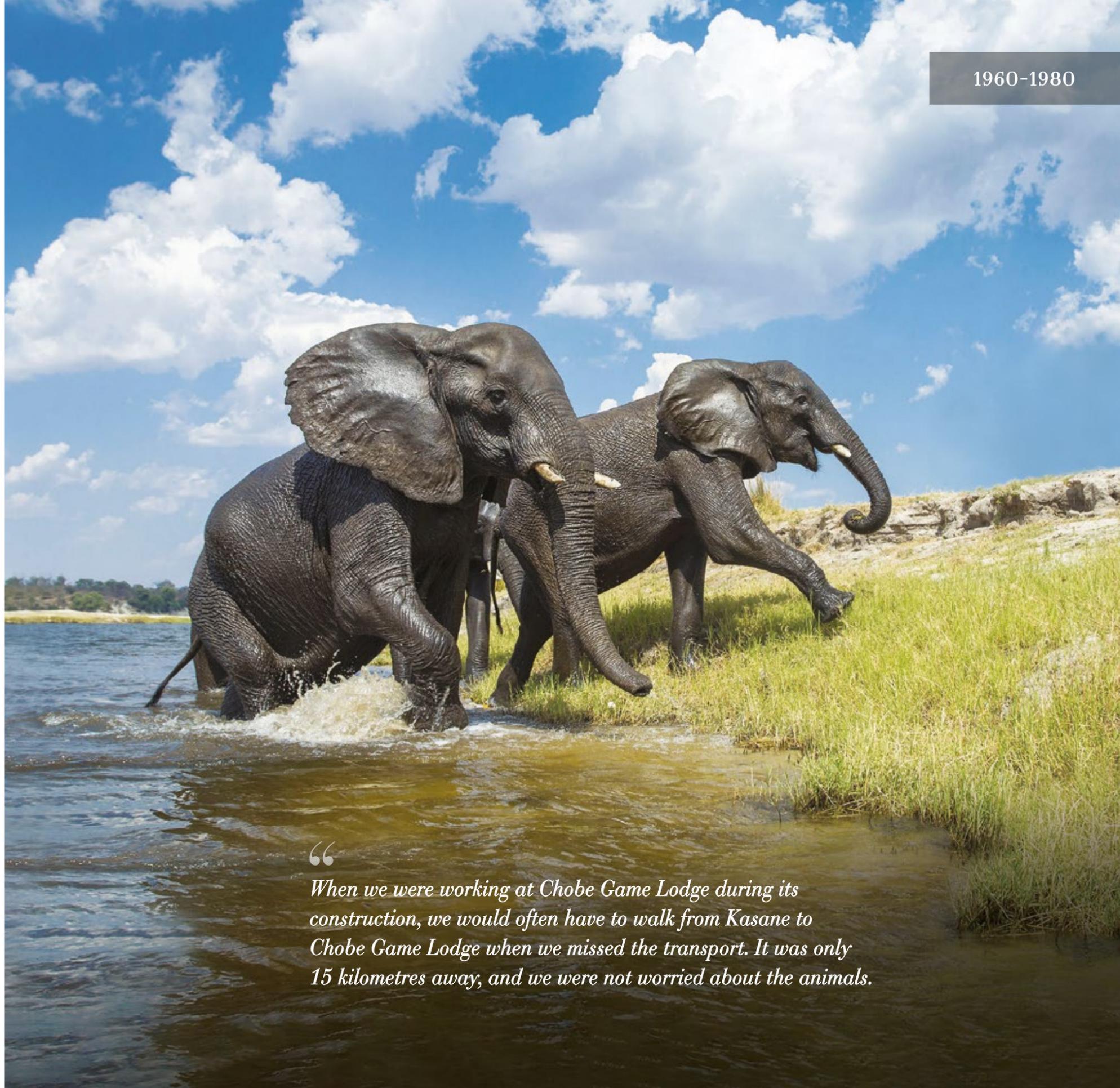
A foundational part of the Desert & Delta Safaris story...

Albert Ndereki's history with Chobe Game Lodge goes back to the foundations of Chobe Game Lodge itself: as a young man he worked as part of the construction crew that built the lodge in 1971 – helping lay the lodge's foundations. Almost 50 years later, he is still with Botswana's oldest five-star hotel, now working as an environmental educator, where he has led "back-of-house" ecotourism tours since 2012 when the lodge was amongst the first to be fully eco-certified.

Born in the village of Satau in Northern Botswana, Ndereki can tell you stories of how he's watched Botswana evolve from simple beginnings into the premier destination for safari goers around the world. When he first started working at Chobe Game Lodge in 1971, guests were expected to wear formal attire to dinner and flew directly into Chobe National Park, landing at Serondela Airstrip by the Chobe River.

He met the legendary cardiac surgeon, the late Chris Barnard in 1974 – and fondly remembers Richard Burton who spent many weeks at Chobe Game Lodge. "He had his own jet here," recalls Ndereki. "He often stayed here and people were stalking him. "I even had the privilege to watch Richard serenade Elizabeth Taylor in their private suite. In fact, the small hospital in Kasane was given to us by Elizabeth Taylor. The two of them went there to go and see how people were living. At that time the hospital was just a two-roomed house so they gave the government money to extend the hospital."

Recently he won the prestigious *We Are Africa* "Shape Africa" Award for his hard work managing and promoting the lodge's award-winning ecotourism facilities. Turn to page 115 where Albert Ndereki shares more on Chobe Game Lodge's journey to becoming one of Africa's leading ecotourism properties.



“

When we were working at Chobe Game Lodge during its construction, we would often have to walk from Kasane to Chobe Game Lodge when we missed the transport. It was only 15 kilometres away, and we were not worried about the animals.

JOHN KATA

AN OKAVANGO STALWARTS



Just like the unchanging pattern of life that carries on around Camp Okavango, one of Botswana's oldest photographic camps, John Kata's career has bridged the old and the new worlds of life in the Okavango.

Mana Meadows talks to John Kata with Ernest Chaba helping with translation.

We're sitting on the outside deck of Camp Okavango. In the distance an elephant bull slowly makes his way across the Nxaragha channel, a path of papyrus dragging in his baggy-trousered wake. Nature is all-encompassing here: worn pathways below the deck speak of night-time highways belonging to hippo residents; squirrels scamper across the camp's beautiful living areas; and red lechwe antelope browse beyond the treeline. Behind us, breakfast is being cleared away and the tinkle of crockery and cutlery mingles with the surrounding bird chorus as bulbuls and mousebirds feast on the juicy red bouquets of African mangosteen fruits (*"Motsaudi"* in Setswana) above us.

Growing up with his family on the islands surrounding Camp Okavango, this amphibious world has been John Kata's home before the camp was even a whisper of an idea. It is fitting that I am catching him here 40 years later as he is working his final month as a nature guide at this historic camp. It also happens to be Desert & Delta Safaris' first fully solar-powered camp after being

completely rebuilt in 2016 as a modern luxury safari camp.

Kata's adult life has been intricately linked with the birth and subsequent growth of Desert & Delta. His people – "water bushmen" (or Bayeyi) lived off the land surviving off fishing, hunting and the seasonal wild fruits that brought colour and variety to a Spartan-like diet which he believes made them feel "strong and fresh, and live longer". He shakes his head as he points to the breakfast table with its scones, cheese platters and various fruit juices to choose from. "With this food we eat today, 40 years and we're feeling finished," chuckles Kata, who is known for his soft spot for hot chocolate.

In Kata's youth there were no regulations and his people were free to hunt and fish. Their existence was in tune with nature and a respectful balance existed. He is bemused at my interest in what things were like then. He thinks for a while and remembers that there were no elephants "and much more water" in those days – "big rains and big floods," he recalls.

“

John Kata's adult life has been intricately linked with the birth and subsequent growth of Desert & Delta Safaris. His people – 'water bushmen' (or Bayeyi) lived off the land surviving off fishing, hunting and the seasonal wild fruits that brought colour and variety to a Spartan-like diet which he believes made them feel 'strong and fresh, and live longer.



CHAPTER

2

BUILDING A COMMUNITY

The origin of the present-day Desert & Delta Safaris can be compared to that of a river, where two small tributaries eventually merge to form one large waterway.

Desert & Delta Safaris was created in 1980, but the company only came under its present management in 1992, when Chobe Holdings purchased it from Jessie Neil, and expanded the brand by adding Chobe Game Lodge.

But what did a 44-room luxury lodge on the banks of the Chobe River have in common with two remote safari camps in the heart of the Okavango Delta? And how did these two tributaries converge?

The answer lies in the vision of a man who believed that tourism, and specifically photographic tourism, could and should provide wide-scale employment and empowerment for Botswana's people, and in doing this, would guarantee the protection of its wild areas. This man was Jonathan Gibson, a businessman with a soft spot for both people and wild places. As a child, Gibson had frequented the Chobe area on camping trips with his parents and had a deep affinity for the landscape and the people of Botswana. It may seem obvious now, but in the 1980s, with photographic tourism virtually non-existent, the vision that tourism could provide countrywide upliftment, was an unusual one. Yet, it would be the foundation on which Desert & Delta Safaris would presently be built. In 1983, Gibson, together with childhood friend and business partner, Ian Green, bought Chobe Game Lodge. The lodge had been closed since 1977, and in 1984 Gibson and Green reopened it again.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

1981-1997



THE TRIBUTARIES CONVERGED



CHOBE GAME LODGE AND THE BIRTH OF CHOBE HOLDINGS LTD

But let's go back in time a little. Due to hostilities in neighbouring Zimbabwe, Chobe Game Lodge had been closed since 1977. Despite the peaceful political resolution in Zimbabwe in 1980, Southern Sun, the South African owners, did not reopen it. When Gibson and Green phoned Southern Sun in Johannesburg, they were told that it was decided that the lodge would not be reopened, and that they would consider selling it. As Gibson recalls, after that discussion, things moved fast. "A week after that phone call the price was set, far beyond what we

could actually afford, given our involvement in medium-term property investments. The Game Lodge had unique rights in that it was a permanent structure in a national park. Nine frantic months followed as we renegotiated lease terms with government and sold off Johannesburg property. Only then could we start the extensive repair and required refurbishments."

The job ahead was huge. Not only were big structural changes needed, but the Chobe region's image was suffering due to security issues in neighbouring regions. "These were very tough times, conflict in Namibia and continued unrest in neighbouring newly independent Zimbabwe's western provinces meant that photographic tourism, still at its infancy then, was a very difficult sell," recalls Gibson. And added to this, there was a severe shortage of skilled staff.

But just eight months later, on the 15th March 1984, Chobe Game Lodge was officially reopened by Sir Ketumile Masire, Botswana's president at the time. Despite its challenging beginnings, business improved for the lodge and in 1985, the Sun International Group bought a 50% shareholding. This investment enabled further renovations and access to the group's considerable marketing skills. Shortly afterwards, Green pursued other business interests in South Africa and sold his share to Gibson, who formed Chobe Holdings in 1989 in order to acquire Sun International's shareholding as well.

AN AUSPICIOUS INVITE

Meanwhile, on the opposite side of northern Botswana, over 300 kilometres away in the verdant Okavango Delta, Jessie Neil, the wealthy American concessionaire who had established the first two Desert & Delta camps, was building a product that would become known for its unique elegance in a very remote environment. Gibson had the opportunity to visit Neil. "As a colleague in the industry Jessie invited myself – and surprisingly, my very young twin sons, John and Matthew – down to visit for a few days. Children were usually a strict no-no. Given Jessie's foresight, attention to detail and her own eccentricities, both properties branded as Desert & Delta Safaris achieved rapid recognition for exceptional standards of service," remembers Gibson. "This visit reminded me that Botswana had much more to offer than just Chobe: for us to be able to grow, we would need to be able to offer packages that included other destinations."

By 1991, Neil wanted to opt out of the industry. Gibson had a good working relationship with her and was offered the opportunity to buy the safari company. In 1992, Chobe Holdings purchased Desert & Delta Safaris, expanding the Desert & Delta brand by adding Chobe Game Lodge to its portfolio. Desert & Delta Safaris, as we know it today, had officially been formed. Now was the time to put philosophy into practice: community ownership as a company culture.

“
Jessie Neil, the wealthy American concessionaire who had established the first two Desert & Delta Safaris camps, was building a product that would become known for its unique elegance in a very remote environment.



Camp Okavango – 1980



Camp Moremi – 1984



Chobe Game Lodge – July 1983



Chobe Game Lodge – March 1984



THE PATH TO COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

In the 1980s one of Gibson's biggest – and well-founded – fears, was that the electorate, not benefitting in any real sustainable way from wildlife, would inevitably lobby to allow ever greater encroachment by cattle, a traditional and well understood means of livelihood, into previously designated wildlife areas. “In a democracy, especially a new democracy, centred in distant Gaborone – the future of Botswana's wildlife, outside national parks and game reserves – looked uncertain,” explains Gibson.

Gibson's view, and the view of a few other tourism pioneers in Botswana at that time, was that non-consumptive wildlife tourism was the only logical alternative. It was different from the hunting industry in that it could, in most parts at least, remain open year around, offering permanent employment, which would inevitably lead to a necessity to train and upskill. “If the non-consumptives could gain a material foothold in the country, it would provide space for citizens, particularly ex-employees who had garnered skills in the work place, to strike out in the industry on their own, thus providing a further voice for the preservation and protection of our wildlife resources from our very own electorate.”

Gibson believed that citizens should be given the opportunity to play their part in management and ultimately ownership of not only Desert & Delta Safaris, but in companies across the industry. Only this, he said, would provide the industry with credibility. And in order to protect their interests, citizens, and by extension their locally owned businesses, would actively seek to ensure their natural resources were protected. With these beliefs, Desert & Delta surged forward with empowering its people. It was a win-win solution, and for a change focused on people, and not just the environment. This was refreshing to both government and citizens. But as Gibson himself acknowledges, while this theory was in practice simple, in reality it was much more difficult to achieve.

FORGING THE COURSE FORWARD

Experience in senior management was needed

A major problem was that there were very few qualified local people who had any experience in the tourism industry, least of all in the high end Desert & Delta Safaris sort to serve. As an independent country, Botswana was less than twenty years old, and at independence it had been one of the poorest countries in the world: virtually the entire population at that time was engaged in pastoral farming. "In the absence of any formal hotel training establishments, or even a secondary school in the district, we had no alternative but to employ expatriate management. Their task, however, was always to identify those amongst our employees who demonstrated an interest and inclination for advancement. These individuals would then receive special attention in terms of training, both in-house and externally. The expatriates understood that, at some undefined date in the future, citizen management should and would be armed with the skill sets to replace them," Gibson explains.

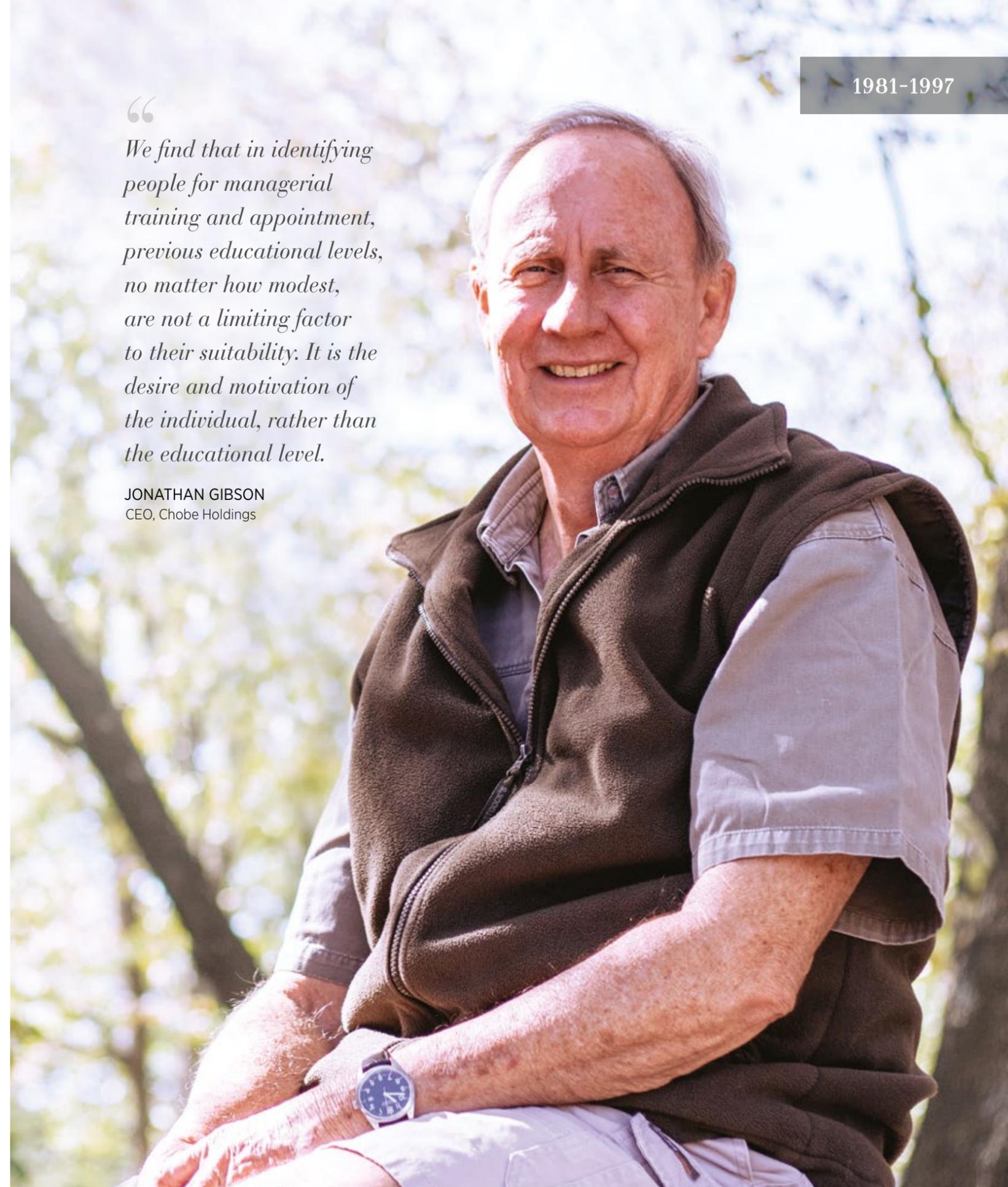
Creating the right fit

Another big problem was finding staff who were not only trained, but who also wanted to live in remote areas. "After some time, the educational authorities had begun to recognise that wildlife-based tourism really did represent widespread employment opportunities," says Gibson. "And so they began sponsoring various tertiary educational opportunities in order to fast-track citizen empowerment in the industry." But Desert & Delta senior management soon noticed that the graduates from these institutions had often been trained with city or urban type hotels in mind. "As many of these people had been brought up in rural villages, getting to the city was exactly what they had aspired to anyway," explains Gibson. "In short, a managerial job in a remote bush camp was definitely not what they felt they had been trained for, nor where they wanted to live. It fell to us to conclude that there must be – amongst our employees and indeed elsewhere in the rural north – smart and motivated people who had never been presented with educational opportunities that allowed them to go onto higher education. We actively sought to find these people, if not in the ranks of our staff, then elsewhere. This policy was never a once-off process, but turned into an ongoing one that, to this day, is still running."

“
*Chobe Holdings CEO
Jonathan Gibson
believed that citizens
should be given the
opportunity to play
their part in manage-
ment and ultimately
ownership of not
only Desert & Delta
Safaris, but in
companies across the
industry. Only this, he
said, would provide
the industry with
credibility.*

“
*We find that in identifying
people for managerial
training and appointment,
previous educational levels,
no matter how modest,
are not a limiting factor
to their suitability. It is the
desire and motivation of
the individual, rather than
the educational level.*

JONATHAN GIBSON
CEO, Chobe Holdings



MOSIAKO BASHE

COMMUNICATIONS & OPERATIONS,
DESERT & DELTA SAFARIS : 1988 – PRESENT

On the cosiness of the industry back then:

When Mosiako Bashe joined the industry in 1988, most remote camps contracted Maun-based companies to organise supplies and do their administration. “Our office was very small,” remembers Bashe, who worked for one of these companies. “It was a storeroom, and an office... There were only three staff... I did the radio comms and the daily ops stuff. The camp supplies would be flown in once a week. We didn’t have a cold room, so we would get all supplies from SPAR (a local shop) on a Wednesday evening and keep it fresh overnight at the office with the aircon on. Very early the next morning supplies were flown to the camps. Dry goods went to camps on trucks once a month. With gas, petrol and diesel and supplies, all on one truck! Today, we have over 50 staff here. And in the camps, over 300 staff. And six remote camps! The company has grown a lot. But I still enjoy it. And I can still manage it.”

On the Desert & Delta Safaris “culture of cosiness”:

Known for his sense of humour and empathy for his workmates far from home, Mosiako Bashe has been known to play hymns from national radio stations over the ops radios on Sunday mornings to staff in remote camps so they feel connected with the outside world. Bashe says that, despite the company’s growth, he thinks it has still managed to maintain its cosy, familiar atmosphere. “The atmosphere still remains as is... when I talk to the people in the camps from here, every morning, I can feel how they are. Is their morale still there? I come here in the morning for them. I must cheer them up. We are one family and they are far from their families.”



MAMA MEADOWS

CHOBE HOLDINGS LTD AND THE BOTSWANA STOCK EXCHANGE

*Listing on the Botswana Stock Exchange
provided a means of allowing Chobe Holdings
(and therefore Desert & Delta Safaris)
to show transparency and build national
trust in the tourism industry:*

“We decided to list on the Botswana Stock Exchange to visibly disprove the allegations, in the most transparent way possible, that as for at least our part in the tourist industry, we were not retaining revenue outside the country, nor were we evading taxes and other obligations to our host country. I also wanted to bring in far wider citizen share ownership than what we currently had; as it happened our initial public offering was heavily oversubscribed, consequently we have today some one and a half thousand members of the public as shareholders. Being listed, operating with unashamed transparency to the highest reporting standards, made Chobe Holdings unique amongst our industry peers. It challenges the company, and by that I mean all of us, the board, the executive, management and staff to operate and conduct ourselves at a level far above that required of our non-listed competitors. Anybody can see our contribution to this industry. Chobe Holdings, voluntarily and willingly, provides this information in a so called “Value Added Statement” in the fly of our annual report, this document is freely available to all on our website.”

JONATHAN GIBSON
CEO, Chobe Holdings



“
Growing up with his family on the islands surrounding Camp Okavango, this amphibious world has been John Kata’s home before the camp was even a whisper of an idea.

MAMA MEADOWS

1960-1980



I urge him to share more. He thinks for a while and then asks Ernest Chaba to say to me that people were much tougher then. He is more comfortable talking in Setswana, and Chaba is helping with translation. “Someone could have an accident with an animal but they never went to hospital, they were being attended by guys who knew what kind of plants to use so they could heal the wound,” explains Chaba. Kata interrupts to elaborate. Chaba listens with a serious face, nodding occasionally and then suddenly breaks out into laughter. “He thinks at the same time they were brave enough to stay with that kind of risk... But now we fear everything, even a small accident, we just cry and get flown to hospital! Even John himself has lost that kind of courage.”

When Kata was twenty-two years old, the government started encouraging his people to move out of the delta and into villages like Maun, where they would have better access to healthcare, education, and above all, be safe from the ravages of tsetse flies, which caused the death of many people each year.

The village elders were unhappy at the prospect of moving, and Kata remembers that the government often came to try and convince them to move. Chaba translates: “When the government came to have meetings, the elders were against the motion, but the youngsters were happy as some of them were already working in town, and they were helping the government by telling their elders - ‘look at your health’. The tsetse fly problem was bad then, it wasn’t under control at that stage. The elders wanted to say ‘no, we enjoy this place, we don’t want to move, and we have been living here for ages.’ But at that time the tsetse fly was horrible for everybody. They were all happy in the end... and they were convinced by those young guys because they could see their children were having a better life on the other side. They were also given cattle.”

Soon after the government started visiting, people flew to the current site of Camp Okavango and came to introduce

themselves to the villagers, telling them of their plans to build a camp there. It was 1976 and at one of these introductions Kata asked if there was work with these people. By then his family was planning on leaving the delta and he liked the idea of staying on to work in his homeland. The translators suggested that he should come back to camp and speak to Jesse Neil who was building the camp. He jumped in his mokoro, crossing the same channel that we were now looking over. He was offered a job as a night watchman, which would soon change to groundsman as preparations for the camp construction gained momentum.

So began Kata’s long and peaceful career with Desert & Delta Safaris. From being night watchman, he soon progressed to camp gardener and once the camp was built, he moved on to help build Camp Moremi in 1982. This was the next camp that Neil was building. After that he returned to Nxaragha island and started working as a poler, and later a guide, which has been his profession for the past 40 years now.

Ernest Chaba (above) Assistant General Manager at Desert & Delta, helps share John’s fascinating story through translation. As one of the companies longest standing employees, Ernest has worked closely with John over the decades which has formed a strong personal bond between the two.





CHAPTER

3

GROWING BUSINESS:
**GROWING
PEOPLE**

*The journey to becoming the most
established safari circuit in Botswana*

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

1988-2013

SURGES IN GROWTH



In the early 1990s, Desert & Delta Safaris became wholly Botswana-owned and by the late 1990s, the company was ready to take the brand to the next level. Strategic investments in the Botswana tourism industry were acquired, including related service businesses such as Safari Air, an air charter operator. The purchase of a large developed property near Maun's airport provided a ready-made self-contained operational base, and gone were the days where a team of three managed to run two camps from a small office.

Key to these changes was the acquisition of strategic new properties that would create a circuit allowing guests to experience vastly contrasting regions. It offered a diversity of destinations that established Desert & Delta Safaris as one of the best safari circuits in Botswana. With Camp Okavango and Camp Moremi firmly on the path to success, the next investment was the well-known "Lloyd's Camp" in Savute in 1998, which was located on the Savute channel in the heart of one of Botswana's most dramatic regions for predator activity. Construction on a new 24-

bed lodge started immediately. The new lodge, named the "Savute Safari Lodge", was opened in March 1999 by His Excellency, Festus Mogae, President of Botswana at the time.

Further expansion beckoned and by 2001 the company had built Chobe Savanna Lodge, the fifth product in the Desert & Delta Safaris portfolio. Although just four kilometres further down the Chobe River from Chobe Game Lodge, Chobe Savanna Lodge is in Namibia's Caprivi Strip. To this day it is accessible only by boat.

Soon after this was the purchase of the beautiful Xugana Island Lodge, another big feather in the Desert & Delta Safaris cap as it is located on one of the most picturesque lagoons in the permanent water area of the Okavango Delta. Xugana Island Lodge had early roots in the delta: it had been a favourite destination with the safari-hunting industry in the early 1970s, but now it was purely photographic. Guests were able to fish and game view during boat trips, and take a walk on the many nearby islands, which were well-populated with wildlife.

And, fundamental to the Xugana experience, they could truly absorb the tranquillity of the delta by exploring it via mokoro – a traditional dugout canoe that provides an ancient, almost silent mode of transport in this labyrinthine waterway.

From delta to desert – in 2008 Desert & Delta Safaris purchased Leroo La Tau, which offered yet more diversity and personality to the safari portfolio. Located on the banks of the Boteti River, overlooking the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park, it boasted one of the largest zebra and wildebeest migrations in Africa, followed of course by the throngs of predators that came along for the easy pickings.

The circuit was really coming together for the company: guests could track big predators with 4x4s in harsh desert areas, as well as explore stunning water-based activities in the Okavango Delta. Safari Air transported guests to and from the various locations on a well-planned schedule, which allowed visitors breakfast at Savute Safari Lodge after an early morning game-drive, and then lunch in the Okavango Delta.

In 2013 Camp Xakanaxa, was bought. Set on the banks of the Khwai River near its source on the Xakanaxa Lagoon in the heart of the Moremi Game Reserve, this classic tented camp was the latest property to join the portfolio. The addition of Camp Xakanaxa meant all the luxury lodges in the Xakanaxa area of the Moremi Game Reserve came under the Chobe Holdings banner.

“

It offered a diversity of destinations that established Desert & Delta Safaris as one of the best safari circuits in Botswana.



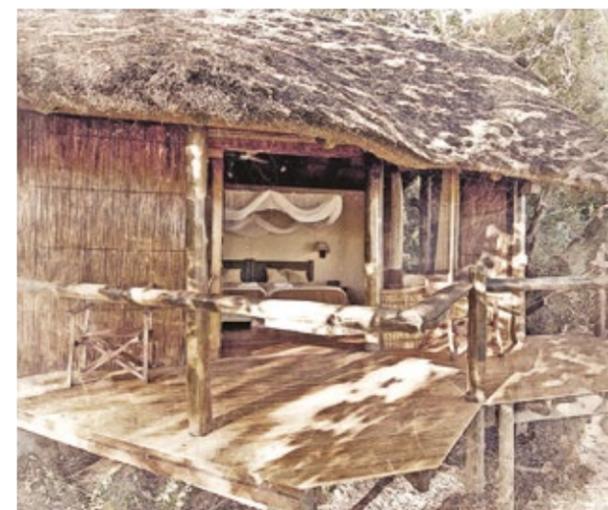
Leroo La Tau – 2008



Savute Safari Lodge – 1998



Chobe Savanna Lodge – 2001



Xugana Island Lodge – 2001



Camp Xakanaxa – 2013

“

From its early days, once employed with Desert & Delta Safaris, there were no limits on what you could achieve in the company: if you wanted to grow further, Desert & Delta Safaris would always meet you halfway.

ERNEST CHABA

Assistant General Manager,
Desert & Delta Safaris



EMPOWERING ITS PEOPLE TO GROW WITH IT



LOCAL PEOPLE IN TOURISM: WHAT DID IT LOOK LIKE IN THE 1990s & EARLY 2000s?

This vast company growth led to an increase in Desert & Delta Safaris' staff needs. But Botswana didn't yet have a hotel-training school, or any hospitality schooling institutes and therefore trained staff were scarce. Instead, the industry relied heavily on private companies to empower local communities to learn on the job. Management at Desert & Delta quickly realised that Botswana's fledgling photographic tourism industry would need help building skilled capacity if it were to be internationally competitive and develop home-grown talent.

But time, effort and commitment were needed to make this a reality. People who came to work for Desert & Delta were mostly from rural areas where exposure to tourism and education had been very low. They often didn't imagine themselves in leadership roles. On the other hand, they were naturally brilliant hosts. Additionally, they were used to living remotely, and typically near wildlife, and they usually enjoyed it, all essential components for life in the bush.

When it came to senior positions in the camps, the few local people with hospitality training usually came from urban backgrounds and preferred city-based jobs. In the 1990s and early 2000s, camp managers were mostly experienced expats (often husband and wife teams) who had worked in safari camps throughout Africa. Many had farming backgrounds which often meant they arrived ready with management experience. Out of necessity they were regularly all-rounders with a wide range of practical skills, like fixing a water pump or repairing a faulty boat motor. But they also required expat salaries and benefits

and were occupying jobs that the senior management of Desert & Delta Safaris believed could be filled by local Botswana.

SHIFTING MIND-SETS ALL AROUND

At the time, empowering Botswana into senior positions was not being done in the industry – or certainly not on the scale that Desert & Delta Safaris believed it should be done. Dynamics needed to change, but a lot of work lay ahead. The very first step was that Botswana needed to see themselves as part of the future of the company. And secondly, the company realised that, in order to enable its people (many of whom had very little mechanical or technical experience) to run a safari camp, they would need to put systems in place to address this. Either that, or they had to change the way the safari camp was run. In the end they did both.

AND PUTTING TALK INTO WALK

Every journey starts somewhere, and Desert & Delta Safaris had long-ago started theirs. The shift had started from early into the company's entry into the industry. Always strong on being locally supportive, it was finding its feet and building up a culture that was open-door despite being corporate; one that valued the empowerment of local people above all else. The outline had been drawn, and now the shading in had to begin.

The first place Desert & Delta Safaris started was with in-house training.

“
If I tell you what level I finished school with, you won't believe me. But thanks to Desert & Delta Safaris' training I am now talking to you as the Assistant General Manager at Desert & Delta Safaris. I started as a groundsman when I joined the company.”

GROWING PEOPLE THROUGH TRAINING

From its early days, once employed with Desert & Delta Safaris, there were no limits on what you could achieve in the company: if you wanted to grow further, Desert & Delta would always meet you halfway.

The company produced (and continues to produce) endless leaders because of this approach. One remarkable example is Ernest Chaba, currently Assistant General Manager at Desert & Delta Safaris. He started his career as a groundsman at Savute Safari Lodge in 2007, and within a year he moved from groundsman to Trainee Manager – becoming a waiter and then barman in between.

“If I tell you what level I finished school with, you won't believe me. But thanks to Desert & Delta's training I am now talking to you as the Assistant General Manager. I started as a groundsman when I joined the company.”

Fast-forward thirteen years and he has trained most of the current Desert & Delta managers. He is now Assistant General Manager, imparting his bottom-up knowledge of the company to over 400 staff throughout the camps and lodges. “Training people takes me back to the mission of the company. You develop, motivate and help people grow. That's the only thing that I'm looking at when I'm in training – to build other people. To help them by trying to understand them.”

WHEN PRACTICE MAKES CULTURE, AND, DEVELOPING THAT CULTURE

The proof was in the pudding. Employees started looking at people like Chaba and realised that the company was serious about promoting locally, and from within the company. In-house training had started, and the shift had begun.

The company was building its foundation on the strengths of its people. A gradual assemblage of non-obligatory perks further developed this culture of 'people first'. These perks included forward-thinking leave allowances, which included above-average sick leave, generous maternity leave and family leave, which permitted staff to visit sick family members for extended periods without losing their jobs. The perks also included advanced healthcare systems including a dedicated staff doctor; staff committees to deal with camp disagreements and an emphasis on spirituality and building a genuine sense of family in camps. As the company matured, the policies matured and developed even further. Attitude gradually developed into a culture, which found a name under something that had been there all along: a culture of care.



—
FROM
HUMBLE
BEGINNINGS
CAME
GREAT
THINGS
—

1980

Jessie Neil invests in Botswana opening Camp Okavango on a private concession in the Okavango Delta.

1983

Jonathan Gibson & Ian Green purchase Chobe Game Lodge from Southern Sun.

1985

Camp Moremi opens in the Moremi Game Reserve forming Desert & Delta Safaris first combination safari circuit.

1989

Jonathan Gibson forms Chobe Holdings to acquire all shares in Chobe Game Lodge.

1992

Chobe Holdings acquires Desert & Delta Safaris and the company's two safari camps.

1998

Desert & Delta Safaris purchases Lloyd's Camp and renames it to Savute Safari Lodge.

2001

Chobe Savanna Lodge is built on the Chobe River and Xugana Island Lodge in the Okavango Delta is acquired.

2008

Leroo La Tau on the Boteti River overlooking the Makgadikgadi Pans National Park joins the Desert & Delta Safaris portfolio.

2013

Camp Xakanaxa in the Moremi Game Reserve is purchased by Desert & Delta Safaris to complete the current safari circuit.

2014

The refurbishment of Chobe Game Lodge commences.

2016

The original Camp Okavango is removed and construction of the new Camp Okavango begins.

2018

Desert & Delta Safaris second camp, Camp Moremi undergoes a complete rebuild.

2021

Desert & Delta Safaris purchases Nxamaseri Island Lodge in the Okavango Panhandle.

CHAPTER

4

THE
CARES
PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of committing to developing the potential of Botswana citizens while also preserving the country's natural heritage found a home to hang its hat on in 2018. There had always been a deeply-rooted philosophy of caring within the company – so it followed on naturally that the acronym almost wrote itself: “CARES”.





“
*Bringing everything
under one heading, the
“CARES” philosophy gave a
name to a culture that had
been there all along.*

WHAT IS “CARES”



*The CARES philosophy is tantamount to
how Desert & Delta Safaris is run.*

For deeper insight into each section, please explore
the relevant sections elsewhere in the book.



Career and Community

PAGE 65



Advanced Health Program

PAGE 67



Responsibility to our Environment

PAGE 68



Equality in the Workplace

PAGE 70



Soul and Spirituality

PAGE 72



CAREER AND COMMUNITY

Supporting local communities and creating employment opportunities for Botswana nationals through career and social development programs, including Leaders for the Future, which provides bursaries and guaranteed employment within the tourism sector.



DIGGING DEEPER INTO “CARES”



[CAREER]

STAFF WELFARE & GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

“I worked for this company for three years and then I joined another company for three years, and then I came back again. What made me decide to come back to Desert & Delta Safaris is the welfare of the staff: how the company is looking after their staff and how the company can help you grow. You don’t have to be stuck in one place. So, if you want to go forward in this company, you can go forward. Here the door is open, they like to help you grow.”

KEPALETSWE – OR “KP”
Head Guide, Camp Moremi

[COMMUNITY]

A SPIRIT OF FAMILY

There was an early realisation at Desert & Delta Safaris, and most importantly, an understanding, that people in remote areas, far away from home and with limited communication with their families would need extra support. But what was the best way to provide this support? The answer lay within the camps. Ernest Chaba, Assistant General Manager at Desert & Delta believes that fostering a genuine sense of community is instrumental to how people deal with the remoteness. “Why are we here in the bush? We’re here to work. But how can we win without connecting with each other? We need each other. We have to work as a family. So that’s the thing here. We love each other and we are one family,” says Chaba.



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

“You know, looking back at my time here, I realise that I have achieved a lot within the company – I have grown and learnt a lot. From working as a guide, and then becoming a senior manager in the company, where I am regarded as one of the success stories here at Desert & Delta Safaris... that is such an achievement for me. And when someone comes to me and says, ‘thanks for giving me that advice’ – that is also an achievement for me.”

MUNIHANGO LIMBO
Staff Wellness Manager, Desert & Delta Safaris

STANDING TOGETHER

“Desert & Delta Safaris is like a community. If someone has a problem, we all stand up and make sure we help that person. And if our staff members have problems in the camps, we have a team of HR people here in Maun who work closely with their families, passing on messages in the bush.”

LAKIDZANI “LUCKY” TWIIMONE
Camp Manager & Peer Educator, Desert & Delta Safaris

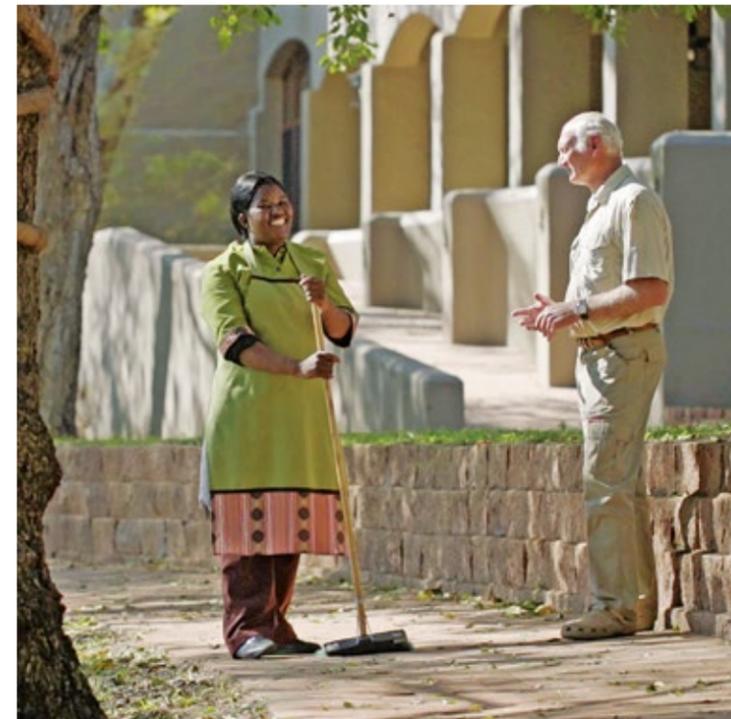


ADVANCED HEALTH PROGRAM

A company doctor dedicated to the well-being of company staff conducts regular visits to each property. Consultations include general administration, the management of anti-retroviral treatment, as well as psychological support.

“We believe in taking care of three things: body, mind and soul – and these three things must be in balance. So we have a doctor, a staff welfare co-ordinator, and a pastor. We have a program for HIV/AIDS – as you know it used to be largely a youth problem, but we encourage our staff to know their status. The company gives them support by offering free transport to get their medications.”

LAKIDZANI “LUCKY” TWIIMONE
Camp Manager & Peer Educator



“Desert & Delta Safaris’ Health and Wellness Program began in 2003, initially as a response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the subsequent drain of the company’s valuable human resources to the disease and its widespread repercussions in Botswana society. To counter this problem, Chobe Holdings employed professionals from the area who had extensive and first-hand experience in managing these issues. This was, and still is, a first for the country. Over the course of a decade of intensive intervention, the incidents of HIV/AIDS dropped significantly and the emphasis was shifted to staff wellness in general. We continue to place great emphasis on healthy and happy staff, so the programme of education, training and treating staff will remain an essential part of the company’s policy.”

ANDRE BIRKENSTOCK – “DOC B”
Previous Group Company Doctor and current
Camp Manager, Chobe Savanna Lodge

Dr Andre Birkenstock (Right) engaging with one of the staff at Chobe Game Lodge. Lakidzani “Lucky” Twiimone, Camp Manager & Peer Educator (left).



RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR ENVIRONMENT

Botswana is widely recognised as one of Africa's most diverse and pristine natural environments with a large percentage of the land under national parks and protected by wildlife concessions.

As a custodian of this natural heritage, Desert & Delta Safaris understands the role it plays in conserving and protecting the areas in which it operates.



Desert & Delta Safari's protects the country's natural environment through sound sustainable projects including silent, CO₂ emission-free safaris on the Chobe Riverfront, as well as ongoing financial support for local wildlife initiatives, such as the Botswana Rhino Relocation and the Re-introduction programme.



"Given the fact that our properties are located within key natural protection areas of Botswana, as Desert and Delta Safaris, we are accountable to ensuring that we maintain our responsibility to the environment. As custodians of the incredible areas that we've been granted the privilege to operate in, it's our duty to make sure that we get it right from an environmental protection point of view, and that what we do is sustainable. We see it as our responsibility to design and build our lodges and camps with minimal impact on the natural environment. If you take a look at the rebuilds: Camp Okavango, Camp Moremi, the front area of Savute Safari Lodge - the impact on what was existing natural terrain is minimal in terms of the way that we built these camps. We have physically built them around vegetation and trees, without having to impact any of the natural vegetation for our operations. Savute Safari Lodge and Camp Okavango have state of the art solar power plants - and it is our intention to have the same for Camp Moremi and Camp Xakanaka soon, so that our reliance on fossil fuels and powered electricity generation is a lot less. We are also looking at utilising our power resource in the most natural way."

WALTER SMITH

Walter Smith, Operations Director,
Desert & Delta Safaris



CHOBE GAME LODGE & ELECTRIC ENERGY

In 2014 Chobe Game Lodge introduced its first electric game-drive vehicle and electric-powered safari boat in a pilot project to test electric conversions in the safari industry. Six years later, Chobe Game Lodge proudly operates a complete fleet of electric solar-powered safari boats and four electric converted vehicles making it the largest electric safari fleet in Africa.

A recent solar power generation project has seen Chobe Game Lodge's back-of-house workshop roofs being converted into an incredible 600m² of solar panels. These generate 104 Kwh of electrical energy at peak performance and fully charge the electric vehicles during the day time. Extra power comes from Kasane's main grid which is hydroelectric.



EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

With core values centred on promoting citizen development within the workplace, all Desert & Delta Safaris remote camps are managed by Botswana citizens. Female empowerment is also brought to the forefront with Africa's first all-female safari guiding team at Chobe Game Lodge.



“

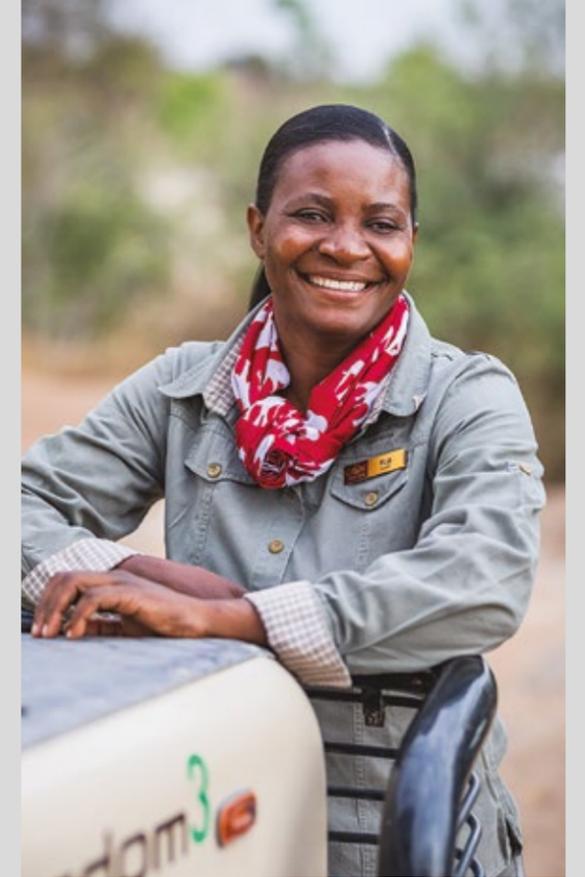
The more they encouraged me to be something else, the more they encouraged me to be a guide.

FLORENCE KAGISO
Senior Guide, Chobe Game Lodge

WOMEN THROUGHOUT THE TOURISM INDUSTRY NEED TO BE BETTER REPRESENTED IN SENIOR POSITIONS

“The road to female equality in our management workforce was an organic process led by the culture and philosophy with which we've always run our business at Desert & Delta Safaris. Women in management had reasonable representation in our camps and lodges in the earlier days, but this was generally under foreign expat management couples. Ultimately, we wanted to have all our remote camps managed by Botswana, and from the beginning we knew that it would be important to have a balanced team of men and women. Having gender equality in the management teams is crucial to getting the best results in the hospitality industry as both parties bring something unique to the table. Having said that, there is no question that our aim at head office and our HR team mandate is to ensure that we maintain a strong female contingent. So, what started as a natural process has evolved into a philosophy that we remain committed to: women deserve more representation in senior positions throughout the tourism industry and it is our intention to do what we can to drive this forward.”

JAMES WILSON
Marketing Director, Desert & Delta Safaris



“Growing up I had an interest in doing something related to nature. When I entered the industry, it was different to what we have now. Guiding was a male-dominated job, and everyone would tell you, ‘good for you, try it for a while, but long-term it isn't a good life choice for a woman’. They said you had to spend hours out in the bush. And if you were driving a vehicle you would have to change tyres. That sometimes you would be driving through very difficult terrain...”

So, it was a little bit tough, but I knew in my heart that I wanted to do it. So, the more they encouraged me to be something else, the more they encouraged me to be a guide. I had to pull up my socks to be the best: you're new to the industry, you're working with people who are the best, who have more experience. As a new person you have to always try to be at their level, and that alone gave me courage.”

Florence Kagiso, a Senior Guide at Chobe Game Lodge, was one of the first female guides in Botswana. Kagiso qualified as a guide before Desert & Delta Safaris began its concentrated efforts to promote female empowerment through its Chobe Game Lodge gender equality program, but she still feels she benefited from the changes it created industry-wide. Learn more about Kagiso's story on page 102.



SOUL AND SPIRITUALITY

A team that is dedicated to staff wellness coordinates visits from the company pastor and spiritual leader, who offers guidance, family advice and motivation classes.

This support structure ensures that a healthy and welcoming soul is at the heart of Desert & Delta Safaris' philosophy.



ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SONG

If you've visited any of the Desert & Delta Safaris' camps, you'll know how much heart and soul the staff put into their frequent nightly serenades. Singing – be it a dinner serenade, a church service beneath the trees, or a hearty welcome as you boat or drive in – plays a vital role in keeping up camp morale. "Church is not just about signing or praying," says Ernest Chaba, Desert & Delta Safaris Assistant General Manager. "It's also about guiding or training each other on real life. It brings love."

OUR PEOPLE ARE OUR ASSETS

"As a company we are different because we are more into developing our people than just developing our business. Desert & Delta Safaris believes that the most important asset that an organisation can have, is its people. Because without people, nothing will happen. But with people, anything can happen. That's why we have adopted this concept."

MUNIHANGO LIMBO
Staff Wellness Manager, Desert & Delta Safaris



CHAPTER

5

RESPONSIBLE
TOURISM

means

LOCAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT

How Desert & Delta Safaris became the first luxury safari circuit to have its camps managed wholly by Botswana citizens.

Desert & Delta Safaris had always been very clear that its people were its biggest asset: company growth should equal growth in employees' opportunities. In 2014, the company became the first luxury safari circuit to have its camps wholly managed by Botswana citizens. No small feat – considering the status of Botswana's tourism training industry a mere two decades ago.





CREATING WAVES OF CHANGE



TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BOTSWANA

So how did the company achieve this? We've seen that the development of local potential had already begun decades earlier (see more on page 51) and that from early on, there was a vision that one day all camp management staff would be Batswana. In summary, from the outset the company was serious about creating change in the industry; and it communicated this clearly to its staff.

THREE STEPS TOWARDS CHANGE

Three things helped Desert & Delta Safaris' employees realise that the company was serious about promoting locally. Firstly, every employee could quickly identify someone in the company who had started at the bottom and worked their way up. Secondly, in-house training was excellent and open-door: anyone who wanted to learn a new skill could do so in their own time and with quick results if they had an aptitude for it. And, thirdly, the company boasted an induction process that communicated plainly from day one that an individual's future was in his/her own hands (see page 55).

“

I try to realise and visualise where they are coming from, why they are here, where they are going, and what will help them to grow.



MUNIHANGO “LIMBO” AND HIS LIFE-CHANGING INDUCTIONS

Dream early, plan early

As early on as during the induction phase, new employees learnt about the company’s approach to developing local potential. Munihangho Limbo, who started working at Desert & Delta Safaris in 2001 as a safari guide, and who is now Staff Wellness Manager, realised early on that once people truly understood that the company was behind them, their motivation increased radically.

“All that you need to grow in this company is passion and your heart saying, ‘I want to grow’... you just need to be dedicated and committed and show the leaders that you want to grow. What I like about Desert and Delta is that you give them your dream, and they will walk with you so that you can achieve your dream.”

It may sound like a cliché, but the saying finds its roots in Limbo’s humble little office at Desert & Delta Safaris’ Maun headquarters.

He explains, “It’s an ongoing thing, sharing your dream. When new employees are inducted, I will assure them that, one day, this company will make them a somebody, somewhere. And I always give a live example of myself. Anyone can grow... most of the people who are holding a management position today have started from the bottom. We always tell new employees: ‘you know what: attitude counts most for you to grow’... and it’s working.”

Putting talk into walk

Limbo himself is a product of the company’s open-minded all-inclusive approach to in-house capacity building. He started with the company as a guide, quickly moving

on to become camp manager. He was later transferred to Maun where it was believed he could have a wider impact in Human Resources. Today Limbo heads the Staff Wellness Program at Desert & Delta. His role is to ensure the staff live by and are supported by the company’s CARES Philosophy. Having been through the company from the bottom up, he is sensitive to others’ journeys, backgrounds, and battles.

In his new position, he soon realised that while people knew the rules and regulations of the company on paper, they were still encountering problems on the ground. “When people get into the job or lodge they start to make mistakes and make poor judgements because no one has spoken to them on a personal level,” he explains. So, he personalised the inductions, creating his own system that is now being used every day. “I have been doing these inductions and conversations for over fifteen years now. In our induction, apart from what is written in black and white, I personally sit down with the person and when I’m done with the rules and regulations of the contract, I try to realise and visualise where they are coming from, why they are here, where they are going, and what will help them to grow.

“Two weeks ago I was inducting one of the new guides and he shook my hand. And he said, ‘you know what, I have worked in different companies and this is the first time to hear this kind of induction. You are talking like a pastor, you are talking like a parent, and you are talking like a colleague...’ That made me so happy.”

Given the space and trust to adapt and do things differently, employees like Munihangho Limbo were creating a blueprint for a culture of leadership and in-house ownership at Desert & Delta Safaris.

“

What I like about Desert and Delta Safaris is that you give them your dream, and they will walk with you so that you can achieve your dream.



DEVELOPING
POTENTIAL
AT
DESERT & DELTA
SAFARIS:
TESTIMONIALS

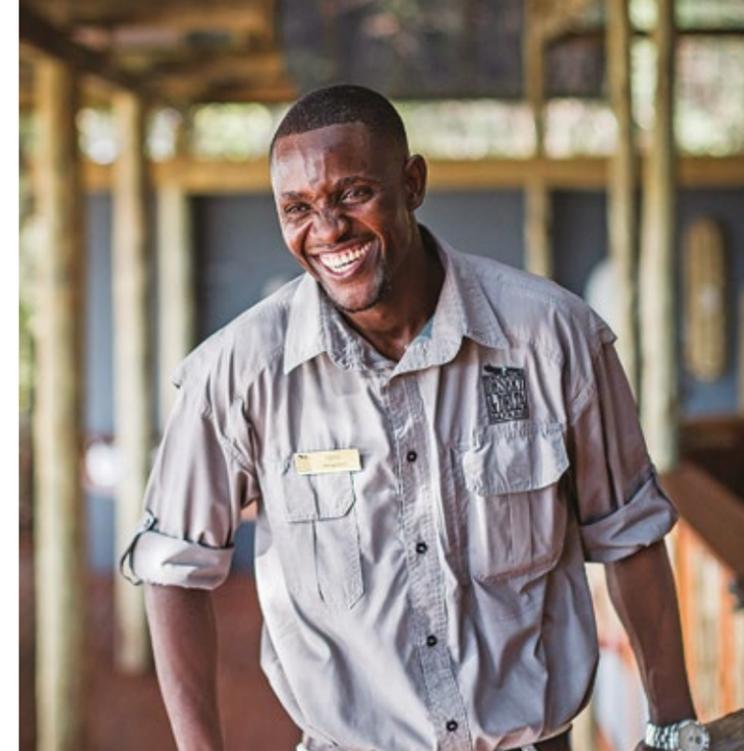


“
I like Desert & Delta Safaris very much. I have worked for them for twelve years now. I started as a nobody and now I'm a somebody. Desert & Delta gives people an opportunity to grow, and as long as you have the right attitude toward your work, the senior managers will support you.

LAKIDZANI “LUCKY” TWIIMONE
Camp Manager and Peer Educator



“
Ernest Chaba started his career with Desert & Delta Safaris as a groundsman in 2007. Today he is responsible for developing around 400 staff, working as Assistant General Manager at Desert & Delta where he focuses mostly on training managers throughout the camps.



How in-house training helped me:

ERNEST “ERNY” CHABA:

WAITER TO ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

Ernest Chaba started his career with Desert & Delta Safaris as a groundsman in 2007. Today he is responsible for developing around 400 staff, working as Assistant General Manager at Desert & Delta where he focuses mostly on training managers throughout the camps. Once he saw that the company believed in local talent and would support him if he brought his own aspirations and motivation to the table, there was no stopping this young go-getter. “When you are getting welcomed in camp, the managers tell you that they have a system on the ground: in your own spare time you can come and do in-house training, learning from other people. So, I did that, I worked as a waiter, I worked as a barman... then I decided, ‘I don’t have to stop here.’” Motivated to do more, Chaba also received chef’s training in the kitchen. “The company then advertised a Trainee Manager post... I applied and wrote only two lines; ‘please do not hesitate to contact me, I would love to try the position.’ After a few months HR called me into their office, and I was freaking out because I thought I had done something bad... They offered me the position that I had applied for as Trainee Manager. I was sent to Camp O (Camp Okavango).”

Since then his training was extended to time spent at Disney World in Orlando, Florida, and he returned to the USA in January 2020 to host talks on how Botswana has become one of Africa’s most responsibly conscious travel destinations for the eco-sensitive traveller.



SACHOMBO TWIIMONE

[Rest in Peace : 1974 - 2021]

WAITER TO DESERT & DELTA SAFARIS
GENERAL MANAGER

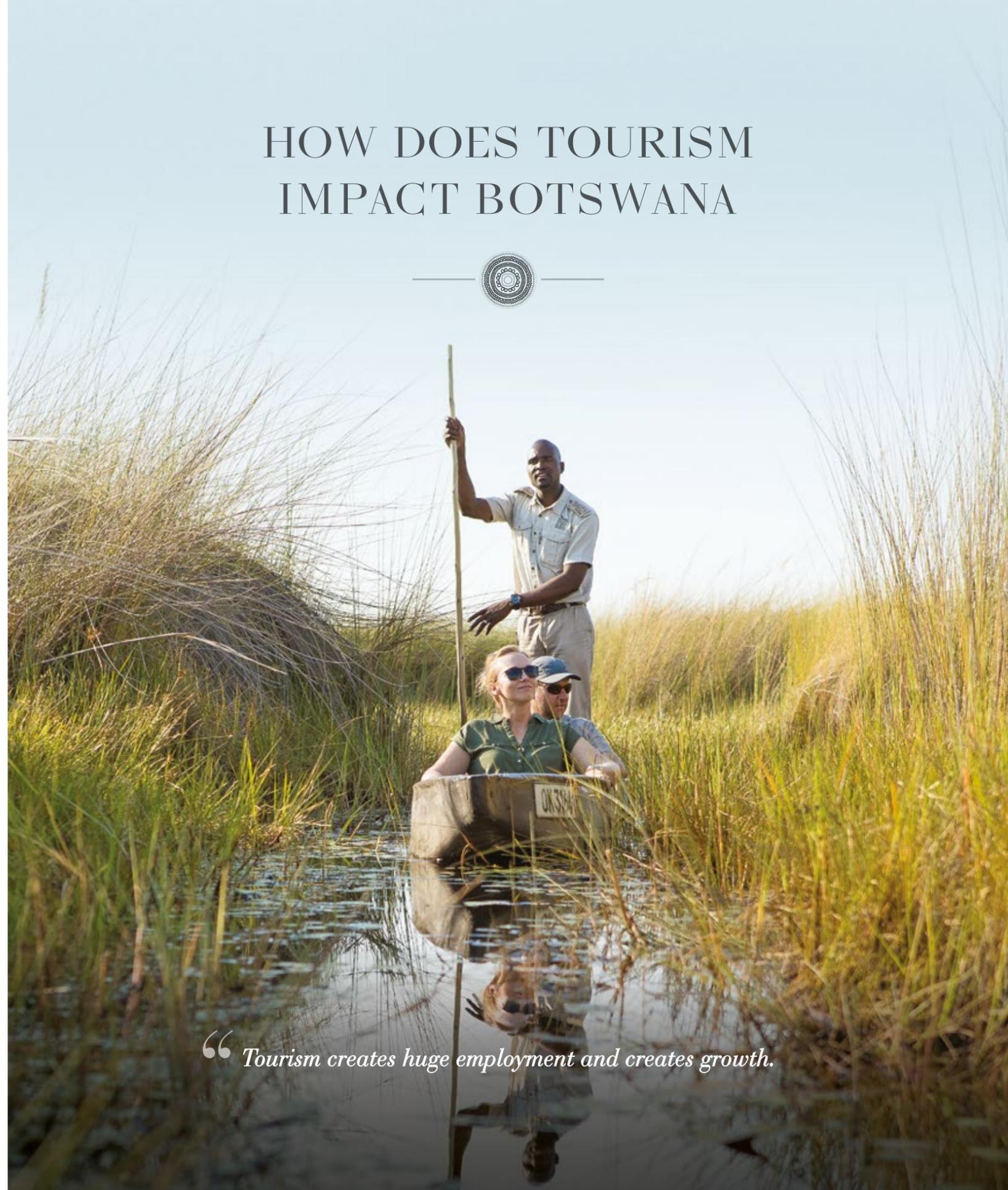
"I am proud to work for Desert & Delta Safaris because it's one company that is concerned with humans. I look at myself and I say - 'I started at the bottom in 1998 and I climbed up the ladder to get where I am now' - so I'm so proud of Desert & Delta Safaris. We are currently the one company who started with empowering locals and all our camps are run by local people. To me this is good and it responds directly to the unemployment rate, which is heavy now.

I have been very lucky to work for Desert & Delta Safaris. I am where I am today because of Desert & Delta. I have learned a lot of things managing the camps. I started from being a waiter and look at all the help I got along the way - even until now, including school. To me that is a very good thing for the company. I have faith in Desert & Delta Safaris."

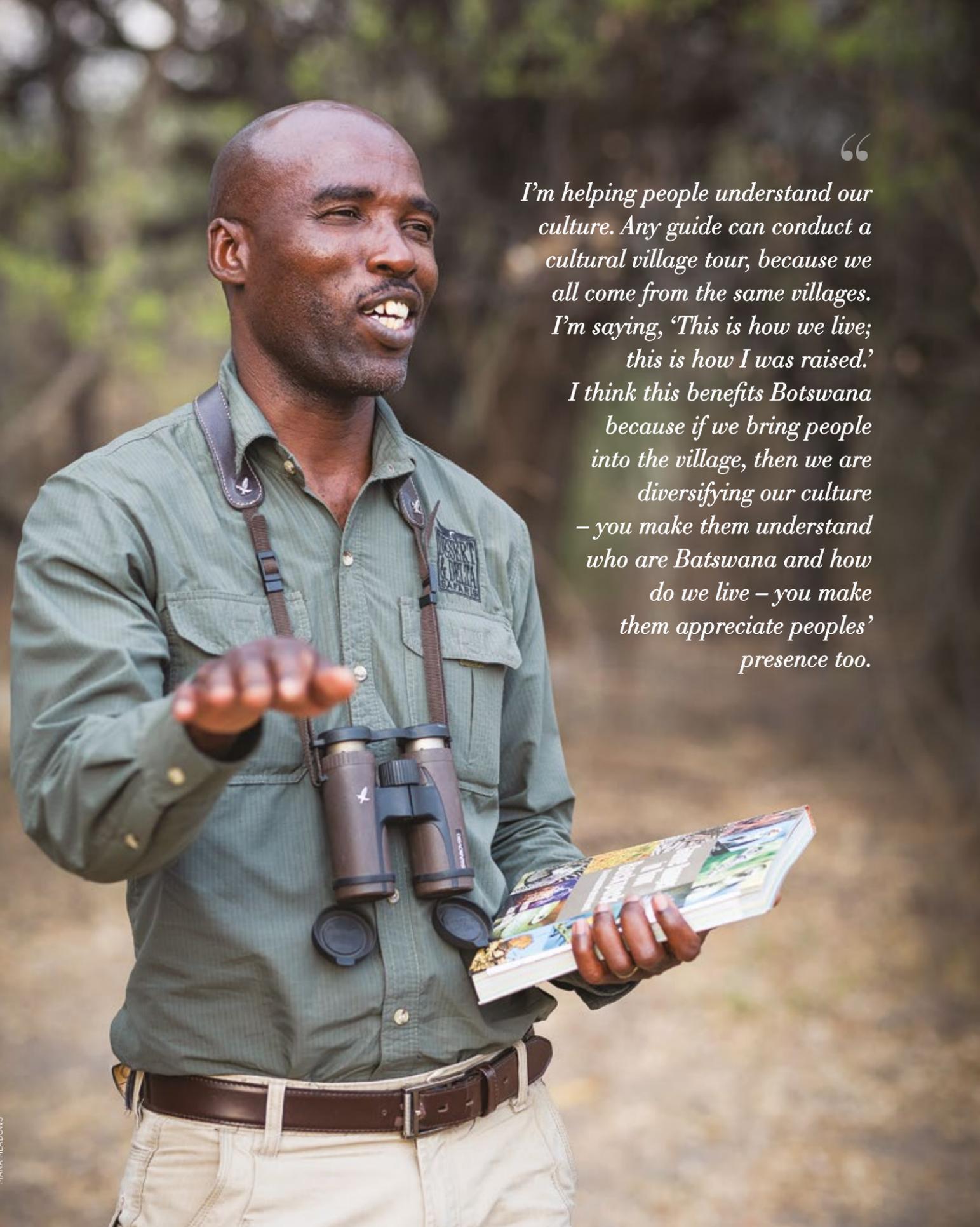
“

...it's one company that is concerned with humans. I look at myself and I say - 'I started at the bottom in 1998 and I climbed up the ladder to get where I am now' - so I'm so proud of Desert & Delta Safaris. We are currently the one company who started with empowering locals and all our camps are run by local people. To me this is good and it responds directly to the unemployment rate, which is heavy now.

HOW DOES TOURISM IMPACT BOTSWANA



“ *Tourism creates huge employment and creates growth.* ”



“
I’m helping people understand our culture. Any guide can conduct a cultural village tour, because we all come from the same villages. I’m saying, ‘This is how we live; this is how I was raised.’ I think this benefits Botswana because if we bring people into the village, then we are diversifying our culture – you make them understand who are Batswana and how do we live – you make them appreciate peoples’ presence too.”



METHALE “METAL” MOSHETI

HEAD OF DESERT & DELTA SAFARIS GUIDE TRAINING:

“Sharing our culture is diversifying our culture”

“Tourism benefits Botswana mostly through employment, which covers many other things. Remember that most people live in extended families – you may think that Desert & Delta Safaris is just benefiting Metal, but it is also helping people who are not working now. Some people must rely on just a few people who are at work, and that will be tourism helping all those people to meet their needs. That’s why children can go to school. Tourism creates huge employment and creates growth.”

“After guiding in the day, in the evenings we host – we’re with our guests. That’s where the topics of culture

come up. That’s when people will want to know about me. Now it’s my turn to share: how and where do we live? I’m helping people understand our culture. Any guide can conduct a cultural village tour, because we all come from the same villages. I’m saying, ‘This is how we live; this is how I was raised.’ I think this benefits Botswana because if we bring people into the village, then we are diversifying our culture – you make them understand who are Batswana and how do we live – you make them appreciate peoples’ presence too.”



ISHMAEL MOGAMISI

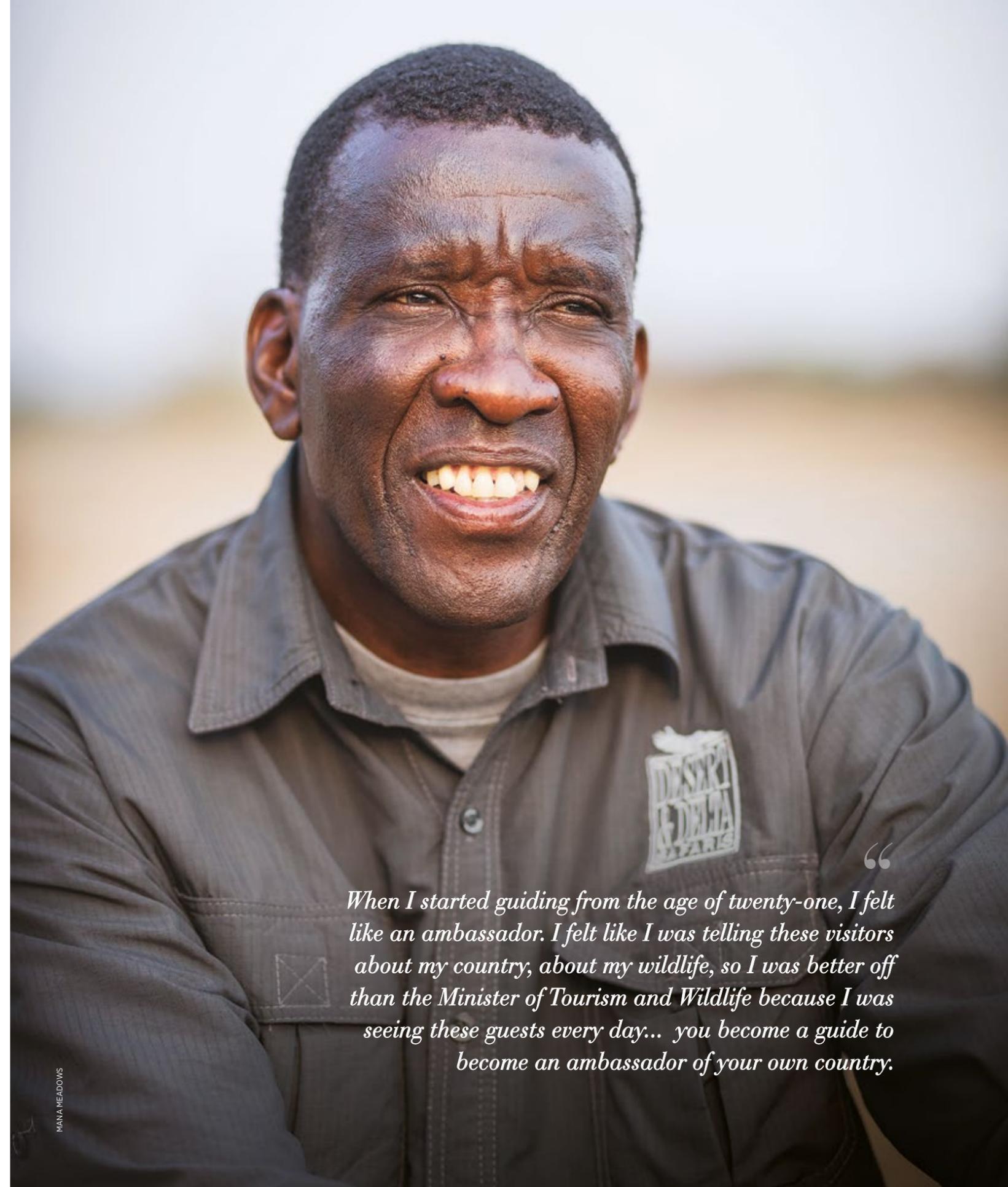
HEAD OF DESERT & DELTA SAFARIS' INTERNAL GUIDE-TRAINING PROGRAM:

“Culture and tourism is the same thing to me – you cannot go to a country without understanding the culture.”

“Guiding has changed a lot during the years. Most people are coming here now with better knowledge. They are not like the guests who were coming here in the 70’s and 80’s, who just wanted to find an elephant, take a picture, and go back home. Now they want detailed guiding, and they also want to know about the country, the culture, the political situation, the stability/instability, and the relations with our neighbours. Guests are coming here to learn about the wildlife *and* the people – teaching them about the culture of the people, or the history of the country is very important to them, they like it. Culture and tourism are the same to me because you cannot go to a country without understanding the culture... bringing culture into tourism is very important, it makes

people feel much better. At the end of the day the guests remember the people they met on the trip. They will always remember what they have learnt from the locals.

When I started guiding from the age of twenty-one, I felt like an ambassador. I felt like I was telling these visitors about my country, about my wildlife, so I was better off than the Minister of Tourism and Wildlife because I was seeing these guests every day... guides are the ones who take guests to nature... you become a guide to become an ambassador of your own country. It’s about culture, religion and wildlife. So, I am teaching the new generation the importance of this job... you learn from the travellers as well.”



“When I started guiding from the age of twenty-one, I felt like an ambassador. I felt like I was telling these visitors about my country, about my wildlife, so I was better off than the Minister of Tourism and Wildlife because I was seeing these guests every day... you become a guide to become an ambassador of your own country.”



“

MC's career path from waiter to Group Managing Director shows how responsible tourism in developing countries is paying dividends. It's more than just creating jobs such as chefs, guides, or general staff, we are seeing genuine growth in careers within management and with an ownership within tourism. However, it is important to say that although the Chobe Holdings Group provides the opportunity to grow, MC's journey to being promoted to Managing Director is down to exceptional hard work and dedication to learning and growing as an individual within this company. I can't think of a better person to have at the helm as we look ahead to the next chapter of Desert & Delta Safaris' future!

JAMES WILSON
Marketing Director

LEMPHEDITSE ODUMETSE

FROM WAITER TO GROUP
MANAGING DIRECTOR:

“The wonderful thing with Desert & Delta Safaris is that the doors are always open for internal promotion, no matter what your background.”

Lempheitse Odumetse, known to his colleagues as MC, began his career at Desert & Delta Safaris as a waiter at Camp Moremi in 1999.

“As a young man working at Maun's most famous pub - The Duck Inn - one of the directors of Desert & Delta Safaris saw potential in me and so I found myself with an opportunity to work my way up the tourism industry ladder. Inspired by my uncle, John Kata (see page 32), I studied to become a professional guide and worked at Xugana Island Lodge for five years after completing my studies. Looking to expand my horizons, I joined the company's management team and for just over ten years ran five of the Desert & Delta properties. During my time as a camp manager, my team and I were awarded the Top Performing Camp of the Year Award seven times! The wonderful thing with Desert & Delta Safaris is that the doors are always open for internal promotion, no matter what your background. If you set your mind to it, Desert & Delta will help you achieve it. Hard work and perseverance pays off.

In 2013 I was promoted to the Maun head office, where today I am the Group Managing Director responsible for the running of Desert & Delta as well as the other companies under the Chobe Holdings Group.”



CHAPTER

6

Developing
**RESPONSIBLE
TOURISM**
through
FEMALE
EMPOWERMENT

*Developing Botswana's human potential
– and developing that human potential
equally – is crucial to how Desert &
Delta Safaris sees itself contributing
to responsible tourism in Botswana.*

Through two separate long-term commitments aimed at empowering women in the tourism industry, Desert & Delta Safaris has contributed to massive industry change: Chobe Game Lodge's all-female guiding team has raised the profile of female guiding not just in Botswana, but throughout Africa; and the promotion of women into senior management positions in Desert & Delta camps throughout Botswana has transformed the way women are establishing themselves in the industry.





—

CHOBE GAME LODGE'S ALL-FEMALE GUIDING TEAM HAS RAISED THE PROFILE OF FEMALE GUIDING NOT JUST IN BOTSWANA, BUT THROUGHOUT AFRICA.

—



CHOBE GAME LODGE AND ITS ALL-FEMALE GUIDING TEAM



*A national and international message:
women do belong in the wilderness*

They've featured in international news publications across the world, and they've dared women at home to dream that they too belong in this industry. The all-female guiding team has also changed perceptions from the outside: after spending time at Chobe Game Lodge, foreign guests arriving at their next safari destination often look around and ask, "Where are the women guides?"

They've created expectations for an industry that never knew it had them. "They've shown us that there is space for women in the nature-guiding industry, in Botswana... and for that matter, the rest of our beautiful continent," says Johan Bruwer, Director at Chobe Game Lodge, and one of the earliest advocates of women working as guides in Botswana.

"As a company, we strongly believe in employing the best person for the job. Too often women have been overlooked in society, and especially in male-dominated sectors within the tourism industry such as lodge management and guiding."

WALTER SMITH Operations Director, Desert & Delta Safaris



HOW DID IT ALL BEGIN?

Just fifteen years ago, women in guiding or senior management tourism positions were rare in Botswana's safari industry. The handful of women who went against industry (and familial) expectations and dared to dream they could guide, graduated from their guiding training at the Botswana Wildlife Institute and then struggled to get placed. "Very few operators wanted to take women on attachment as the perception was, and still is, that it's a man's job," says Bruwer who had recently arrived to work at Chobe Game Lodge and was starting to understand what women in the industry were up against. Bruwer had noticed that guests reacted very positively to the one female guide employed at the lodge. He decided that Chobe Game Lodge could be a big part of the solution in encouraging women into the industry and he pitched the

idea to the Chobe Holdings Board. They were supportive.

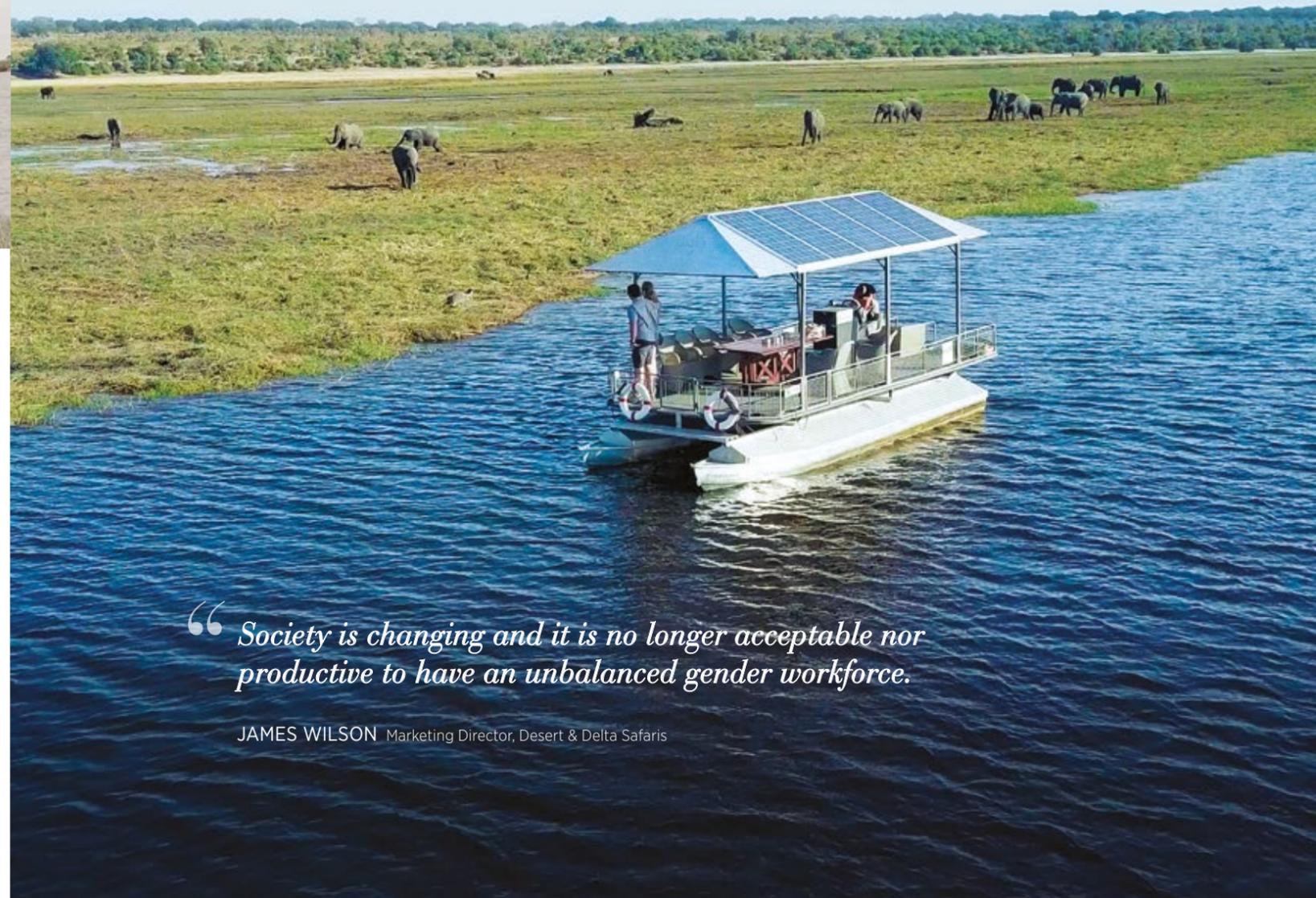
"Once we actively started encouraging female guides to work at Chobe Game Lodge, we noticed that time and time again, when finally given a chance, the women in the team were outperforming their male counterparts," says Bruwer. The management team at Chobe Game Lodge realised they needed to do more. "We approached the Botswana Wildlife Training Institute (BWTI) in Maun and told them that we would take all their female student guides. We also advertised extensively in national media and used every opportunity through local television and radio to publicise our female empowerment initiative. And we approached the few existing female guides and offered them positions here at Chobe Game Lodge," remembers Bruwer.

CREATING INDUSTRY WIDE CHANGE

"Chobe Game Lodge was bold and brave enough to question the status quo," reflects James Wilson, who was based at the lodge during its transition to an all-female guiding team. "That's an achievement in itself." But that was just the beginning, believes Wilson. It created questions in the industry: if Chobe Game Lodge can employ an all-female guiding team, why aren't there more females in male-dominated positions in the tourism sector? Not just in Botswana, but across Africa. "We knew we would have a dynamic guiding team but also have the potential to make a positive impact in female empowerment," says Wilson. "Nobody is saying companies should shift their guides to all-female. It's a system that evolved for us and is working well, and through it, we believe we have generated a demand for a better balance in our sector of

men and women in equal positions across departments. Society is changing and it is no longer acceptable nor productive to have an unbalanced gender workforce. Tourism in Botswana has led the way in conservation-led tourism initiatives. It's time our company shows that we have also led the way in local and female empowerment in the safari sector."

At the end of the day, it was an enormous team effort. "This would not have been possible without the drive from our management and financial support from our board in the form of extra-training and development for young female guiding graduates. At the time, nobody thought it would be possible to have a female-dominated guiding team – let alone all-female. But our General Manager Johan Bruwer pushed on," says Wilson.



"Society is changing and it is no longer acceptable nor productive to have an unbalanced gender workforce."

JAMES WILSON Marketing Director, Desert & Delta Safaris

WHAT HAS CHOBE GAME LODGE DONE FOR WOMEN IN TOURISM IN BOTSWANA?

“This lodge has done a lot for Botswana already. The all-women guiding team that we have here, how many are we? Eighteen to twenty lady guides? That’s huge! There is no other lodge out there that is only operating with female guides – only us! And for management to have that faith in us encourages us more. We have our sisters and friends out there, and the young people who are still growing – they are looking up to us. They will say ‘I can see you putting on that uniform, I want to grow up and do what you are doing,’ – and that alone is encouraging young people out there! Working for this company has been an eye-opener because not everyone believes in ladies. You need someone with a heart to believe that a woman can do this.”

FLORENCE KAGISO

Assistant Head Guide, Chobe Game Lodge



ON-SITE TRAINING OPENED DOORS THAT HAD NOT EVEN EXISTED BEFORE

Chobe Game Lodge expanded its female empowerment mandate, providing on-site training that equipped the new guides for work in real situations. It closed a gap created by decades of gender bias so that women who had trained at Chobe Game Lodge suddenly found doors open where there wouldn’t even have been doors in the first place.

Florence Kagiso qualified the year before Chobe Game Lodge began actively recruiting female guides. She had already overcome discouragement from well-meaning family and friends who advised her against a career in guiding. But after graduating she found the challenges didn’t stop: the industry wasn’t ready for women, and salaries for them were poor.

But with the training, perceptions shifted too. “Now, we’re going through a lot of training, through working here we are learning things that improve us,” says Florence. “So other companies are looking at our qualifications, as well as our experience, and now suddenly they will consider a woman coming from Chobe Game Lodge more than they will consider a man coming from somewhere else because of the training that we are given by this company.”

“

...the young people who are still growing – they are looking up to us.

FLORENCE KAGISO

Assistant Head Guide, Chobe Game Lodge



WHAT DO WOMEN BRING TO THE INDUSTRY?

“Women are so gentle. And gentle on equipment. And they have this eye for reading situations and people.”

FLORENCE KAGISO

Assistant Head Guide, Chobe Game Lodge

“You cannot have a family atmosphere in a property where women are not properly represented in the senior management – it just wouldn’t work. The new trends in travel around the world focus on connecting with people. Yes, places are important of course, but the real value in travelling is connecting with people from all around the world. This is considered an authentic travel experience. At Desert & Delta Safaris, women have been instrumental in creating that atmosphere of warmth, friendliness and professionalism – which is authenticity in a nutshell.”

WALTER SMITH

Operations Director, Desert & Delta Safaris

“Our camps are probably the most solo-travel friendly places in the world. We dine with our staff and fellow guests, and the general ambience is a homely and relaxed one. There is a feeling of family and inclusion which is just what you want when travelling on your own. Our female managers play a crucial role in taking extra special care of our solo-female travellers. Our female managers have added to our business growth in opening up a new sector.”

JAMES WILSON

Marketing Director, Desert & Delta Safaris

WHAT WE CAN DREAM WE CAN REACH



Today, owing to the company's solid commitment to gender equality, around 50% of the Desert & Delta Safaris senior management in the camps are represented by women. We talk to some of Desert & Delta's most inspirational women leaders about their journeys into Botswana's tourism industry:



GORATA NYAME

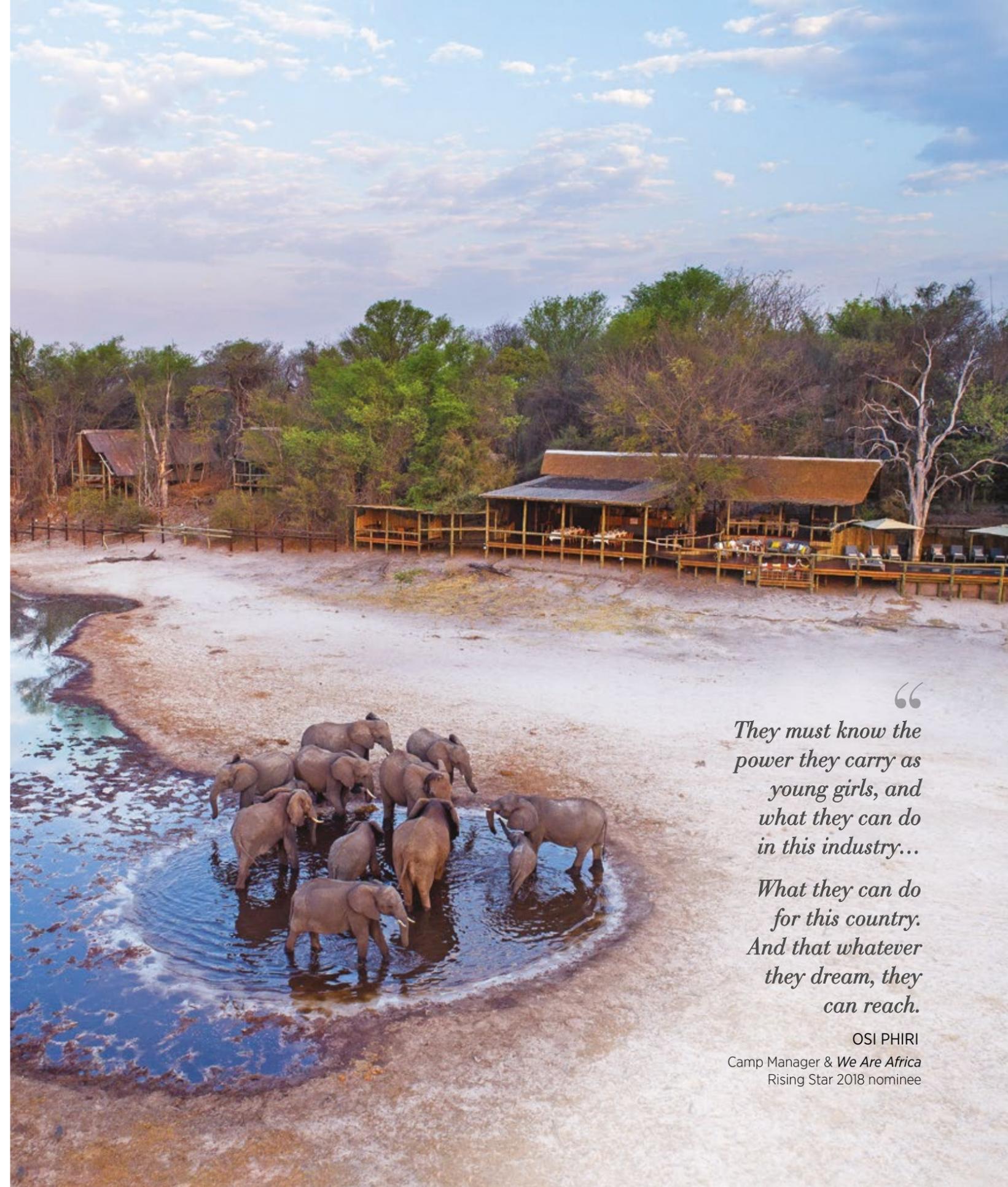
CAMP MANAGER

With no previous tourism experience, she won a *We Are Africa* Rising Star award just two years after joining Desert & Delta Safaris in recognition of being an "up and coming young star making a mark in the African travel industry." Gorata Nyame is a former special education teacher who believes that regardless of gender, having an affirmative attitude is all it takes to succeed in life.

Q: *Is it harder for women to enter the tourism industry than men?*

A: I think we are in a different generation now. The generation we are in is a very fast generation and does not weigh gender: we are all the same. What I love is that we all see ourselves as similar. We are all 50/50. So I would encourage people, and especially the ladies to not put their mindsets on the past where you used to say, "I am the woman, I have to do this, I have no choices. Women should be this: men should be this." But instead, to position yourself where you will be capable of facing any challenge. A woman is capable of doing anything, a man is capable of doing anything, so if we all just come onto one level, everything is going to be possible. The company is also doing a very good job of growing its own people. How we do things here is totally different to what other companies are doing.

"This generation is a totally different generation... A woman is capable of doing anything, a man is capable of doing anything, so if we all just come onto one level, everything is going to be possible."



"They must know the power they carry as young girls, and what they can do in this industry..."

What they can do for this country. And that whatever they dream, they can reach.

OSI PHIRI

Camp Manager & *We Are Africa* Rising Star 2018 nominee

OSI PHIRI

CAMP MANAGER

She's a quiet, determined leader who propelled herself from a university graduate in business enterprise to senior camp manager at one of Botswana's busiest and most successful camps in just 3 ½ years. Ambitious yet humble, she had no tourism experience, just a keen desire to join the industry, and a readiness to learn from her contemporaries and seniors. Now she believes she has a role to play in passing on her experience.

Q: *How do females feature in tourism in Botswana?*

A: Some years ago, one of our former presidents made sure that equality was implemented and females were being celebrated and empowered to keep growing and doing whatever work they wanted to do. So I would say that laid a very nice foundation because now, being a female at this time, this year, in the tourism industry, I feel it's not entirely easy, but also not so complicated as it would have been maybe ten years ago. You find that there are a lot of opportunities for females to grow, to reach whatever they would like to reach. We now have female guides and different jobs that people in our country didn't think females could do.

Q: *How have you found the journey into Desert & Delta Safaris senior camp management?*

A: I'm comfortable when I'm among my male colleagues, I don't feel intimidated by them. I feel we're humans trying to work hard and reach a common goal. Of course, being female, even if there is that freedom, you still feel the urge to work twice as hard because females tend to be seen as maybe having weaknesses... I always try to do twice as much so that I can prove that I can be stable and professional when it comes to work.

Q: *As a woman, do you think it's important to give other young women advice on how to enter the industry? Is there a need to differentiate between young men and women?*



A: I think it is important to give advice to young women who would like to enter this industry because I find that in our society, even though equality has been promoted by our government, you find that we're from very different cultures, and there is still male dominance in some places. And if a young girl is born into that then they grow into that. So I do think that it would be good to speak to young girls. They must know the power they carry as young girls, and what they can do in this industry...what they can do for this country. And that whatever they dream they can reach. Because to be honest even with the young girls I'm working with here, sometimes I have to push them. Some of them just feel that, "okay, that's it, I'm just going to end here." I have to give them a different perspective.

Q: *As a woman, have you noticed that there are any hindrances to you entering the industry?*

A: No, I haven't seen any hindrances. I've worked with women at Desert & Delta who have had a baby and been out of work for a certain amount of time and it's actually for longer than most companies in the safari industry offer. Desert & Delta will hire someone to temporarily fill that position so you always know that you won't be cut off just because of that. And after some time you come back and you resume work and continue.

LEENG "LYNN" TEBALO

DESERT & DELTA SAFARIS GUIDE:

"Pursue what you love, and you won't feel those stumbling blocks"

She's in love with her job and the whole world can see it - her positivity is infectious. She's also currently the first and only woman guide in the Desert & Delta Safaris bush camps. Leeng Lynn Tebalo, who was a member of the Chobe Game Lodge all-female guiding team, talks to us about her experiences of entering this male-dominated arena, and how your attitude is everything.

"I got into guiding through the love of the jungle. I grew up going to the cattle posts every weekend, hanging out with my brothers, knowing all the birds, knowing how to track, knowing bird calls." As well as an early love of nature, she also knew early on that being a female wouldn't hold her back from anything. She credits her father for helping her to adopt a positive attitude towards chasing her dreams. "I remember when I grew up my dad would say, 'Be a man.'" She couldn't understand what he meant. She'd say 'But dad, I am a woman.' Later she realised that he meant do it as if you are a man, as if nothing can hold you back. "So there haven't been any challenges on my side," she reflects. "My whole life I have grown up knowing that I can challenge men and their duties. So to me, it wasn't like this is just the guy's duties. I always liked to say, 'I can do this. I have the potential to do this.' So when I first met guides I said, 'I would love to do this, I can do this.'"





CHAPTER

7

PRESERVING THE
ENVIRONMENT
through
DEVELOPING
LOCAL
CITIZENS

*Although the empowerment of people
has always been the focus of Desert
& Delta Safaris, environmental
protection has been just as essential.
For, without one, there cannot be the other.*

Early in the company's history, it was realised that local citizens – and more specifically, local citizens who benefited from tourism – would ultimately hold the key to protecting the country's heritage.



VALUING THE POWER OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



Leeng “Lynn” Tebalo, Desert & Delta Safaris’ first woman guide to work in its remote camps, has three children who, at young ages are already environmentally conscious. She chuckles as she admits that she’s overheard her five-year-old telling people off for littering, and she says she’s heard her children educating their friends not to kill birds “because it’s mum is somewhere else waiting for it.” They love that she is a guide, she says. “They love nature and the outdoors. They are always learning. And not just learning about the animals – which they love, but they know the conservation part of it too.”

Genuine, behind-the-scenes stories like this one illustrate an aspect of Desert & Delta’s philosophy that extends beyond simply operating their camps in a respectful and environmentally responsible way. It extends to ensuring that the philosophy is carried through countrywide to every Motswana at home, and transcends generations. “We need to live the philosophy – not just at work,” says James Wilson, Desert & Delta Safaris Marketing Director who says that the CARES philosophy speaks directly to this.

Tebalo’s children may not grow up to be conservationists, but like so many others in the Desert & Delta family, they can still be environmental envoys in their own right.



“*My children love nature and the outdoors. They are always learning. And not just learning about the animals – which they love, but they know the conservation part of it too.*”

LEENG “LYNN” TEBALO
Guide, Desert & Delta Safaris





ALBERT NDEREKI: BOTSWANA'S LONGEST- SERVING ECOWARRIOR

Albert Ndereki is an environmental envoy who lives and works the Desert & Delta philosophy of educating through example. Ndereki, who is an eco-guide at Chobe Game Lodge, has become a community role model and a respected voice for the wilderness in an area where traditionally the environment is given scant thought.

He's one of the Botswana tourism industry's longest-serving members, who in his own words, "eats, sleeps and lives ecotourism". In 2019 his passion for the environment won him the prestigious Shape Africa award from the travel show *We Are Africa*.

"Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" – this simple formula has been Ndereki's guiding principle since first becoming involved in environmental education in 2008. Before this, he managed the lodge's extensive gardens: he can relate the histories of all the indigenous trees that welcome guests to the lodge's entrance, patting them affectionately as he recalls events at the time that each tree was planted (most of these recollections have to do with celebrity visits).

When Ndereki first started working with Chobe Game Lodge in the early 1970s, environmental awareness in Botswana's hospitality industry was almost non-existent. As photographic tourism became more established, government soon realised that it needed to preserve its fragile ecosystems, and environmental controls and regulations were put in place. Today, Chobe Game Lodge is a leading example to the surrounding communities, to NGOs, government agencies and even other lodges who need to learn ecotourism from a hands-on perspective.

"Chobe Game Lodge has taught many people about ecotourism, because we're doing it practically – we're doing it with our hands and our minds. I always try to explain to people: 'Guys, there is a landfill here, there are people who are willing to do (recycling) jobs: they can take plastics, bottles and make a business, it's very simple.' I think many companies around here think that Chobe Game Lodge can do this because it has money, but if they are thinking like that, they are pulling themselves down."

Ndereki has been a continual source of inspiration, both for his community members around him and also for international press who have spread his story widely, contributing to Botswana's deserved reputation as Africa's most conscientious ecotourism destination.

"I am passionate about ecotourism because it teaches many people how to conserve the environment in Botswana. I always meet people in town and try to teach them about the environment, and many people now know more. We are just trying to clean our environment and look after our district, that is why we have to teach our people in the villages."

Chobe Game Lodge has taught many people about ecotourism, because we're doing it practically – we're doing it with our hands and our minds.

ALBERT NDEREKI Eco-Guide, Chobe Game Lodge

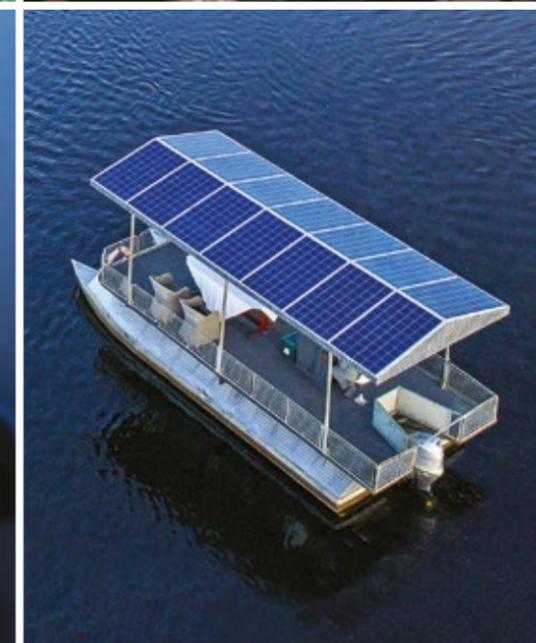
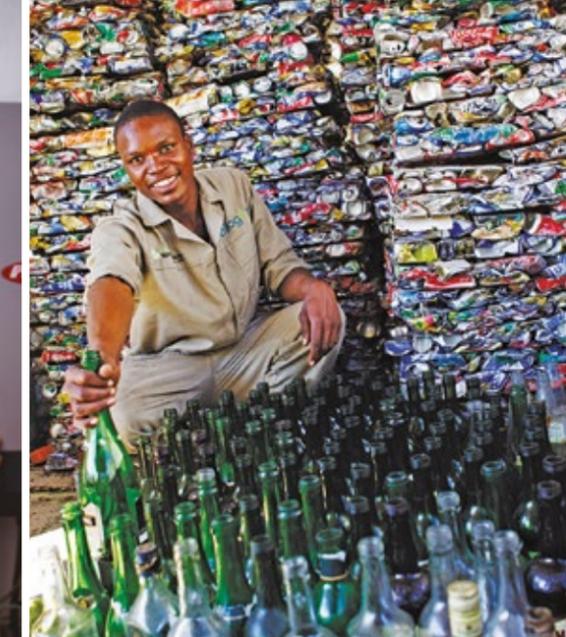
CHOBE GAME LODGE: A CONTINENT LEADER IN ECOTOURISM



In 2012 Chobe Game Lodge was among the first ten properties in Botswana to be awarded the highest Ecotourism level in the country by the Botswana Tourism Organisation – an impressive accolade in itself, but when you think of its infrastructure, and the energy and waste-management demands of a 44-room five-star lodge, the recognition shines that much brighter.

Fast forward eight years and the awards haven't stopped. In 2015 the lodge won the "Best for Resource Management" award at the World Travel Market's Africa Responsible Tourism Awards and in 2017 they won the "Responsible Tourism Award for Best Carbon Reduction" at the *World Travel Market* event in the UK for their

work in reducing carbon emissions through their fleet of electric vehicles and boats. Chobe's back-of-house workshop roofs are home to an incredible 600m² of solar panels, which generate 104 Kwh of electrical energy at peak performance and fully charge the electric vehicles during the day time. Extra power comes from Kasane's main grid which is hydroelectric. As well as the approximate 60 000 litres of grey water that is processed on site every day, at least 95% of all plastic, paper and metal waste is sorted and recycled. Glass is crushed on site to make bricks and plastic bottles are returned to the supplier to be recycled.





CHOBE GAME LODGE PIONEERING ELECTRIC VEHICLES IN AFRICA

In November 2014, ministers, press and industry colleagues from around the world gathered on the banks of the Chobe River for the launch of the first electric game-drive vehicle and electric-powered safari boat in Africa. Back then, with the technology still in its early stages, the conversion from combustible engines to electric was hugely expensive, almost prohibitively so.

But somebody needed to take the lead in exploring sustainable energy solutions for vehicles in the tourism industry. Johan Bruwer, Director of Chobe Game Lodge, together with the support and encouragement of the Chobe Holdings Board, worked closely with Johannesburg-based company Freedom Won to develop the technology needed to run the vehicles in a remote and challenging environment.

Bruwer, a passionate advocate of green energy, has tirelessly led the lodge's long but thorough journey to environmental innovation in the industry. "If it wasn't for the support of our directors and The Board we wouldn't be here today – they've been courageous. A lot of organisations could be tempted to not invest in back-of-house, and spend money on other things instead," says Bruwer.

As well as the cost factor, time, patience and faith were needed. New systems were often clumsy and complicated, much trial and error took place and

Chobe Game Lodge bore the brunt of much of the early learning curves on the technical side. But ultimately, things got easier. Even today, though it is still expensive, as Bruwer says, it's about taking responsibility to start moving in the right direction. "Now we've started it off in our environment, on our continent, hopefully it will start getting traction. We build these vehicles to work in our rural environment with an aim to need as little maintenance as possible. And we've achieved that in many ways. We've learned to simplify the systems for the vehicles and the boats."

Industry buy-in is vital to the wide scale success of converting to green energy as much and as soon as possible. It will make the technology cheaper and therefore more accessible. But before making such significant investments, most companies want to do hands-on research beforehand. So Chobe Game Lodge regularly hosts clients of Freedom Won who are interested in going electric and lodge management makes a point of sharing as much information as possible to help people make decisions.

Today the Chobe Game Lodge electric safari fleet transport guests on the majority of their excursions. All four of their boats are now electric-powered safari boats (three of which are fully solar powered) and four of their vehicles are electric with plans to convert the full range.



PROTECTING THE PRECIOUS ENVIRONMENT

Without a healthy environment, and without taking care of the nation's wild areas, there is no tourism industry. With its remote camps, Desert & Delta Safaris focuses on using sustainably sourced material, building solar powered camps (for example Camp Okavango and Savute Safari Lodge which are 100% solar powered) and constantly working on their contribution to ensuring they protect the precious environment in which they operate.





Tsodilo Hills – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – one of the highest points in Botswana with 4500 rock paintings.

CHAPTER

8

A
JOURNEY
TO THE
FUTURE

Commercial success has ensured the longevity of Desert & Delta Safaris, but at the heart of the company's success is its commitment to the development of its people. It is therefore no surprise that one of its next immediate objectives is also people-centric.

LOOKING BACK TO PLAN FORWARD



In the words of Jonathan Gibson, CEO of Chobe Holdings and the man behind the company's farsighted "people first" policy, the aspect that has personally given him and the company's senior management most pleasure, has been "working amongst our staff, watching their growth in terms of ability, effectiveness and apparent joy of being at the coalface." He admits that this was never achieved as a single preconceived strategy, but rather it evolved through being in tune with the working experience alongside the Desert & Delta Safaris staff.

Retrospection has been the natural approach to planning the company's forward trajectory, as well as achieving long-term sustainability. Gibson reflects that the early vision of the company was very simple: to provide the travelling public with an insight to Botswana's top wildlife destinations at a fair and generally affordable price. "But possibly more importantly," he adds, "to demonstrate to our government that a viable self-sustaining wildlife-based industry could provide employment and entrepreneurial opportunities to rural communities."

This vision has been realised and it continues to be. Rural communities have been empowered, and employment opportunities continue to be created, not only within the Desert & Delta umbrella but for the industry at large as people training with Desert & Delta head out into the wider industry. Commercial success has guaranteed the longevity of Desert & Delta Safaris, but at the heart of the company's success remains its commitment to the development and nurturing of its people: the links driving the chain. Given the brand's commitment to the people of Botswana, it is therefore no surprise that one of its next immediate objectives is also people-centric.

“For me, that is the epitome of responsible tourism – staying with a company like ours that invests in people and conservation.”

JAMES WILSON Marketing Director, Desert & Delta Safaris



THE SEDIA RIVERSIDE HOTEL: A WIN-WIN WIDER VISION

In 2019 Desert & Delta Safaris acquired the Sedia Riverside Hotel – one of Maun’s original hotels. This may have been a surprising addition to the company’s bouquet of remote luxury safari properties. But the move has been carefully considered: it creates two major wins with one move – and as usual with Desert & Delta, the wins are set to involve wide scale benefits for Botswana, both in the company’s immediate reach, and in the wider tourism industry in general.

Developing local potential through training opportunities

The long-term objective of the Sedia property is to use it as a hospitality training institute – the first of its kind in Botswana. It will provide an immediate source of training and education in a country where this is still under-developed. “Our ambition as a company is to use today’s momentum to create an industry with a plethora of local talent – from guiding to management to senior executive roles across the company,” says Desert & Delta Safaris Marketing Director, James Wilson. “We value the ability this property will have in employing more people here in Maun where we will seek to train and qualify local citizens, preparing them for employment throughout the industry.”

Establishing Maun as a cultural base

At the same time, the company firmly believes that Maun is on the verge of an exciting transformation and wants to help establish a cultural, town-based destination in what is very much a safari-based industry. James believes that by encouraging interest in Maun and the cultural aspect of Botswana, much needed diversity to the country’s tourism industry will be added. “The modern international traveller enjoys an opportunity to meet local people when they travel. That’s when they really get a feeling for a country. I believe that Maun needs a beautiful little property that resonates with the town’s charm and grit. Yes, the remote locations in the safari camps provide a first class wilderness experience, but taking in some of the local community life is only possible if you stay in one of our towns.”

NXAMASERI ISLAND LODGE: RISING UP IN THE WAKE OF THE COVID PANDEMIC

After an incredible 2019 welcoming guests to Botswana, the emergence of COVID-19 had a devastating impact on northern Botswana and the entire tourism industry. The worldwide pandemic lead to countries throughout the world restricting travel and putting an immediate stop to most international travel.



No event in our history has tested our resolve in this way, but through adversity came a unity and singularity of purpose throughout the company. With the camps completely shut down for several months, maintaining the properties and protecting the precious natural resources was a challenge. The biggest challenge however was in supporting the people of Desert & Delta Safaris through this trying time. Standing true to our CARES Philosophy which puts people first, our mission was to ensure every member of staff retained their job and received financial support throughout the pandemic. Despite the massive challenges faced with negligible income and an industry brought to its knees, we are proud to have achieved this objective. We are also proud of the role that we played, with our industry partners, in assisting with the vaccination of tourism staff and rural dwellers throughout the regions in which we operate.

A heartfelt thanks goes out to all our people who worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic. Their commitment played a vital role in ensuring the survival of Desert & Delta Safaris, which is testament to the importance of putting people first. We grieve those lost during the pandemic and commit to honouring their memories which lie intertwined with our story.

This is an event which will be forever etched in the history of the travel and tourism industry. Despite the challenges faced, our goal as a company was to continue moving forward and come out a stronger and more integrated organisation.

To that end, in September 2021 Nxamaseri Island Lodge in the Okavango Panhandle joined our circuit operating under Desert & Delta Safaris. We want to

remain committed to our goal of developing tourism destinations that have yet to reach their potential outside of the core wildlife products. As Botswana continues to develop as a tourist destination, we have recognised the need to showcase the country’s unique cultural heritage to bring to light the human story of this remarkable destination. Tsodilo Hills, on the western side of the Okavango Panhandle is a UNESCO World Heritage site in its own right because of its spiritual significance for the people of Botswana. With the lodge’s close proximity to both the hills and the Panhandle, Nxamaseri Island Lodge joining our excellent circuit presented the perfect opportunity to raise much needed awareness for the region.

With Chobe Holding’s charter operator, Safari Air, now offering flights throughout northern Botswana we are able to provide convenient linkages to previously unexplored destinations and in turn support emergent operators. Through this we hope to encourage more people to connect with the communities of this incredible destination and explore the ancient cultural heritage of this great country.

As we look to the future it is encouraging to see the diversification of Botswana’s tourism product. We are delighted to be playing our role in the development of these new offerings. After many years of work within the tourism industry I am proud that we have developed a strong product supported by an incredible team who are able to enhance Nxamaseri Island Lodge, bringing the Tsodilo Hills and Okavango Panhandle closer into the industry.

JONATHAN GIBSON
CEO, Chobe Holdings



Q&A WITH JAMES WILSON

MARKETING DIRECTOR - DESERT & DELTA SAFARIS



James Wilson is a passionate and articulate voice when it comes to the story of both Desert & Delta Safaris, and Botswana's tourism industry. He shares some of his thoughts on the industry with us, and tells us why he's proud to be a part of Desert & Delta Safaris.

“
I want our guests to know the positive impact they have and can continue to have by supporting a company like Desert & Delta Safaris.

Q: *Why do you believe the Desert & Delta story is so important?*

A: There are three sets of people who I really want to share our story with. Firstly, our guests, the traveller. In a time when climate change is a worry and conscious travellers are feeling more concerned about their impact when they travel, I want our guests to know the positive impact they have and can continue to have by supporting a company like Desert & Delta Safaris. While we all need to do our bit in minimising our impact on the environment, we cannot undervalue the positive change that a sound and responsible tourism company like ours has made in empowering people and protecting the local natural resources.

Secondly, I believe it's important for our story to be read by our very own people: past, present and future staff members, their family and friends. Many of our own people don't know about our roots and what we've achieved.

Lastly, I also want our government to know more about our story because I think we often get so caught up in everyday challenges, that we need to pause, appreciate our achievements, and look back at our journey so far. Only then will we be able to understand how far we've come, and how much is still possible. And of course we want the government to know how much we value their support. Without their sound policies and approach to the protection of Botswana and its people, this country wouldn't be the desirable destination that it is, and for that we should be very proud!

“
Despite Desert & Delta Safaris being listed on the BSE (Botswana Stock Exchange), there is no sense of an impersonal corporate set up... I love the company's approachability and passion for what we do.

Q: *Where do you think the Botswana tourism industry is compared internationally and regionally?*

A: Botswana is widely recognised as the most superior safari destination in the world. Careful government control on national parks and concessions means we've preserved a highly desirable tourism asset, which will only increase in its value as over-tourism increases worldwide. In 2017, the World Travel & Tourism Council awarded the Botswana Tourism Organisation the *Tourism for Tomorrow Destination Stewardship Award*, highlighting Botswana as the most Sustainable Tourism destination in the world. Lonely Planet listed it as a top tourism destination in 2018. Botswana was also the first Sub-Saharan African country to sponsor ITB – the world's largest travel show.

Q: *What are people supporting when they travel with Desert & Delta?*

A: Our camps are built in prime, unspoilt wilderness areas in a sensitive manner that respects the surrounding environment. Each guest contributes to ensuring these areas remain pristine as the areas are protected by our presence, and the projects we take part in. Most importantly though – our guests are supporting local empowerment, because nobody has worked as hard as Desert & Delta Safaris in empowering local citizens into senior roles within the tourism industry. For me, that is the epitome of responsible tourism – staying with a company like ours that invests in people **and** conservation.

Q: *What does the Desert & Delta brand mean to you?*

A: For me, it is simply family. There are so many people, both senior and junior, who have been with this company for such a long time. And despite Desert & Delta Safaris being listed on the BSE (Botswana Stock Exchange), there is no sense of an impersonal corporate set up. Working here makes you feel invested in part of the journey. We love each other and we love what we do! I love the company's approachability and passion for what we do. And I feel that this passion resonates with our staff and our guests – all the way through to the way we operate.

Q: *What are you most proud of achieving, as a company?*

A: I am proud of employing so many women in senior positions; having an all local citizen management team; and our heritage dating back to being the first real luxury safari circuit. I am also proud of how we've evolved to offer good value as well as a high-end experience for our guests – one that is real! And now I want to be more vocal about what we've achieved thus far, ensuring that world-travellers are aware of what we can achieve together.

Q: *Where do you think Desert & Delta is going next?*

A: We'd like to diversify and develop our brand to different markets – perhaps more adventure mid-range places – so that people will understand we are more than just a responsible travel operator in Botswana. We are custodians of our land and people, developing and empowering through tourism!

“

The Desert & Delta Safaris model of tourism revolves around ownership, and ownership is quite broad-based in this context. It's not only the physical owning of the property and the vehicles and everything we do, but it is ownership of the responsibilities we take towards the destination, it is ownership of our responsibility as a small company: developing the people. It is the ownership we have in protecting the environment, and contributing to the economy.

WALTER SMITH

Operations Director,
Desert & Delta Safaris





“
*Most importantly though,
 by staying with us, our
 guests are supporting local
 empowerment, because
 nobody has worked as hard
 as Desert & Delta Safaris in
 empowering local citizens
 into senior roles within
 the tourism industry.”*

LEMPHEDITSE ODUMETSE
 Group Managing Director,
 Chobe Holdings

MANA MEADOWS



DESERT & DELTA SAFARIS

EMPOWERING
 THE PEOPLE OF
BOTSWANA
 THROUGH TOURISM
our Journey Together
 Desert & Delta Safaris

*Empowering Botswana
 Through Tourism*

Published in May 2022
 as a tribute to the country,
 the staff and the guests of
 Desert & Delta Safaris.

RESERVATIONS OFFICE

TELEPHONE (+267) 680 1494
 E-MAIL info@desertdelta.com

MARKETING OFFICE

TELEPHONE (+267) 686 1559
 E-MAIL marketing@desertdelta.com
 ADDRESS Private Bag 310,
 Maun, Botswana



desertdelta.com

PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR Stuart Parker

CONTENT & COPYWRITER Mana Meadow

PROJECT PHOTOGRAPHY Mana Meadow

CONTENT PHOTOGRAPHY James Gifford
 Stuart Parker
 James Wilson
 Walter Smith
 Joshua Tough

DESIGN & ART DIRECTION Nadine Beattie
 – Blue Hue Designs

PRINT Novus Print

COPYRIGHT: Desert & Delta Safaris. All rights strictly reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, or by photocopying, recording or microfilming, or stored in any retrieval system, without the written permission of the publishers.