

PHOTOMASHATU

FAQ

1. How many hides are there?

Currently there is only the one hide; the Matebole Hide, it takes up to 8 photographers at a time.

2. What are photographic hides?

These are structures built to specifically maximise the photographic potential of the subjects that visit them. These hides can be used to view animals in the normal manner, but have been positioned to consider the angle of the sun, the background as well as the angle you are to the animals and birds.

3. Where is PhotoMashatu located?

In Mashatu Private Game Reserve, Botswana.

4. How do I book?

The PhotoMashatu vehicle, hides and equipment rentals can be booked through PhotoMashatu reservations reservations@photomashatu.com. Clients in camp can book on an ad hoc basis at the lodge subject to availability.

5. Are children allowed in the hides?

No children under the age of 12 are permitted in the hides, unless with a private group.

6. Can I visit the hides on my own?

No, All guests using the hide have to be accompanied by a PhotoMashatu wildlife photographer. Should the PhotoMashatu wildlife photographer not be available, guests of Mashatu can utilize the hides, at the normal rate in the company of a Mashatu guide.

7. Where does the PhotoMashatu vehicle operate?

The PhotoMashatu vehicle operates on the predator rich Mashatu Game Reserve and is available for all lodges within the Mashatu property.

8. When can I go on a drive on the PhotoMashatu vehicle?

The game drives will be as per normal to lodge game drive times.

9. Do I have to stay at Mashatu to use the hides, photo vehicle and equipment rentals?

The only guests who have access to, or may book, the PhotoMashatu hides, vehicle and equipment rentals, are the guests staying at Mashatu Lodge (Main Camp) or Mashatu Tent Camp.

10. How is the climate like at Mashatu?

The climate over most of southern Africa is temperate, although hot, dry conditions are usually encountered in the Tuli region. Heavy summer thunderstorms of short duration in the late afternoon and early evening may be expected. Rain usually occurs during the summer months – between October and March. **Average Temperatures during the year can be seen below.**

January

Min: 24°C or 75°F **Max: 37°C or 99°F**

The beginning of a New Year sees the area looking lush with verdant plains and dense greenery. There is plenty of water in the veld thanks to the heavy summer thunderstorms that visit Mashatu in the late afternoons starting in early December.

Zebra and waterbuck begin to give birth to the new generation, and kudu start calving towards the end of the month. Elephants are to be found in large numbers, with migrant herds moving into the area. Enormous herds of up to 200 congregate – all taking advantage of the new green vegetation. Temperatures may be high – reaching between 35°C and 40°C. Fortunately the heat may be moderated in the afternoons and early evenings by the build-up of clouds and the possibility of a cooling thunderstorm. Cheetahs normally make their appearance, drawn to the area by concentrations of impala moving from the woodlands into the open plains. The impala are lured out by the tender new grass shoots, which cover the plains in delicate shades of green, especially to the north and east of the Majale River. If the rains have been plentiful, the Limpopo River may be flowing strongly and there is a good chance of flash floods at the Majale, Pitsani, Nyaswe and Matabole Rivers.

February

Min: 23°C or 73°F **Max: 40°C or 104°F**

The temperature soars in February – one of the hottest months of the year. The conditions are similar to those of January. Kudus continue to calve and there is also a good chance of seeing late impala fawns, tottering along on spindly, wobbly legs behind their mothers. Due to the excessive daytime heat, the animals wisely seek shade before 8 am, only becoming active again in the late afternoon just prior to sunset. Tropical thunderstorms are still a regular afternoon feature, and there is also a high probability of flooded rivers to add some excitement to game drives.

March

Min: 21°C or 70°F **Max: 35°C or 95°F**

The harsh, searing heat of summer begins to abate and there is less likelihood of rain. A few late kudu calves may make a bemused appearance at the beginning of the month. Large nursery herds of gawky Impala young are seen being kept under some control by the watchful eyes of their mothers. The bush is still dense but the bright shades of green are starting to dull as the year progresses. Due to the decrease in rainfall, the characteristic carpets of yellow flowers, so prevalent in the early summer months, begin to disappear.

April

Min: 18°C or 64°F **Max: 30°C or 86°F**

This is a truly lovely time of year in the bushveld. It is now autumn and the daily temperatures are most pleasant, with balmy days and nights. The trees are still green and the bush is thick. Ground cover growing away from the larger watercourses begins to change colour to the browner winter shades as water becomes scarcer. A hush begins to fall over the bush as the myriad of insects; frogs and reptiles quieten down in preparation for winter. Flocks of migratory birds also begin to congregate in the treetops, gathering together in preparation for the long flight northwards to sunnier climates and greener pastures. The rains have abated although late, unseasonable showers may occur – but this is the exception rather than the rule.

May

Min: 12°C or 54°F

Max: 31°C or 88°F

The transition from summer to winter happens quickly in the Limpopo Valley. Temperatures begin to drop rapidly after sunset and both morning and evening game drives require warmer clothing. Although chilly in the mornings, the days are clear and pleasant with crisp blue skies. Now that the rains are over, the veld begins to dry out and game starts congregating around the major water sources. The eight perennial and non-perennial rivers on Mashatu now provide much needed water for the wildlife on Mashatu and these valuable sources of water will continue to do so until the rains arrive in early December. Deciduous trees start losing their leaves and drifts of golden leaves accumulate on the ground around the trees. The grasses, forbs and herbs gradually begin to fade away. As the vegetation starts to thin, the elusive leopard is more easy to detect in the bushy riverine corridors. Lions, which are usually dispersed with the game during the wet season, now begin to concentrate their activities in the central parts of Mashatu.

June

Min: 9°C or 48°F

Max: 29°C or 84°F

Winter is now upon us and has tightened its night-time grip on Mashatu. Many of the natural pans and pools of water in the rivers have now dried up and elephants and a host of other species begin to frequent the last remaining ponds and artificial waterholes at both the Main and Tent camps. This makes for exciting mealtime game viewing. Predator sightings are good at this time of the year thanks to the thinned out vegetation and increased concentration of game. Generally the game is more active during the day.

July

Min: 8°C or 46°F

Max: 29°C or 84°F

The conditions are much like those in June. The days are good with crisp mornings with cold nights. Elephants begin to dig for water in the sandy riverbeds, providing water not only for themselves but also for a variety of other animals. This is a favourable time to visit the archaeological site at the Motloutse River as the summer vegetation has disappeared and a host of interesting features are now visible.

August

Min: 13°C or 55°F

Max: 31°C or 88°F

The veld is extremely dry now and the floodplains and grasslands adjacent to the Limpopo are now barren. The bush has become harsh and almost inhospitable with absolutely no groundcover – only dust and rocks are visible for kilometres. The veld's colour palette comprises of hues of brown and red as the last remaining mopane tree's leaves shed the green hue that they have been holding. The weather is fine, with temperatures becoming warmer. The early mornings and evenings are now comfortable on the game drives. August is a showy month when it comes to spectacular sunsets, the airborne dust giving rise to pyrotechnic displays as the sun sinks below the horizon.

September

Min: 16°C or 61°F

Max: 36°C or 97°F

This is a month of great contrast weather-wise. The bush is still very dry – a condition exacerbated by the south-eastern winds that blow from August through to October. Many trees begin to blossom in anticipation of the rapidly approaching summer and their vibrant blossoms enliven the bush providing a bountiful treat for baboons and other hungry inhabitants that have struggled through the lean winter months. Temperatures begin to creep upwards, and game drives are once again early morning and late afternoon affairs – the wise means of avoiding the debilitating midday heat.

October

Min: 19°C or 66°F

Max: 39°C or 102°F

Temperature begins a steady rise and conditions start becoming desperate for many of the herbivores as sub-region frontal systems touch on the Limpopo Valley, bringing superheated air into the region. October is referred to as 'suicide month' because of the heat ahead of the rains. There may be the odd tropical thunderstorm but the barren earth sucks up this early rain. This welcome water is not enough however and seldom results in a noteworthy floral display. Predators have a fine time as many animals are weak and restrict their activities to the area close to the waterhole. The lack of dense vegetation and dry powdery soil make tracking lions and leopards easier and often results in some exceptional sightings. Elephants listlessly wait out the dry season, moving from one waterhole to the next, where they take full advantage – wallowing and drinking for hours. They feed on the surrounding vegetation moving into the bush on feeding forays when the temperature has dropped sufficiently for them to forage out of the protective shade. It is also at this time of year that the eland begin to calve.

November

Min: 22°C or 72°F

Max: 37°C or 99°F

Summer is now in full swing at Mashatu. The temperatures are high and there is a lot of humidity in the air. The chances of convectional thunderstorms are good although the real rains are still a month away. Some of the summer migrant birds begin to arrive and the characteristic call of the red-chested cuckoo rings out clearly heralding the approach of better times for all. Once a good rainfall is recorded the small and drab but extremely vocal monotonous lark keeps the bush awake day and night with its irritating call as these birds perch on every treetop and announce their presences.

December

Min: 20°C or 68°F

Max: 33°C or 91°F

December is the most vibrant month at Mashatu. Rains are a regular occurrence with spectacular thunderstorms with their dazzling lightening displays rumbling in from the northwest in the afternoons. Flash floods often come bursting down the rivers sweeping away the accumulation of dirt and debris and leaving fresh, clean channels once again. The whole veld looks freshly washed. After the rains, the veld is transformed into a golden carpet of acres and acres of yellow-flowered "devil thorns" interspersed with myriad other vibrantly coloured flowers. Swamps and marshlands along the Limpopo River fill with water attracting water birds in their droves as they take full advantage of the biological explosion of insects, amphibians and reptiles. Impala and wildebeest give birth to numerous gangly, wide-eyed young, which start gambolling, and bounding on the plains shortly after birth. This is Mother Nature's way of swamping the predators with a glut of food supply thereby ensuring the survival of the species. Migratory birds return en masse with enormous flocks of white, black and abdim's storks roaming the grasslands. Lesser-spotted and steppe eagles compete to annex every available treetop and the trill of the woodland kingfisher fills the air. The bush is alive and an avian and insect cacophony fills the air – day and night

11. Clothing?

Dress code is safari casual. Be sure to bring a sweater, which may be needed at any time of year. During the winter months (May to September) very warm clothes, including a windbreaker or anorak, are essential.

12. What is a resident wildlife photographer?

PhotoMashatu has a resident wildlife photographers based at Main camp to help guest photographers. They can hire out the use of the photographer to join them on game drives as well as for the photographic hides. He/she will also be available for tutor sessions in camp during the day. Additionally, you can hire out the PhotoMashatu vehicle, in which the resident photographer will accompany you.

13. Who are the Mashatu rangers and Trackers?

The guides and trackers are Tswana men from the region who have both a natural instinct as well as an intimate knowledge of the bush. These guides average 15 years on Mashatu and are 'career guides'. They are thoroughly trained in all aspects of ecology and are therefore able to impart valuable information and priceless insight – adding richness to your safari experience.

14. Is the hide only for photographers?

Guests at Mashatu may use the hides for normal game viewing purposes as well as photography, but still accompanied by the PhotoMashatu guide. The experience at the hide is a natural history one and as such it caters for all visitors who love nature. Many animal and bird species visit the hide, making for entertaining and compelling viewing. The highlight if course, is when the elephants come down to drink, it is an adrenaline filled affair.

15. Which lenses should I bring?

You will be photographing anything from birds to elephants so both a wide angle as well as a telephoto lens would be useful.

16. Do I need a tripod or a beanbag?

No, the hide has shelves with rotating plates and beanbags.