

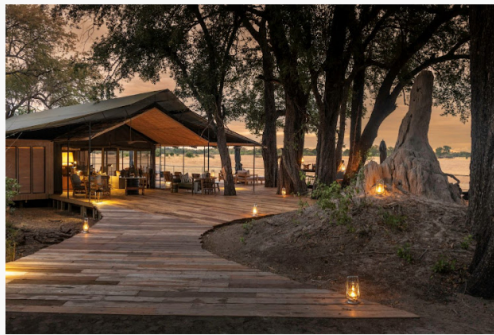
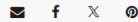
TRAVEL

DELIGHT IN THE DETAIL AT CAMP KIRI

AT THE EDGE OF THE KIRI CHANNEL, THIS CAMP TRADES OPULENCE FOR AUTHENTICITY AND DISCOVERS TRUE WILDERNESS LUXURY

14 October 2025

Words: Richard Holmes



Canvas tents are pitched in Larch fever-berry woodland, merging the lodge with its natural setting.

Image: D. Rogers

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It's early summer in the Okavango Delta, and the landscape is beginning to change. That's no surprise in this corner of Botswana, where one moment the floods arrive, trickling down from the highlands of Angola; next, the mercury is climbing and the waters recede.

It is a land in a state of constant flux.

And though the Okavango marketing machine is built on images of a watery landscape, where days are spent on mokoro excursions and speedboat adventures, what of the summer season here when the channels are empty and the mokoros are pulled up on dry land? Perhaps surprisingly, it becomes a land of plenty.



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Camp Kiri's eight under-canvas suites are elevated on platforms, offering unobstructed views of the plains.

Image: Supplied

That's especially true on the grassy plains of the concession known as NG32 in the eastern reaches of the Delta, a (happily) short flight from Maun. Far from the famous Panhandle, yet just 20km from the iconic Chief's Island, it's the savannah-style location that sets Camp Kiri apart from other Okavango Delta lodges.

Camp Kiri belongs to Machaba Safaris, which was founded in 2012 with the vision of reviving the spirit of a classic safari: canvas, campfires and intuitive guiding paired with understated comforts.

Throughout the collection, which stretches across Botswana and Zimbabwe, you'll find camps that are intimate and deeply connected to the landscape. Unfenced and under canvas, they are a welcome change from the growing trend towards bush-boutique luxury lodges, where overt opulence can feel out of place in the

wilderness.

Instead, Camp Kiri revels in the wild setting. Here, sandy paths lead guests to the eight under-canvas suites — along with a pair of two-bedroom family suites — set on elevated platforms, gazing out across a grassy plain where myriad animals are drawn to the waterhole day and night.

In the peak of the flood season, the Kiri Channel trickles past, often allowing mokoro adventures just steps from the lodge. Spacious dining and lounge areas look out across the grasslands, while the fire pit puts you at eye level with the waterhole action. And when the summer heat gets too much, a low-key pool deck allows you to relax amid the forest.



Interiors balance classic safari charm with understated contemporary comforts, from king-size beds to open-plan bathrooms.

Image: D. Rogers



Private decks and outdoor tubs invite quiet moments beneath the stars.

Image: D. Rogers

Camp Kiri is pitched in a forest of larch and fever-berry woodland, and what the tents might lack in designer bling they gain in a sense of space and forest immersion. Out front, a wide private deck calls for quiet afternoons between game activities. Step indoors, and fans swirl lazily above king-size beds. To the left, a small sitting area and chaise longue. To the right, an open-plan en-suite bathroom that spills onto an outdoor deck complete with a shower and a private tub for soaks beneath the stars. It's classic under-canvas charm with a quietly contemporary finish. All with wildlife on tap.

Sometimes, perhaps a little too much.

"This area, near your tent. It's a bit of a hippo highway," says Kobus, the laconic general manager of Camp Kiri. "Make sure you keep your eyes open in the mornings. The elephants like it too, during the daytime."

It pays to look lively at night too, as it turns out.



The two-bedroom family suites provide privacy, space, and intimate access to the surrounding wilderness.

Image: D. Rogers

One evening, walking back to my tent after dinner, an impala crashes from the undergrowth just metres in front of us. As my guide, Nthobasang "Tops" Matswagole, lets out a shout, an African wild dog follows in hot pursuit, chasing the impala across the pool deck and into the darkness.

The next morning, I'm woken by a commotion at the waterhole in the pale light of dawn. A pack of wild dogs has taken down an impala in full view of those early risers enjoying coffee at the campfire. A herd of buffalo saunters past, chewing the cud with nonchalance, as more dogs arrive to seek a morsel of the action. Within minutes, the impala is reduced to scraps, as the pack trot off towards their den.

I've rarely seen so much game without leaving the lodge, but of course, you'll want to head out.

Set close to the permanent Boro Channel and just metres from the seasonal Kiri Channel, there are seasonal mokoros and speedboats at Camp Kiri if you seek them, but the real magic is to bookend your on-the-water Okavango experiences with time tracking the abundant wildlife that thrives on the vast plains of NG32. It's land, not water, that defines the safari experience at Camp Kiri.



Camp Kiri provides a land-focused safari experience.

Guests may witness African wild dogs hunting, often from the lodge itself.

Image: D. Rogers

complementing the Delta's famed waterways.

Image: D. Rogers

In just a few short days, our game drives along the Boro Channel served up herds of buffalo, bathing elephant and myriad birdlife. Remember, the warmer days of summer, punctuated by dramatic thunderstorms, also mean the arrival of migrant species. Another afternoon was spent tracking the African wild dogs to their den, while abundant herds of zebra and plains game mean there is no shortage of predator activity.

And with the floods receding into summer, there's more time and space to devote to walking safaris in the open grasslands.

We give a large male elephant a wide berth. In the sandy soils, we find the spoor of the rarely seen African wildcat. Moving silently through the grass, we stumble on a family of bat-eared foxes. With the elephant long gone, Tops shows me how an elephant footprint can be measured to gauge its height: double the circumference of the front foot (round, while the rear foot is oval), and you'll get the shoulder height.

It's a detail I'll remember long after the dust has been brushed from my vellies. Because while the watery wonderland of the Delta is certainly worth adding to the bucket list, Camp Kiri was a worthy reminder that in the Okavango, there's delight to be found on dry land too.

machabasafaris.com/en/camps-lodges/kiri-camp

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