



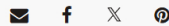
TRAVEL

NEW LODGES INTERPRET THE SERENITY OF THE OKAVANGO

BAINES' LODGE, MBAMBA AND MONACHIRA CAMPS BRING BESPOKE LUXURY AND A CONTEMPORARY FEEL TO OKAVANGO'S RAW SPIRIT AND UNIQUE AQUATIC SAFARI EXPERIENCE

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Words: Richard Holmes



Baines Lodge Deck at sunset

Image: Supplied

Autumn in northern Botswana and the annual floodwaters are starting to fill the channels of the Okavango Delta. The tendrils of water spread south and east, more than 1,000km from where the rains first fell in the distant highlands of Angola. Flood, soak away, repeat.

It's a natural cycle that has continued for about 60,000 years, ever since a shift in tectonic plates rerouted the waters of the Kavango River to seep away into the Kalahari, instead of emptying into the Zambezi River and Indian Ocean. Ever since, it's been a land in constant flux.

Almost as predictable as the coming of the annual floods is the arrival each year of new luxury safari lodges, sprouting like the Mokolwane palm islands across the Delta. Ever since travel reopened post-pandemic it seems that global travellers simply can't get enough of the Okavango's utterly unique aquatic safari experience.



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On the edge of the Okavango Panhandle — the region first to receive the floods — the latest opening comes from conservation-minded safari operator Natural Selection. As of April 2025 their NG12 concession is now home to four distinctive camps, each delivering its own take on the classic safari experience in one of Africa's most iconic landscapes.

Alongside Duke's, Duke's East and the beautifully contemporary North Island, the latest offering is Mbamba, a camp of 12 canvas suites — including two family units — tucked beneath towering leadwood trees. It's a partnership with Uncharted Africa, who also run the iconic Jack's Camp in the Makgadikgadi, and Mbamba

taps into a similar vintage vernacular. Raised on wooden platforms overlooking the grassy plains, the camp is styled in Bousfield's maximalist aesthetic, where plush textiles, Turkish throws, mahogany sideboards, Persian rugs and four-poster beds bring a colourful vintage charm to the wilderness.



Mbamba Camp

Image: Supplied

The location is a stunner too, set in a rich landscape of floodplains, forested islands and open grasslands that play host to large herds of buffalo, alongside healthy predator populations. The birding is equally impressive, with a good chance of spotting the elusive Pel's fishing owl in the boughs above the channels.

Those watery channels are also the touchstone for the new Monachira Camp from Machaba Safaris, which is due to open in May 2025.



Located within the wildlife-rich Moremi Game Reserve, Monachira Camp takes its cue — and its name — from the Monachira Channel that flows alongside, offering guests the opportunity for memorable water-based adventures in flood season.



Mbamba Camp interior

Image: Supplied

While the camp is in a prime location for birding and wildlife, a highlight of a stay at Monachira will be the chance to visit the nearby Gudigwa heronries — a seasonal spectacle (September to November is best) as thousands of herons, storks, and egrets gather to nest.

You'll do some nesting of your own back at camp, with Monachira's 10 spacious under-canvas suites offering a sense of wilderness luxury amid the Delta. Bucking the trend of hyper-luxury lodges offering the last word in mod-cons, at Monachira the focus is on pared-back comfort and wilderness experience. Tents stand immersed in the wilderness, with canvas flaps drawing back to reveal wonderful views from your king-size bed, and private decks offer quiet spaces for contemplation. There are no private plunge pools in the suite, but the communal lodge area offers a communal pool for a cooling dip.





Monachira Lodge main area

Image: Supplied

Guests can explore this pristine wilderness through a variety of activities: tranquil mokoro excursions, guided island walks, motorboat cruises and game drives into remote corners of Moremi. Whether drifting through channels lined with water lilies or scanning the tree line for a flash of wings, Monachira delivers an intimate and rewarding Delta experience.

Though you'll have to wait a few months for the opening in September 2025, that patience will be richly rewarded when visiting the new Baines' Lodge, set in a private conservancy adjoining the Moremi Game Reserve.



Baines' Lodge

Image: Supplied

Baines' Lodge forms part of the A&K Sanctuary portfolio from storied travel operator Abercrombie & Kent, with a bold new look and feel celebrating the work of 19th-century explorer and artist Thomas Baines.

The reimaged lodge is the work of architect Adriana Granato, of the Milan-based architecture and research practice Studio Ibsen, working in tandem with Johannesburg's respected design firm Luxury Frontiers, famous for taking South African safari design global.



Baines' Main Lounge

Image: Supplied

The new Baines' Lodge brings a thoroughly contemporary look to the banks of the Boro River, with angular lines and minimalist design softened by an abundance of natural tones and textures to evoke the raw spirit of the Okavango Delta.

"The lodge had to feel like a modern explorer's haven — immersive, inspiring, and respectful of its environment," says Juan Cloete, lead architect and Associate at Luxury Frontiers. "Thomas Baines' artistry guided us, blending past and present through photography and modern homes."

through abstraction and modern luxury.



Baines' Unit Lounge

Image: Supplied

With just six suites Baines' Lodge will be the smallest offering in the A&K Sanctuary collection, offering a truly intimate discovery of the Unesco-listed Okavango Delta. In homages to Baines — the artist — each suite is envisioned as a 'living gallery', framing the landscapes as a work of art. Indoors there's a similarly artistic approach, from the biophilic design and high-end artworks to curated books and colour accents inspired by Baines' palette.

Rooted in sustainability, and with both water and land-based safaris on the doorstep, Baines' Lodge is set to offer an unforgettable journey into nature, design and narrative.

"This lodge is not just a destination; it's a portal to adventure and beauty, a space that tells a story as vivid as the art of Thomas Baines," says Cloete.

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