

# VOICE OF AMERICA BOTSWANA RELAY STATION STATION BROCHURE – 1991

## INTRODUCTION

SO, YOU'VE DECIDED TO COME TO BOTSWANA.

Here are some suggestions for your initial arrival:

1. American Embassy in Gaborone recommends that travelers be authorized use of a rental vehicle while in Gaborone.
2. Your travel authorization should include 2 days TDY in Gaborone for processing in.
3. Bring with you 6 passport size photos.
4. Due to limited hotel accommodations, reservations should be made 3 to 4 weeks in advance.

### **Botswana Relay Station**

The Botswana Relay station is located on 64-acre site on the southwestern edge of Selebi-Phikwe, the third largest town in Botswana, with a population of over 40,000. Selebi-Phikwe is basically a mining community, dominated by the BCL (Bamangwato Concession Limited) copper/nickel mine\smelter complex, which employs approximately 200 expatriates of various nationalities, predominantly of British origin, and over 4,000 local people. The town is approximately 250 miles northeast of the capital city of Gaborone and linked by asphalt road to the main arterial north\south road and railway some 35 miles distant.

The community of Selebi-Phikwe has grown and prospered over the past 15 years. South Africans, British and Zimbabweans are the most numerous non-citizens, but there are many other nationalities as well. The affluence and varied needs of the population are reflected in the range and quality of shops and other services which are available. If you come to serve a tour at the Botswana Relay Station, you will be pleasantly surprised at the friendly people and scenic splendor of the countryside. You will be met at the airport, escorted to your government furnished living quarters and provided with a "hospitality kit" until your airfreight and household shipment arrives. There is also a "Welcome Brochure" for all new VOA families, to familiarize you with day-to-day life in our town and provide many useful hints to help you settle in with a minimum of problems. Our VOA community here is small, but ready to welcome you in style.

The Botswana Relay station broadcasts VOA programs, currently in English and Portuguese, to Southern Africa. It is unique in the region because it is only one of two international broadcasters transmitting on medium wave and can compete more effectively with commercial stations within the listening area. The station complements other VOA transmissions on shortwave.

The VOA station at Selebi-Phikwe is one of the smallest Broadcast facilities and includes a continental 50 kW AM transmitter operating into a single tower, nondirectional antenna, and a 5 kW Rohde and Schwarz FM transmitter. Commercial power is utilized. The station also has a small HF transmitter for point-to-point communications with Greenville Relay station.

Projects are presently underway to provide additional broadcasting facilities at the Moepeng Hill location. These facilities include an interim shortwave station consisting of four 100 kW transmitters and associated antennas and power plant. Work should be completed in 1991. Additional medium wave facilities are also planned for completion in 1994.

Programs are normally received via the Satellite Interconnect System, or SIS. The SIS is the first of a satellite system dedicated for VOA use to be installed at an overseas relay station. It provides the station with two program feeds, control and monitoring data capabilities, and an order wire circuit. Backup capabilities are provided by TVRO system and HF receivers for program feeds, and an HF transmitter for communications. A telephone backup system is planned.

The station is on the air approximately 19 hours per day, except during midnight to 5.00 a.m. Scheduled maintenance is performed during a two-hour period once a week.

The staff consists of five American and eight Botswana employees. The American staff consists of the manager, plant supervisor and three technicians. The FSN staff consists of six operators\ technicians, a budget and fiscal assistant and secretary. There are also eight contract personnel to provide building and grounds maintenance and driving services.

## **HOST COUNTRY**

### **Area, Geography and Climate**

Botswana is an independent state in Southern Africa. A landlocked, semi-arid tableland, about the size of Texas, it is bounded to the South and South-West by the Republic of South Africa, to the north and west by Namibia, and to the northeast by Zimbabwe. The lonely Kalahari Desert covers most of this vast, sparsely populated country, with most people living in the East, along the main north\ south rail route and road. Although the national language is Setswana, the official language of Botswana is English which is spoken and understood at least at

a basic level, by almost everyone. Rain is experienced mainly in summer, beginning in late October and ending in April. It does not rain often, but when it does, it can be quite heavy at times and cause occasional flash flooding. May to September are usually dry months and during August, winds blow from the west bearing dust and sand from the desert. The hot summers, when temperatures of over 100 degrees are common, are generally tempered by prevailing Northeasterly breezes. Although winter days are usually warm, temperatures fall at night, with frost occurring occasionally, so some articles of winter clothing are essential for your stay in Africa.

## **POLITICAL STRUCTURE**

Botswana, formerly known as the Bechuanaland Protectorate, became independent from Britain in 1966 under the leadership of Sir Seretse Khama, its first President, who died in 1981. It is a free, democratic state, with national elections held every 5 years. Dr. Quett Masire, the incumbent President, is the leader of the Botswana Democratic Party, the largest and most powerful political faction in the country. After years of neglect and poverty, the country is now experiencing an increase in national wealth from its copper, nickel and diamond mines.

## **ECONOMY**

The last 15 years have witnessed a sharp acceleration of social transformation in Botswana mainly in the growth of the urban population and the expansion of the commercial economy, in cattle ranching and in diamond and copper mining. Diamonds were exploited only after independence, and now earn about half of Botswana's foreign exchange. Cattle is the main source of domestic income, and beef is plentiful and inexpensive here. Over 80% of the goods used and consumed in Botswana are imported from South Africa.

## **Currency and Exchange**

The unit of currency in Botswana is the Pula. One pula is divided into 100 thebe. The following denominations of currency are now in common use:

Paper notes: coins: P1, P2, P5, P10, P20 and P50 P1, 50 thebe, 25 thebe, 10 thebe, 5 thebe, 2 thebe (not very common) and 1 thebe.

There are two banks, both situated in the town shopping mall, Barclays Bank of Botswana and Standard Chartered Bank. Most VOA families have checking accounts at one of these banks. The banks accept personal checks drawn on a stateside dollar account and exchange it into pula for deposit into your new

account. This is usually done immediately so that one can get settled early after arrival. The current exchange rate is approximately P1. 84 to \$1. 00.

## **Transportation**

Public transportation throughout Botswana is limited, uncomfortable and unreliable. Most VOA staff have their own privately owned vehicle here at post, since a vehicle is essential as there is no public transportation within the town limits, other than erratic taxi service. The main roads in the town are tarred and other roads have reasonably maintained dirt surfaces. Roads south to Gaborone and north to Zimbabwe are completely tarred. Service stations are sparse, and gasoline is not always available at every station. Travel to anywhere "off the beaten path", such as excursions into the bush or to neighboring villages, etc. will require 4-wheel drive vehicles. If you are shipping a vehicle to Botswana with you, a 4-wheel drive is highly recommended.

## **Vehicle Requirements**

Personal vehicles require a license within 90 days of arrival in the country. VOA will help you get your car licensed and registered. Third party insurance is not mandatory. but highly recommended. Insurance must be purchased with an insurance company registered in Botswana. A considerable discount in insurance premiums can be obtained by producing a letter from your last insurance company, verifying that you have had no claims for the three previous years.

A Botswana driver's license must be obtained and carried with you at all times when you are driving. When applying for your Botswana license, you must have a small passport size photo with you. You should arrive with an international driver's license in your possession.

Traffic circulates on the left hand of the road (British method) and right-hand drive vehicles are most common in Botswana. However, you will encounter little difficulty in becoming accustomed to driving on the "wrong" side of the road. Spare parts, such as spare tires, oil and gas filters, etc. especially any parts unique to your model of automobile, should be brought into the country with your household goods, as these are difficult to obtain here in Botswana. Seat belt laws and speed limits are strictly enforced in Botswana, and hefty fines are levied for any violations.

## **Importation of Pets**

There is no quarantine period for importation of any domestic animals into Botswana. If you are bringing your pet with you, you must have a certificate from your own veterinarian, certifying that all inoculations, including rabies, are current. You must also have an import license, furnished by the Department of Veterinary Services here in Botswana. contact the American Embassy in Gaborone well in advance of your arrival, and they can obtain this License and forward it to you.

## **Firearms**

An Import permit is necessary to import any firearms into Botswana, and all such weapons must be licensed. Import Permits and licenses are not readily issued by the Government, and if they can be obtained at all, the average waiting period is over two years.

## **Amateur Radio**

Most of the VOA staff are ham radio operators and operate their rigs from their homes. If you have a valid license, it usually takes two to three weeks to receive a license to operate in the country. You'll find your popularity will increase worldwide because there are fewer than a dozen active licensed amateurs in the whole country. If you ship amateur radio equipment, remember the house voltages are 240 VAC, 50 Hz and will require a step-down transformer of suitable size. VOA has some of these transformers available but be sure to include a good selection of multi-outlet heavy extension cords.

## **AMERICAN EMBASSY**

The new American Embassy in Botswana is in Gaborone, about 250 miles from Selebi-Phikwe. All arrangements regarding receipt of your airfreight, household effects and vehicle are seen to by the General Services Officer. Any passport problems or applications for visas for entry into South Africa should be referred to the Consular section at the Embassy.

## **SELEBI-PHIKWE**

### **Housing**

VOA families live in Government leased houses, which are located near the center of town and within easy walking distance of the shopping mall. Each house has several air-conditioning units, and all utilities are Government furnished, except the telephone. Direct dialing for international calls is available and reliable. The town gets its water from Shashe reservoir, eighty kilometers northwest of the town. The water is naturally soft and receives full treatment to make it potable and noncorrosive. The standard current in Southern Africa is 240 volts, and each house is supplied with several step-down transformers, so most American electrical appliances will operate satisfactorily. Power outages do occur, especially during the rainy summer season. All homes are fully furnished and include electric ranges, washer, dryer, full-size freezer, refrigerator and microwave oven, plus several smaller electrical appliances, which are listed on the house inventory, Appendix A to this brochure. Lot sizes for each house vary, but most are large

enough for a small vegetable garden and/or flower garden. Each occupant is responsible for the care of the gardens and yards.

## **Health Care**

There is only limited health care available in the vicinity of Selebi-Phikwe. Facilities at the government hospital are basic and there is not always a physician on duty, and it is therefore not recommended. The BCL mine operates a hospital but it is only available to VOA in extreme emergencies. There are two physicians who maintain private practices, but specialized diagnostic equipment is not available in town.

The station utilizes the services of a registered nurse who can provide treatment of minor illnesses and injuries, provide medical advice, and dispense vaccinations and booster inoculations. The nurse works closely with the embassy health unit in Gaborone.

Medical complaints which cannot be addressed in Selebi-Phikwe are referred to either Gaborone or Pretoria/Johannesburg. The Embassy has a contract medical advisor who provides care for VOA families and will refer patients to specialists in Gaborone or South Africa when necessary. The main hospital in Botswana (Princess Marina) is also not considered suitable for treating most illnesses.

South Africa is a country with adequate medical facilities and patients are evacuated there when necessary.

The Regional Medical Officer is in Lusaka, Zambia, and makes periodic visits to the station, about two times per year, to see patients.

Selebi-Phikwe is in the malarial area and weekly anti-malarial tablets are required, and TB is widespread. New arrivals should ensure that their children are inoculated against the disease. There are several other recommended inoculations which can be obtained after arrival. One should check with the State Department Medical Division for other required immunizations.

## **Employment opportunities for Dependents**

There is little or no opportunity for employment for dependents of VOA staff in Selebi-Phikwe. The Botswana government is pursuing a rigorous program of nationalization, and issues work permits to expatriates only on a very limited and selective basis. There are ample opportunities for VOA spouses to become involved in community work and projects, however on an unpaid, voluntary basis.

## **Education**

Education for expatriate children in Selebi-Phikwe is available on the primary school level only. Kopano School is an English medium primary school with an enviable academic record. Fully qualified teachers are engaged to staff the school. VOA children are charged a school fee each term, which is adequately covered by



the school at-post allowance. There are several Government primary school and secondary schools in town which cater exclusively to Batswana pupils. The only secondary school with boarding facilities available to expatriate children in Botswana is the Maru-A-Pula, a multi-racial secondary school, located in Gaborone. The Cambridge Overseas Certificate is taken at the end of Form IV; it is the only school in Botswana which has courses leading to "A" Level. Extra-curricular activities, community projects and self-help schemes are an important aspect of school life, the emphasis being on providing an all-round education and not leading to academic merit only.

Those parents contemplating sending their child to schools away from post should first check to determine if the "schooling away from post" allowance is sufficient and where they wish to enroll them. One may wish to leave a child in the U.S., at a private or public school. Others may wish to enroll their child at a boarding school in another country. The American International School in Johannesburg, South Africa is the choice of several American Embassy personnel because it offers an American curriculum, while providing children with the opportunity to live and learn with other children of many different races and nationalities. Whatever the choice, it should be studied thoroughly. Children going to South Africa schools must obtain necessary study permits to follow their courses of study. Students may be required to produce these permits when entering South Africa, but generally there is a first-time entry on proof of attendance. Parents must establish procedures with the school concerned to avoid difficulties for the child at point of entry into South Africa.

## **Shopping**

Selebi-Phikwe boasts a shopping mall, located in the center of town, with several food, clothing, banks, a Post Office and the Town Council and Government offices. The shops are stocked with all the basic needs, and Americans will not have to get used to strange foods or a more limited diet. Fresh vegetables, imported from South Africa, are available seasonally in several in several of the shops, although deliveries are spotty.

## **Domestic Help**

It is usual, but by no means required, to employ a domestic housemaid (live in or out) and a gardener. For live-in domestics, there are maid's quarters outside the house (usually somewhere in the backyard). Starting salary for a maid is usually the equivalent of \$45 to \$50 per month. VOA families are expected to maintain gardens and the grounds surrounding the residences. Gardeners are paid an average of \$1.50 to \$2.00 per day.

## **Religious Activities**

Christian churches in the area are Anglican, Catholic, Baptist and Lutheran. Other religious groups and Bible study classes meet in various homes around town. The Catholic church has an American "Brother" providing religious, social and agricultural assistance to the community.

### **Recreation and Other Facilities**

The Selebi-Phikwe Sport & Social Club features a wide variety of sporting clubs, including tennis, lawn bowling, badminton, rugby, squash, snooker, darts and the Phikwe Arts Group, a small theatre group, which includes the Folk Club. Other opportunities for recreating in town include clubs such as Bridge, Golf, Scottish Country Dancing, Horseback Riding and Computer, so no matter where your interests lie, there's something for everyone. There are public swimming pools at the Bosele Hotel, the Syringa Lodge and the Makhubu Club, which is in the SPS&SC complex.

### **Libraries\News\Movies**

Selebi-Phikwe has two libraries, the Botswana National Library and the BCL Library. The National Library is located near the market area and membership is free. Inquiries regarding the loan of books are made to the Librarian. The BCL Library is situated opposite the shopping mall. Membership is open to the community on payment of an annual subscription fee. A small charge is also made for each book borrowed.

There are local and international newspapers available at the bookstore on the mall. The international newspapers are usually several days late arriving in town. The BCL Mine issues a weekly newsletter which gives good coverage of community events in Selebi-Phikwe. This is delivered free of charge to all VOA families every Friday.

### **Television\Radio**

Television in Selebi-Phikwe is operated by a cooperative association, the Selebi-Phikwe Television Owners Association, which operates on a subscription basis. There are no commercial television networks in Botswana. There are three channels broadcast at present by the SPTVOA - two channels from South Africa which alternate between the English language and Afrikaans, and one channel showing tapes of programs received from the U.K.

The video standard in Botswana is the PAL system, so television viewers must have sets which can receive this system. American sets, which utilize the NTSC system, are not suitable.

There is a video tape rental shop in town which has a large collection of tapes for rent, also using the PAL system. The quality of the tapes varies, but the shop continually receives new releases. Most VOA staffers have their families send them



tapes of movies or US TV shows, and swap them with other Americans, so there is no need to miss out on the latest happenings back home.

VOA operates the best radio stations in town: 94.2 MHz FM which broadcasts Radio Botswana programs exclusively, and 621 kHz AM which is a shared VOA/Radio Botswana station. Listeners have had little luck in receiving other FM stations; the best bet is shortwave reception.

### **Mail (Local and Pouch)**

Mail to VOA families at the Botswana Relay station may be sent by international mail or via the US Department of state pouch. Either way, it is up to the individual as to which is the most convenient or expeditious. It is recommended that all packages be sent through the state Department Diplomatic Pouch, to avoid delays in customs clearance. Letter mail and packages not exceeding 40 pounds with combined width and girth of 60 inches, and maximum length of 24 inches, will be accepted at the state Department mail room for forwarding to post via pouch. Please alert people who might send packages not to insure them, because the State Department will not accept any insured materials. Letters are most expeditiously received through the international mail address. Some people also use the international mail address for receiving their bills, since this will usually avoid delays and additional interest charges. The choice is yours. It is also wise to ship your bulky purchases with your household effects or air freight because of these restrictions.

The respective mailing addresses are:

Diplomatic Pouch U.S. First Class Mail (Average transit time is 3 to 4 weeks)

Person Name, Gaborone (IS), Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20521-2170

International Mail (Average transit time for letters is 2 weeks)

Person Name, Voice of America, Private Bag, 38 Selebi-Phikwe, Botswana AFRICA

No packages may be sent out through the State Department Pouch, except for video tapes, film for processing, and mail order merchandise being returned to the place of purchase. These must be clearly marked and are randomly opened by the Administrative Office at the Embassy in Gaborone to verify the contents.

All necessary household items, such as pillows, blankets bed linens, bathroom towels, kitchen towels, and pans are provided in the Hospitality Kit issued to new arrivals at VOA for their use until their air freight or household effects arrive at post.

Authored by VOA Botswana Relay Station, 1991

Assembled by: Lee Hite and Bob Scott, April 2023

## **APPENDIX A**

### **TYPICAL HOUSE FURNISHINGS**

#### **LIVING ROOM**

1 sofa, 3 person	1 Love seat	2 chairs, suffed
1 Bookcase	1 Hallpiece	1 Table, nest
1 End Table	1 Cocktail table	1 Fireplace screen
2 lamps	1 Carpet & Pad (12'X 15')	accessories

#### **DINING ROOM**

1 Dining Table	10 Side chairs	2 Arm chairs
1 China cabinet	1 Credenza	1 Server
1 Carpet & Pad (12'X 15')		

#### **MASTER BEDROOM**

MISCELLANEOUS

1 Desk  
2 Transformers  
1 Vacuum Cleaner  
1 Set garden tools

1 Chair  
1 16" fan  
1 set Drapery  
3 Air-conditioners

1 Lamp  
1 Humidifier  
2 Trash cans