

## **Limpopo-Lipadi Reserve; A Slice of Eco-Wilderness**

Most people buying abroad choose to be near a beach, forest or golf course. In Botswana, your neighbouring properties could instead be roaming grounds for elephants and rhinos.

The idea of conducting a second home search in sub-Saharan Africa might seem odd, given that many countries in the region are suffering from famine, war, disease or corruption. Yet look more closely and many African destinations are ideal for investment – none more so than Botswana.

Its good fortune has been mainly due to its diamond mining industry, which accounts for nearly 80 per cent of export earnings. The sector has been hit hard by the global recession and Botswana's economy is now more fragile, with credit ratings agencies issuing downgrade warnings this month. But, as a stable place for investment, it remains on a par with or ahead of much of central Europe, eastern Asia and Latin America.

The property market is small – not least because the country has a land mass nearly twice the size of Germany but only about 2m inhabitants. Yet interest is growing in property both around the capital, Gaborone, and further afield, in new second-home developments that aim to help the country's native residents and its wildlife.

Prices for a basic, single-storey two- or three-bedroom house in Gaborone, to use as a base to explore other regions, start at 190,000 pulas (£17,000) through agencies such as Sam Associates. At the opposite end of the spectrum are estates on several thousand hectares, many in the Tuli Block, an area where Botswana meets Zimbabwe and South Africa, that is off the tourist track but nonetheless stunning and teeming with animals from elephants to elephant shrews.

### **Limpopo-Lipadi Game & Wilderness Reserve**

There are also new projects offering buyers shares in some of the large reserves, in keeping with the Botswana government's push for high-end, low-impact tourism. A prime example is the Limpopo-Lipadi Game & Wilderness Reserve, on a plot as big as Malta in the Tuli Block. Investors can buy shares in the public company that runs the reserve for \$195,000 each.

Buy one share and you can bring five guests and visit as often as you like for up to two weeks at a time, staying at a choice of two luxury riverside lodges and four bush camps in the reserve. Three shares entitle you to stay for up to 90 days and bring 11 guests. Those with five shares can have their own private quarters.

I visited a sprawling lodge by the river being built for a Brazilian shareholder who paid \$975,000 for his five shares and \$500,000 for construction but says he considers it excellent value for a large property in such a pristine location.

The shares are relatively costly because the number of people and buildings on the reserve will always be low, with a development footprint never exceeding 0.01 per cent of the land. Shareholders own the full title deed to the property and the six reserve lodges and camps and, as part-owners in the reserve, can take part in its governance.

Briton Magnus Hird and his wife, Helen, recently bought shares. "We love spending time in Africa and were looking for somewhere to visit more regularly [and] we really liked the opportunities at Limpopo-Lipadi," he says. "I was impressed with the set-up of the development as well as the ecological credentials and overall vision and attitude. We chose Botswana because of its stable democracy and legal system, strong economy and low crime compared with places such as South Africa. It is relatively easy to get to via Johannesburg, has a lovely climate and there is no significant time difference from the UK."

Work on the reserve started in 2007 after South African property developer Alan Marneweck and his brother bought six cattle farms totalling 80,000 acres, including 21km of Limpopo river frontage for \$7.8m. The antiquated fencing has been removed and now a wide variety of animals roam. An electric fence has been installed to keep the wildlife in and poachers out and it is hoped that in time the reserve will double in size. Safaris are a thrill and other pursuits include fishing, sleeping in game hides and even training to become a ranger.

Yet there are downsides to such schemes. Buyers cannot "rent out" their annual visiting entitlement as they are required to be present when their guests are. If not enough shares are sold, the project could flounder. And dollar-based owners could incur an extra monthly charge for running costs, if the South African rand and Botswanan pula strengthen against the US currency.

However, Limpopo-Lipadi is performing well. Share prices have risen since January 2007 from \$96,000 to \$195,000 and 334 of the 475 shares available are now sold.

The six lodges, to be completed by the year's end, are of a high build quality, blending well into the environment. "During construction, everything from the trees to the termite mounds were protected from any impact," Marneweck says.

There are also plans to reintroduce endangered species, such as the black rhino, sable antelope and wild dogs onto the land. Some locals are being trained as builders, while others are being recruited to provide services and goods. And a local school and a clinic have been built.

"The object is to make a real difference to the locality, not just to make money," says operations manager Peter Symons. "That's why it has been so easy to get shareholders on board. They are passionate about the positive impact we can make."

For more information on Limpopo-Lipadi Game & Wilderness Reserve or premium estates and property developments in Southern Africa visit [sa-developments.com](http://sa-developments.com).