How to get from Phalaborwa to the Mozambiquan coast – without tears

Based on various requests recently, here are comprehensive details on travelling by road from Phalaborwa and to Bilene, on the coast in Mozambique. Please note that the information in this article is based on past travel experience and it is very difficult to verify whether any changes have taken place. Please use this as a guide only and not as an official source. (2017)

Through Kruger National Park to Giriyondo Border Post

Enter Kruger National Park at Phalaborwa gate.

Travel in the direction of Letaba Restcamp – Distance is 50km. Travelling time at Park speed limit is not less than 1 hour but provide for 1,5 to 2,0 hours to allow for game viewing as well.

At the intersection with the north/south tarred road in Kruger National Park, approx 1km before reaching Letaba Restcamp, turn left in the direction of Mopani Restcamp.

Travel north for 20,4km. Initially the road follows the Letaba river before the bridge crossing. Game viewing in this area is usually excellent. At the signposted intersection turn right onto a gravel road travelling in direction Makhadzi Picnic Site and Giriyondo Border Post for a further 24,5km (Total distance: Letaba-Giriyondo is 44,9km. Travelling time at Park speed limit is not less than 1 hour but provide for 1,5 to 2,0 hours to allow for game viewing as well.)

Border crossing:

Both the South African and Mozambiquan Border Posts are in the same modern thatched complex, divided simply by rolling gates. Border authorities are friendly and helpful on both sides of the border

Entry into Mozambique:

Visitor visas can be purchased at Giriyondo and paid for in Rands (R564), US Dollars ($108) or Euros (E77). Vehicle entry fee is R10

Entry into Parque Nacional do Limpopo (PNL) the Mozambique sector of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park:

One-off fee of R67 per person (for up to 30 day stay) Vehicle entry fee is R67 per vehicle

Third Party Insurance:

At the time of writing it is not necessary to purchase Mozambiquan Third Party whilst travelling in PNL. However on departure from the Park into the rest of Mozambique it is a requirement. Third Party insurance can be purchased at the PNL exit gate at Massingir and costs approximately R150. The insurance is valid for 30 days.

It is vitally important to remember:

– Passports
– Vehicle documents, which in the case of your clients will be a Letter of Authority from the Car Hire
Company

– The Border Post closes at 15h00 in winter months (1 April to 30 September) and 16h00 in summer months (1 October to 31 March). Do not arrive after the border closing time because you will be sent back!!

Through Parque Nacional do Limpopo to Machampane Wilderness Camp and then to Massingir exit gate

On completion of border and park formalities exit the Giriyondo Border Post complex on the only road. The road is a reasonable gravel one which travels in a southerly direction. Please drive carefully and watch out for the speed-humps, some of which are very high. The speed limit in PNL is 40km/hour.

To Machampane Camp:

At 27.8km look out for signpost to Machampane Camp at the Y-junction in the road. The main road to Massingir bears left and the road to Machampane Wilderness Camp bears right on the less well travelled road.

After 600 meters, turn right at the signposted turning to Machampane Camp. After 2,0km you will pass an Elephant Release Boma on the right-hand side. Beyond this and for the last 3,0km the road becomes more rugged.

Cross the Machampane River on the stone causeway very carefully and 200 meters later you will be in the Camp. There is no “ritz and glitz” entry gatepost, simply the unspoilt bush and tented camp. The staff will have heard your vehicle and should be waiting to welcome you!!

Travelling time from Giriyondo to Machampane is approximately 1.0 to 1,5 hours depending on the wildlife you see.

From Machampane Camp:

Travel back the 5,0km to the Giriyondo/Massingir main road.

Turn right and travel approximately 50km to the Massingir exit gate to PNL.

It is not always well signposted but if you always bear left and follow the well-travelled section you will arrive at Massingir gate safe and sound.

Approximately 25,0km from Machampane you will by-pass the village of Mavodzi on its northern side. In the early morning and late afternoon young herdsman drive the village cattle to water-holes along this road so please drive carefully. The young herdsmen are likely to ask/beg for sweets or money (in Shangaan) but please ignore these requests. There are a number of initiatives to support community needs and support of begging undermines these.

The road becomes more corrugated and stony as you travel south in the park so please drive carefully. Travelling time from Machampane to Massingir exit gate is approximately 1,5 hours

Remember to purchase Mozambiquan Third Party Insurance here for approximately R150. The cover is valid for 30 days.
From Massingir exit gate of Parque Nacional do Limpopo to Bilene

Total distance and driving time: The distance from Parque Nacional do Limpopo’s Massingir Gate to Bilene is approximately 230km

The road is paved from the Massingir exit gate all the way to Bilene.

However, as a result of potholes on some of the stretches of road (some not too bad and others definitely to be avoided), villages en-route where the speed limit reduces to 60kms/hour and should be strictly adhered to, a fairly narrow road until you reach the EN1 (the main south to north road [following the line of the coast] from Maputo to Beira) and traffic, means that you are not likely to average much more than 70km/hour.

The journey time to Bilene is therefore around 3,5 to 4,0 hours

The route to Massingir Town:

Leaving PNL through the Massingir exit gate the road travels for 5km along the top of the Massingir Dam wall which affords an amazing view of this very large dam. Whilst there are signs indicating that stopping is prohibited, many visitors do in fact stop for a few minutes to photograph the dam

The town of Massingir lies to the south of the road approximately 6km from the exit gate. Time permitting it is worth popping in to the village for a short visit to the market.

Fuel is available at a filling station on the eastern outskirts of Massingir. Payment for fuel must be made in cash which can be either Rands or Meticals

The route Massingir Town to Macia:

From Massingir Town travel on the only paved road travelling in a south-easterly direction towards Chokwe.

Approximately 105km from Massingir is a T-intersection. Turn right at this intersection in the direction of Chokwe (a left turn here would take you to the town of Macarretane and across the Limpopo River – if you cross the river you know you have gone in the wrong direction!!)

Approximately 25km from the T-junction you will enter the southern outskirts of the town of Chokwe. It is a large sprawling town and the only major town in the area. Simply follow the road, obeying the speed limits, and you will exit the urban limits travelling in the direction of the EN1 and Bilene.

This road travels through the floodplain of the Limpopo river and you will see irrigation channels on either side of the road that carry water to the farming land. Approximately 60km from Chokwe you will enter the town of Macia and shortly thereafter reach the T-junction with the EN1. On the opposite side of the road is an Engen Filling Station where fuel is available

The route Macia to Bilene:

At the T-junction with the EN1 in Macia turn right in the direction of Maputo. Shortly after turning right keep a careful look-out for the sign indicating a left turn to Bilene. Turn left to Bilene.
If you pass a BP Filling Station located on the right-hand side of the road then you have missed the turn-off to Bilene so do a U-turn.

Approximately 33km from Macia you will enter the town of Bilene and shortly thereafter you will reach a T-junction overlooking the lagoon. You will have arrived safely in Bilene and then it’s just a question of finding your way to your booked accommodation which should be relatively easy.

Some safety tips

– Make sure that your vehicle is equipped with reflective triangles and at least one yellow reflective jacket.
– Obey the speed limits especially through villages, the traffic officials are very active.
– Carry sufficient cash to pay a traffic fine should you inadvertently be caught speeding and request a receipt. Fines generally are the equivalent of approximately R300 and can be paid in Rands. It is worth having smaller denomination bills to deal with this eventuality e.g. R20’s or R50’s rather than R100’s
– Watch out for potholes in the road especially on the stretch of road between Massingir and the Maccaretane/Chokwe T-junction
– Ensure you reach your destination well before sunset, which in Mozambique is between 17h00 in winter and 18h30 in summer
– People are generally very helpful but in the outlying areas do not speak any English. Should you for any reason need any assistance preferably, where possible, stop at a filling station or shop.