

SA retailers boost Botswana's malls



By [Owen Watkins](#)

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Since I arrived in Gaborone in June 2011, the retail environment has just been getting better. One of the initial reasons that I rented our house in this area, (Broadhurst Ext 44) was the large sign, less than a kilometre away, that read "Sebele Centre opening end June - Pick n Pay, Woolworths and many more shops".

Sebele Centre duly opened and this was the beginning of a big push by South African retailers to take advantage of the rapidly growing city, said by some to be the fastest growing city in Africa (real growth, not slum development).

July saw Clicks debut in Game City and the big excitement, Builders Warehouse, which opened in September. Regarded as paradise by homeowners and builders alike, it also endeared itself to the area by contributing P20 000 each to Ikageng, Tswaragano and Moamogwe Primary Schools.

Now, a new, very large retail area, Rail Park Mall, has opened over the past two weeks, next to the old station in the city, the main site of the local, national and international taxi ranks.

It's a well thought out design, adding a covered walkway over the railway line to capture both sides of the transit area. It is a covered mall, with natural lighting and fresh air offering a range of wonderful shops mixing Chinese and South African retailers in a colourful festival. However, the highlight of it is the Food Lovers' Market from Fruit & Veg City.

Based on the South African model, it has been packed for the past two weekends and not just because of the specials but for its range and freshness, which is not equalled in Gaborone. I realise how much I took Sandton shopping for granted; I trawled up and down the aisles like a country bumpkin, going "Ooh look at that." My husband is equally enthralled, coming home with delicacies for the freezer.

So, I will happily drive the 7kms, bypassing my local Woolworths, because in Gabs, Woolworths does not reach close to South African standards. Its range is limited, it is almost impossible to get any pork products (despite the ban having been lifted), the bread is often not as fresh as it should be and most irritating of all, my local store has not installed an electronic card reader that accepts pin codes, constantly necessitating cash.

In contrast, my local Pick n Pay is superb - manned by pleasant friendly staff that actually do care if you have a nice day, a great management team and an excellent range. Note to 'hard working' staff in Johannesburg - the store trades 8am to 10pm Monday to Friday and 8am to 7pm, Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

It also opened a bottle store but that is singularly unimaginative - Spar's Tops is still the best bet in Gabs for wine. I'd love to

see a few barrows of Pick n Pay clothes - the climate is ideal for its summer range.

There's another mall said to be opening soon, so when it does, I will rush to shop and comment.

ABOUT GWEN WATKINS

Gwen Watkins is a freelance writer, editor, subeditor and author. Almost 40 years of experience across industrial and commercial writing, as a reporter and PR consultant, has given her expert grounding in brand communication and native advertising. A Master NLP Practitioner, she uses these skills within the creation of copywriting, annual reports, brochures and website copy.

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