TOUR CODE

NA1

ADVENTURESABROAD

NAMIBIA

'Land of Contrasts'

12 days

Updated 14/06/2013

Day 1 ***Arrival in Namibia***

Arrival in Windhoek, the capital of Namibia.

As capital cities go, Windhoek is very relaxed with a whole mixture of Namibia's tribes strolling the streets. Many are in traditional dress and others are in stylish contemporary clothes often with magnificent plaited hairstyles. The city is full of trees and gardens, plus some splendid buildings dating from the turn of the century, all jumbled up with post-modernist office blocks in a swirl of ethnic mix.

Overnight in Windhoek. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 ***Windhoek - Namib-Naukluft National Park***

Today we leave the interior plateau region and head southwest through the Gamsberg Pass to the Namib Desert, through magnificent colours, pastel-basted rock formations, and waves of taupe-coloured grasses. Even the clouds are tinged orange-pink as distant dunes reflect their colour skywards. In the Nama language, Namib means vast, and this is an understatement. At the opposite end of the moisture scale is the parched Namib Desert with endless orange dunes blown into razor sharp ridges by the sand-shifting wind. The famous Sossusvlei sand dunes at 300m (1,000 ft), are the highest in the world, towering over their nearest rivals in Arabia, and just begging to be climbed barefoot.

Animals, insects, and plants have adapted to live in this generally inhospitable region and apart from infrequent rains, rely on the sea mist that rolls far inland. En route we have the chance to see kudu, springbok, gemsbok and black eagles set against some of the most expansive and dramatically rugged scenery in the world.

En route we have several stops for scenery viewing and photos. Upon arrival this afternoon you will have time to wander the land around our lodge and enjoy the multi-hued sands, strange twisted acacia trees, and almost guaranteed perfect sunset.

Overnight in the vicinity of the Namib-Naklauft National Park. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 3 ***Namib-Naukluft National Park***

Very early this morning we drive into the park to a special place called Sossusvlei, a huge dried up pan (vlei) which sporadically holds water, at the base of some of the most spectacular dunes in the Namib. We watch the morning sun light up the apricot coloured sands, the long shadows accentuating the graceful, almost feminine curves of the dune crests. These immense rich ochre sand dunes are one of the most wondrous sights in the world.

Geologists say that this desert, covering most of the Namib-Naklauft Park, could be the oldest in the world. The older the dune, the brighter the colour from slow iron oxidisation and minute fragments of garnets. Dwarfed by the sheer size of the dunes, your footprints look like insect trails and each step forward forms a mini sand-slide. The solitude is

immeasurable and your place in the great scheme of life takes on a curious insignificance. Visually powerful and deafeningly silent, this unforgettable experience is a high point of our visit to the Namib. Possible game sightings include oryx antelope, springbok, or ostrich.

At Sossusvlei we have plenty of time to walk into the heart of the dunes, scale a dune or two for panoramic views, and walk across the sand to a pan called Dead Vlei. This spooky place is named as such because of the blackened dead acacia trees that "sprout" from a blinding white pan against an orange dune backdrop. Stupendous.

On our way back to our accommodation we will make a stop at Sesriem Canyon, located near the entry gate to Sossussvlei. It was an important source of water for early inhabitants and even during dry times there is water in the upper reaches, where deep clefts in the rock reduce evaporation. Explorers, transport riders and early travellers used to lower a bucket down to collect the water and it normally took 6 lengths of thong tied together, hence the Afrikaans name 'Ses' meaning six, and 'Riem' meaning thong. The canyon was formed by the Tsauchab River rising in the Naukluft and Zaris Mountains to the east, and flowing through to Sossusvlei. Walking through the canyon takes you on a journey back 10-20 million years ago when sedimentary layers of gravel and sand were deposited and cemented together by lime. The ledges are now inhabited by pigeons, raucous pied crows and chattering starlings.

Overnight in the vicinity of Namib-Naklauft National Park. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 4 *Namib-Naukluft Park - Swakopmund*

We continue our journey north through Namib-Naukluft Park via Solitaire. As the name suggests, this is a lonely place in the middle of absolutely nowhere. The only reason it exists at all is to service visitors to the park. It used to have one solitary tree, one petrol pump, a take away kiosk and a captive puff adder. But big things have been happening here and there are now two or three petrol pumps, a fully blown cafeteria and small shop. The dead tree is still standing stark against the flat dry landscape, but the puff adder has gone.

We continue our journey through the spectacular rocky Kuiseb Canyon (photo stops en route) -- with possible sightings of baboon, rock hyrax, or, if lucky, leopard -- to the German colonial resort town of Swakopmund. This is Namibia's second biggest town and traditional "summer capital", and one of the most surreal places in this surreal country. You approach the town through the endless expanses of the Namib Desert, one of the world's largest wilderness areas. Then, through the mists (it is almost always misty in the morning and late afternoon) Bavarian spires and elaborate Germanic architecture rise through the fog banks. The boom of the surf on the notorious Skeleton Coast is an ever-present reminder of the icy Atlantic Ocean beyond.

Overnight in Swakopmund. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 5 *Swakopmund*

Today is free to wander the streets of charming Swakopmund. The town is an eclectic mixture of Bohemian and Bavarian, home to an intriguing mix of artists, hippies, strait-laced descendants of German settlers, stately Herero women in Victorian dress, and hardened miners, game rangers, safari operators and fishermen. Swakopmund exudes romance and history, a rich cultural melting pot of old and new. Nighttime entertainment ranges from sophisticated spins on the casino's roulette wheels, through raucous parties at the many pubs and restaurants, to an assortment of drama, music and cultural events. It is indeed odd to be in a little corner of old Bavaria wedged between one of the world's harshest deserts and even harsher coastlines.

You might wish to take an optional scenic flight along the famed Skeleton Coast where you may get a glimpse of the Damara desert-dwelling elephants, the many shipwrecks that litter the coast, or perhaps the sea of dunes to the south.

Your Tour Leader can help you with these and other options.

Overnight in Swakopmund. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 6 *Swakopmund - Skeleton Coast - Twyfelfontein*

From Swakopmund we travel briefly up the desolate but beautiful Skeleton Coast, the name referring to the treacherous nature of the coast and the fact that it is a graveyard for many ships. The attraction for visitors to this region is its untouched and mysterious barren beauty, swept by cold sea breezes and often enveloped in a dense fog. This fog accounts for the many shipwrecks and the unique ecosystem which gives life to most unusual plants. The strange 'Elephant's Foot' plant anchors itself in rock crevices, while desert succulents like Lithops look exactly like pebbles until a tiny yellow flower emerges.

We then head into the semi-arid environs of Damaraland, past Spitzkoppe Mountain in the distance and the soaring Brandberg Range to Twyfelfontein. This is stunning country and our journey is broken up by opportunities to stretch our legs, examine interesting stones, plants, bugs etc, and to photograph the amazing landscape.

Overnight at Twyfelfontein. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 7 *Twyfelfontein Area*

This morning we will examine some of Africa's finest prehistoric rock art -- paintings and engraving dating back some 5,000 years. We also visit a geological oddity known as the Valley of the Organ Pipes, the Burnt Mountain, and the Petrified Forest, where we can also view some welwitchias, a strange looking plant reputed to live for over 1,000 years.

Everywhere you turn are strange rock formations, unbelievable colours, and interesting and unique plants, birds, and other fauna. Our guide will bring to life the natural and human history of this otherworldly and remote corner of the planet.

Overnight in Twyfelfontein. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Twyfelfontein - Etosha National Park*

Today we travel toward Etosha National Park.

Etosha has been referred to as the best kept secret in Africa's safari world, and is one of the world's largest national parks. Its concentration of wildlife is extraordinary, and the dependence on water holes throughout so much of the year makes the wildlife readily visible. In fact, it may just be possible to enter the lives of a more spectacular array of creatures with greater ease and intimacy here at Etosha than anywhere else on the globe.

Time permitting, we may be able to have a game drive in the vicinity of our lodge this afternoon.

Overnight in the vicinity of Etosha Park (HOTEL / LODGE). Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 9 *Etosha National Park*

We have a full day game viewing* in the park, which will take us past the Etosha pan itself, a huge shimmering expanse of usually dry lake bed criss-crossed by myriad animal tracks.

When the original lake at Etosha dried out, it resulted in a hard, dazzling white calcrete wasteland where mirages shimmer above the mineral-rich "salt desert." This salt is important to wildlife. The alkaline clay of the pan cannot sustain life, though the surrounding open savannah cam. In years of exceptional rainfall, the park again resembles a lake, albeit only centimetres deep in parts. It can then briefly sustain a rich profusion of micro-organic life that entices thousands of flamingoes to breed here.

Etosha was once the largest natural park in the world, but it has since been re-shaped several times until being reduced to its present size in 1967. The pan, clearly seen from space, is the park's central feature and takes up one-quarter of its area. There are no roads into the pan, but along the southern fringes is a network of trails linking the three main rest camps and natural waterholes in between.

Our pace is leisurely and set by the animals that we encounter. Possibilities include: elephant, lion, cheetah, giraffe, and many hooved species, including zebra, antelope, and many many birds.

* For our full days of game viewing in Etosha we will be using open safari-style vehicles (ie Land Rover / Land cruiser) with space for 4-6.

Overnight in the vicinity of Etosha (HOTEL / LODGE). Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 10 *Etosha National Park*

Today we heading over to the eastern side of Etosha, so after breakfast we pack our bags and head out into the park for more fantastic game viewing. Every part of the park supports different species and it is possible that we will see entirely different things today.

Lunch will be at Halali Rest Camp in the centre of the park; we should reach Namutoni by late afternoon, game-viewing en route. Namutoni centres around a historic German fort dating back to 1903 and declared a national monument in 1950.

We leave the park at Namutoni and travel the short distance to our lodge.

Overnight in the vicinity of Etosha (HOTEL / LODGE). Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 11 *Etosha - Ombili Bushman Project - Windhoek*

We leave Etosha early today and take a short drive to the Ombili Bushman Project where we can spend some time learning about the fascinating lives of today's San people (Bushmen). The village here allows a good insight into how the San of today are coping with the modern world.

We continue to Windhoek on a good, paved road. The Windhoek area is at a refreshing altitude amongst rolling bush-dotted hills and is well watered by rain. It does, however, get so hot that the rain evaporates soon after each dramatic downpour. Winters are bright but very chilly at night and summers wonderfully hot.

Overnight in Windhoek. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 12 *Departure*

Today we depart from Windhoek.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.