

NAMIBIA

Deserts, Dunes, and Ancient Cultures

12 days

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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.

Today you will meet our Namibia-based Tour Leader and enjoy a welcome dinner this evening.

Please note: Due to space availability and other considerations, our Namibia itinerary may run in reverse order (Windhoek to Windhoek).

Overnight in Windhoek.

Included Meal(s): 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.

We will have a picnic lunch en route.

Overnight in the vicinity of the Namib-Naklaft National Park.

Included Meal(s): 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-Naklaft Park, could be the oldest in the world. The older the dune, the brighter the colour from slow iron oxidation 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.

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On our way back to our accommodation we will make a stop at Sesriem Canyon, located near the entry gate to Sossusvlei. 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.

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We'll have a picnic breakfast en route and likely a late lunch upon return to our lodge.

Overnight in the vicinity of the Namib-Naukluft National Park.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Namib-Naukluft Park - Swakopmund

We continue our journey north through Namib-Naukluft Park via Solitaire and 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.

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We will have some time for a stroll around town before dinner.

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Overnight in Swakopmund.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 5 Swakopmund: Leisure Time & Optional Activities

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.

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You may wish to participate in an optional activity, including "Living Desert" excursions of the amazingly diverse Namib Desert biosphere; marine cruises on the Walvis Bay lagoon and outer harbour, scenic flights, camel rides, and many more (your Tour Leader can advise on current pricing and book in advance once you arrive on the tour).

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Overnight in Swakopmund.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Swakopmund - Damaraland

After an early breakfast the road takes us north and east into the wonderful and diverse region of Damaraland. We pass Namibia's highest mountain, the Brandberg, which peaks at 2573 m above sea level, and take time to view game and absorb the vastness of the scenery along

the way. We will make our way into the heart of Damaraland where we will spend the next two nights at our specially erected Under Canvas Camp ("Huab Under Canvas").

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Damaraland is typified by displays of colour, magnificent table-top mountains, rock formations and bizarre-looking vegetation. The present day landscape has been formed by the erosion of wind, water and geological forces which have created rolling hills, dunes, gravel plains and ancient river terraces. It is the variety and loneliness of the area as well as the scenic splendour which will reward and astound you, giving one an authentic understanding of the word 'wilderness'.

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If time allows this afternoon (or tomorrow if we are running late) we will visit the nearby attractions and geological sites of the pre-historic Twyfelfontein rock engravings (recently declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site). We will arrive in the late afternoon after a long yet rewarding day -- with time to enjoy sundowners before dinner.

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Overnight in Damaraland.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 Damaraland Touring

Today is dedicated to exploring this remarkable and fascinating area with our guides. After an early breakfast we will be treated to a memorable 4x4 excursion along the ephemeral Aba Huab River valleys to explore this remarkable region and to search for game, including the elusive desert adapted elephants if they are in the area. Damaraland is home to a variety of desert adapted wildlife and hidden desert treasures. As the elephants are mostly active in the mornings we will normally have the best chance to see them then before returning to camp for lunch. However, if all avellers are in agreement, we could possibly take a picnic lunch and stop to enjoy that in the shade of a large Ana tree by the riverbed, ideally while watching a herd of elephant browsing nearby. On return to camp there should be time to relax and enjoy some pre-dinner drinks while admiring the stunning views of your surroundings at sunset.

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Overnight in Damaraland.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Damaraland - Etosha National Park

This morning after breakfast we will continue our safari to Etosha National Park. Lunch is had en route and if time allows this afternoon our guide will take us on a game drive into Etosha, exiting the park before the gates close at sunset. The rest of the evening can be spent game viewing at the camp's floodlit waterhole.

Etosha National Park, located in the northwest corner of Namibia, is a vast and unique ecosystem that has been shaped by millions of years of geological and climatic forces. The park's landscape is dominated by the Etosha Pan, a massive salt pan that stretches over 130 km (80 miles) in length and 50-70 km (31-44 miles) in width. This pan is the remnants of an ancient lake that dried up thousands of years ago, leaving behind a crust of salt and minerals.

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Etosha has a rich human history, with evidence of human presence dating back thousands of years. The park is home to numerous archaeological sites, including ancient stone tools and rock art. In the early 20th century, the park was established as a game reserve, and in 1970, it was declared a national park. Today, Etosha is one of Namibia's most popular tourist destinations, attracting visitors from around the world with its unique landscapes and incredible wildlife.

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Overnight at Etosha (West).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Etosha National Park West

Today we embark on a full-day adventure within the stunning Etosha National Park, navigating the central and western sections from the comfort of our private safari vehicle. As we explore the park, we'll be surrounded by a diverse landscape that seamlessly blends grasslands,

savannas, and woodlands. The grasslands, with their waving grasses and scattered acacia trees, provide a habitat for grazing animals like antelopes and zebras. The savannas, with their open woodlands and abundant bushes, support a wide range of wildlife, from giraffes and elephants to lions and hyenas. Meanwhile, the woodlands, with their dense thickets and towering trees, provide shelter and shade for animals like leopards and cheetahs.

Etosha is renowned for its incredible array of wildlife, with over 114 mammal species calling the park home. We'll keep our eyes peeled for iconic animals like elephants, lions, giraffes, and zebras, as well as lesser-known species like the endangered black rhinoceros and the elusive leopard. The park is also a birdwatcher's paradise, with over 340 bird species documented, including eagles, vultures, and ostriches. The unique geology and hydrology of the area have created a variety of habitats that support this diverse range of wildlife, from the salt pans and waterholes to the rocky outcrops and sandy dunes. As we explore the park, we'll delve deeper into the fascinating ecology and natural history of Etosha, and gain a deeper appreciation for this incredible African wilderness.

Overnight at Etosha (West).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Etosha National Park East

Today we bid farewell to our current camp and embark on an exciting eastward journey across Etosha National Park. With a full day of game viewing ahead of us, we'll take our time navigating the park's diverse landscape, which effortlessly blends grassland, woodland, and savannah. As we explore the park, keep your eyes peeled for the incredible array of wildlife that calls Etosha home. We'll focus on the numerous springs and waterholes, where multiple species often gather at the same time, providing us with fantastic game viewing opportunities.

As we make our way through the park, we might be lucky enough to spot an elephant roaming in the distance, its massive frame silhouetted against the horizon. Perhaps we'll catch a glimpse of a pride of lions lazing in the shade, their tawny coats glistening in the sunlight. Or maybe we'll see a giraffe strolling gracefully across the savannah, its long neck bobbing up and down as it searches for tasty acacia leaves. Other wildlife we might encounter includes blue wildebeest, eland, and kudu, each one a unique and fascinating addition to our Etosha experience. Tonight, we'll overnight at a camp in the eastern sector of the park.

Overnight at Etosha (East).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Etosha - Windhoek

After a leisurely breakfast, we bid farewell to the wilderness and set off on our journey back to Windhoek, Namibia's charming capital city. The scenic road takes us south through the picturesque central highlands, where we'll pass through rolling hills, verdant valleys, and commercial farmlands that showcase the country's agricultural prowess. As we drive, keep an eye out for the unique rock formations, sparkling streams, and quaint rural villages that dot the landscape.

Along the way, we'll make a stop at Lake Otjikoto, a tranquil oasis nestled in the heart of the highlands. This picturesque lake is a haven for birdlife, and we might spot a variety of species, including herons, egrets, and kingfishers. Take a moment to breathe in the fresh air, listen to the sweet songs of the birds, and soak up the serene atmosphere.

Next, we'll visit the bustling town of Okahandja, where we'll explore the local woodcarver's craft market. This vibrant marketplace is a treasure trove of unique souvenirs, handmade crafts, and authentic Namibian artifacts. Browse the stalls, chat with the friendly vendors, and pick up some last-minute curios to commemorate your incredible safari adventure.

As the sun begins to set, we'll arrive in Windhoek, where we'll spend our final night in Namibia. Take some time to relax, unwind, and reflect on the unforgettable experiences we've shared on this safari journey. Tonight, we'll enjoy a farewell dinner at a local restaurant, savouring the flavors of Namibian cuisine and toasting to an unforgettable adventure.

Overnight in Windhoek.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Departure

Today we depart from Windhoek.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast