

NAMIBIA

'Land of Contrasts'

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").

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'.

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.

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.

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.

Overnight at Etosha (West).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Etosha National Park

Today is dedicated to a full day of exciting game viewing within the central and eastern sections of Etosha National Park from the comfort of our private safari vehicle/s. We drive our way from the southern Andersson's Gate to Halali (where we may stop for lunch) and then on across via selected waterholes such as Goas, which are normally particularly good for game viewing, to Namutoni Camp in the east, eventually leaving the park before sunset, arriving with enough time to relax and freshen up before for dinner.

Etosha National Park covers 22,270 km², of which approximately 5,000 km² is made up of saline depressions or 'pans'. The largest of these pans, the Etosha Pan, can be classified as a saline desert in its own right. The Etosha Pan lies in the Owambo Basin, on the north-western edge of the Namibian Kalahari Desert. Until three million years ago it formed part of a huge, shallow lake that was reduced to a complex of salt pans when the major river that fed it, the Kunene, changed course and began to flow to the Atlantic instead. If the lake existed today, it would be the third largest in the world. Etosha is the largest of the pans at 4,760 km² in extent. It is nowadays filled with water only when sufficient rain falls to the north in Angola, inducing

floods to flow southward along the Cuvelai drainage system.

□ The park consists of grassland, woodland and savannah. Game-viewing centers on the numerous springs and waterholes where several different species can often be seen at one time. The park boasts some 114 mammal and over 340 bird species. Wildlife that one might see includes elephant, lion, giraffe, blue wildebeest, eland and kudu.

Overnight Etosha (East).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Etosha National Park

Full day of exciting game viewing within the eastern section of Etosha National Park. Our day and lunch placement □are somewhat free-form to take into account seasonal variations, weather, and travellers' interest.

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Overnight at Etosha-East.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Etosha - Windhoek

After a leisurely breakfast we set off on our journey back to Windhoek. The road takes us south through Namibia's central highlands and commercial farmlands to reach Windhoek for the last night of our safari. We can visit Lake Otjikoto along the way and spend some time in Okahandja at the local woodcarver's craft market where you can do □some last minute curio shopping if desired.

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Overnight in Windhoek.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Departure

Today we depart from Windhoek.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast