

In 2014 the **Caprivi Strip was renamed the Zambezi Region**, swapping the name of a German governor for that of one southern Africa's great Rivers. There are 13 regions in Namibia, but of these only the Zambezi boasts 6 ethnic tribes – Subia, Yeyi, Mafwe, San, Tortela and Mbukushu. Amazingly, they have adapted a Zambian language – Lozi – as a common medium of communication. The Zambezi Region is also the only region that shares its borders with 4 other countries – Angola, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe, all members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The regional capital is the town of Katima Mulilo, which is located on the Zambezi River. There are no other major towns in the area, although it is fairly densely populated and travellers will encounter numerous villages.

Another huge draw-card is that the Caprivi is surrounded by 4 perennial rivers – Chobe, Kwando, Linyanti and the mighty Zambezi! For years this area was the domain of the South African Army – wildlife suffered as a result- but with soldiers long gone, wildlife populations have recovered. These waterfront areas combine riverine forests with vast wetlands, attracting over 600 species of bird, 4 of the big 5 (less rhino) as well as boasting 4 National Parks – Bwabwata, Nkasa Rupara, Mudumu and Mahango. Nearly 200 kinds of flora, shrubs, trees and fruits, complement the wildlife and amazing geography.

Damaraland is one of the most scenic areas in Namibia, a huge, untamed, ruggedly beautiful region that offers the more traveller a more adventurous challenge. Here there are prehistoric water courses with open plains and grassland, massive granite koppies and deep gorges. Towards the west, the geography changes dramatically with endless sandy wastes, that incredibly are able to sustain small, but wide-ranging, populations of desert-adapted elephant, black rhino, giraffe, ostrich and springbok. These animals have adapted their lifestyles to survive the harshness of the sun-blistered, almost waterless desert spaces. Elephant move through euphorbia bush country, and can travel up to 70km in a day in search of food and water and unusually, do not destroy trees in their quest for food. Follow black rhino cow and her calf in typical Damaraland 'melkbos' terrain. Together, Damaraland and Kaokoland are known as the Kaokoveld.

Damaraland is the old apartheid name given to the region south of Kaokoland and north of the main road to Swakopmund. It extends 200km inland from the desolate Skeleton Coast and 600km southwards from Kaokoland. The name Damaraland is derived from the fact that the Damara people live in this area (they were relocated here as a result of the Odendaal Plan in the 1960's). The name Damaraland is still commonly used in tourism circles, although the entire region has now been renamed; the southern section now lies in the Erongo region while the north forms part of the Kunene region.

Highlights of the area include:

- The Brandberg - Namibia's highest mountain and home to the famous 'White Lady' Bushman Painting.
- Twyfelfontein - a wonderful rocky outcrop with thousands of Bushman engravings.
- Spitzkoppe - a typical pointed inselberg, and a place of great mystery to the ancient San people
- The Petrified Forest - which is millions of years old.
- The Vingerklip (finger rock) - a towering finger of limestone that rises 35m above its base.

The Brandberg 'the fire mountain' is named after the effect created by the setting of the sun on its western face, which causes the granite massif to resemble a burning slag heap glowing red. The Brandberg (and the Spitzkoppe) is a favourite place for climbers in Namibia, and both mountains contain a high density of San (Bushman) art. The main attraction at Twyfelfontein (doubtful spring) is its large gallery of rock art, one of the most extensive in Africa.

Two other well-known geological features close to Twyfelfontein are the Organ Pipes and the Burnt Mountain. The Organ Pipes are a distinctive series of dolerite pillars that have been exposed by erosion and can be viewed in the small gorge on the left hand side of the road leading to the Burnt Mountain. This flat-topped mountain derives its name from the piles of blackened limestone at its base.

The Spitzkoppe (sharp head) is one of Namibia's most recognizable landmarks. It's shape has inspired its nickname, 'The Matterhorn of Africa,' but the similarities begin and end with its sharp peak. It is actually the remnant of an ancient volcano, formed in the same way as the Brandberg and Erongo massifs. It was first climbed in 1946 and is now a popular climbing destination with local and foreign mountaineers alike, with plenty of technical climbs available.

In the caves and ravines of the area many prehistoric rock paintings have been found and none more famous than the 'White Lady' of the Brandberg. First discovered in 1917 by the German surveyor Dr. Reinhard Maack on a descent from Konigstein, the painting remained relatively unknown until 1948, when the French archaeologist Abbe Henri Breuil copied it and brought the painting to light.

Etosha National Park is one of Southern Africa's finest and most important Game Reserves. Etosha Game park was declared a National Park in 1907 and covering an area of 22 270 square km, it is home to 114 mammal species, 340 bird species, 110 reptile species, 16 amphibian species and, surprisingly, one species of fish. The Etosha Park is one of the first places on any itinerary designed for a holiday in Namibia.

Etosha, meaning "Great White Place", is dominated by a massive mineral pan. The pan is part of the Kalahari Basin, the floor of which was formed around 1000 million years ago. The Etosha Pan covers around 25% of the National Park. The pan was originally a lake fed by the Kunene River. However the course of the river changed thousands of years ago and the lake dried up. The pan now is a large dusty depression of salt and dusty clay which fills only if the rains are heavy and even then only holds water for a short time. This temporary water in the Etosha Pan attracts thousands of wading birds including impressive flocks of flamingos. The perennial springs along the edges of the Etosha Pan draw large concentrations of wildlife and birds.

A San legend about the formation of the Etosha Pan tells of how a village was raided and everyone but the women slaughtered. One woman was so upset about the death of her family she cried until her tears formed a massive lake. When the lake dried up nothing was left apart from a huge white pan.

The game viewing in Etosha National Park is excellent, the best time being from May to September - the cooler months in Namibia. Visitors to Etosha Game Reserve can expect to see many buck species, elephant, giraffe, rhino and lions. More fortunate visitors will see leopard and cheetah. There is a network of roads linking the five camps and subsidiary roads lead to various waterholes.

When it was originally proclaimed at the turn of the century the Etosha Park consisted of an area of 100,000 square kilometres. This was the largest reserve on earth but in the 1960's political pressure resulted in the Park being reduced to its current size.

Traditionally visitors to Etosha had a choice of three rest camps - Namutoni, Halali and Okaukuejo. Each camp has tourist facilities such as a restaurant, a shop (selling only basic goods), a motor garage for fuel and basic repairs, and a swimming pool, as well as various grades of accommodation and camping facilities. September 2008 heralded the opening of Onkoshi Camp a brand new lodge inside Etosha - this was the first development inside the park in several decades and offers an environmentally friendly luxury experience. Accommodation options inside the park were further increased with the opening of the Dolomite Camp & the Olifantsrus Campsite in the previously restricted western Etosha.

Three of the five camps have floodlit waterholes, the exceptions being Dolomite and Onkoshi Camps. Of these three, two provide excellent night game viewing. Rhino and elephant are often seen at the waterhole at Okaukuejo. The waterhole at Halali has the reputation of attracting leopard and visitors who spend the whole night here will probably see one. However, Namutoni waterhole is rivalled by the artesian springs of Klein Namutoni and Koinachas, so fewer animals frequent it compared to Okaukuejo and Halali. Onkoshi Camp has unparalleled views over the eastern Etosha Pan which attract thousands of flamingoes and other waterbirds during the rainy season.

The Fish River Canyon in Namibia is (allegedly) the 2nd largest canyon in the world after the Grand Canyon.

The immensity of this magnificent landscape is truly breathtaking. The towering rock faces and deep ravines were formed by water erosion and the collapse of the valley due to movements in the earth's crust over 500 million years ago. Today the canyon measures 160km long up to 27km wide and almost 550m at its deepest. It is fair to say that when you arrive at the canyon though, its exact location is a bit of a mystery as the 500m vertical drop from the flat dry plateau is completely out of view.

Nowadays the canyon is part of the Ai-Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. Self-drive tourists, hikers, photographers and nature lovers world-wide are attracted to this long, thin, meandering river. Depending on the time of year, you could be looking out to a dry river bed or a rainy-season raging torrent. The northern most entrance is the gate at Hobas

Campsite and a further 10km drive takes you to the main viewpoint. Stunning views of the gorge combine with your first impressions of the Nama Karoo to the east of Fish River and the Succulent Karoo to the west of the river. The latter extends into the Sperrgebiet National Park and has over 1.600 different plant species, many of them occurring here and nowhere else. Other outstanding vantage points are at Hell's Corner and Sulphur Springs.

The environment of this spectacular scenery embraces a number of habitats bringing together several species of mammals, an abundance of reptiles, insects and fish that live in natural pools and the Fish River itself. For example the hot springs occurring on the canyon floor, the most well-known being at Ai-Ais, form pools of water which in turn attract many types of waterbirds. So birding around the canyon can be very rewarding.

While Namibia is more famous for being the home of the Namib Desert, it must be remembered that much of eastern and southern Namibia is covered by another - **the Kalahari Desert. The Kalahari is not a true desert as it receives too much rain, but it is actually a fossil desert. So do not expect to find the tall sand dunes associated with Sossusvlei, the landscape is more one of golden grass and small red dunes.**

The Kalahari Desert - or Kgalagadi, as it is known in Botswana - stretches across 7 countries - Botswana, Zambia, the Republic of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Its coverage in Namibia is called a 'desert' principally because its porous, sandy soils cannot retain surface water, but in some areas annual rainfall can be as high as 250mm, which accounts for the luxuriant grass cover during good years.

As the Namibian area of the Kalahari Desert is covered with trees, ephemeral rivers and fossil watercourses, the reasonably regular rainfall patterns that occur every year do allow for huge numbers of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, plant life and insects to thrive. In terms of vegetation most of the southern segment is taken up with camelthorn, red ebony and other acacias, and towards the centre silver terminalia and shrubs are common. Farther north, where the climate is wetter, the acacia gives way to bush savannah and dry woodland of kiaat (also known as wild teak) Zambezi teak (also called mkusi or Rhodesian teak) wild seringa (formerly Rhodesian ash) manketti, shiwi and other magnificent timber species. Large numbers of Tamboi trees grow in the Grootfontein area. The quiver tree (Aloe dichotoma) A. hereroensis and A. littoralis are 3 species of aloe that also occur here.

The bush and grass of the Kalahari Desert provide perfect ambush cover for cheetah to get within sprinting distance of springbok, hare and porcupine. Giraffes can go without drinking water for several weeks and browse various Acacia species for additional sustenance. Zebra graze leaves, grass, bark and roots throughout the area and gemsbok, surely one of Namibia's most remarkable mammals, obtains sufficient moisture from leaves and grasses. Black-backed jackal scavenge for carrion, kill young livestock (as do caracal) and otherwise survive on insects, birds and rodents and if the opportunity presents itself, small antelope. Black-footed cats prefer short to medium-length grass.

Kaokoland is one of the last remaining wilderness areas in Southern Africa. It is a world of incredible mountain scenery, a refuge for the rare desert dwelling elephant, black rhino and giraffe and the home of the Himba people. Although it is harsh and offers little respite at midday, the rugged landscape is especially attractive during the early morning and late afternoon when it is transformed into softly glowing pastel shades. The topography in the south of the area is characterised by rugged mountains which are dissected by numerous watercourses, but north of the Hoarusib River the scenery is dominated by table-top koppies. Still further north, the Otjhipa Mountains rise abruptly above the Namib floor to form the eastern boundary of the Marienfluss, while the west of the valley is defined by the Hartmann Mountains. The Marienfluss valley is very scenic and relatively greener than the Hartmann's valley. Hartmann's valley is closer to the Atlantic and yet much more arid. However, it does have a strange atmosphere when the sea mists drift inland.

Kaokoland differs greatly from Damaraland in terms of accessibility and infrastructure. While quite a bit of Damaraland is isolated from the outside world it is really Kaokoland which is the back and beyond, silent, huge and for the most part empty. With 16,000 or so inhabitants, 5,000 of them Himba, Kaokoland has a population density of only one person to every two square kilometers which is about a quarter of the national average.

Kaokoland is bordered on the south the Hoanib River and on the north the Kunene River which also forms Namibia's border with Angola. Mountain ranges near the Kunene River are rugged and impressive with the highest point located at 2039m in the Baynes Mountains. It is an oddity that a river runs through this arid landscape with the only real waterfalls in Namibia along its course. The Ruacana Falls are 120m high and 700m wide in full flood. Also along the Kunene River you'll find the Epupa falls, about 135km downstream from the Ruacana falls. The name Epupa is a Herero word for the spume created by falling water. Epupa is formed by a series of cascades that drop a total of 60m over a distance of about 1.5km and at

one point reaches a total width of 500m. It is a possibility to swim in some of the pools but one has to be wary of crocodiles in doing so.

The area surrounding Epupa Falls has richly coloured rock walls, a variety of trees including the wild fig, baobabs and waving makalani palms. Spectacular sunsets and perennially flowing waters means that the area offers much to see and experience. Bird watching is rewarding, especially for the rare Rufoustailed palm thrush, as well as bee eaters, the African fish eagle and Kingfishers ranging from giant to the tiny Malachite Kingfisher. One of the best places to stay in the Epupa area is the Epupa Camp luxury lodge.

For a bit of adventure try white water rafting and canoeing on the Kunene River. For about twenty years preceding independence the Kunene River was out of bounds because of the bush war, but since the early nineties trekking this far north for river adventures has taken off in a big way. The stretch of river normally traversed is the 120km between Ruacana and Epupa Falls. A highlight of the trip is negotiating the Ondurusa rapids as well as passing through the looming zebra mountains and crossing the section of the river known as the 13 rapids.

Near the hot water spring at Warmquelle is Sesfontein Fort which for many years was a desolate and rapidly disintegrating ruin. Almost a hundred years after it was first built, the historical monument, originally a police outpost, was reconstructed and equipped to accommodate tourists. Sesfontein Fort derives its name from the six fountains which have their source in the vicinity. The palm trees at the fort were planted by the German police officers who manned the fort to combat weapons smuggling and elephant and rhino poaching.

The Himba people who inhabit Kaokoland are the descendants of the earliest Herero's who migrated into this area in the 16th century. Around the middle of the 18th century the pressure of too many people and cattle in this dry, fragile environment led to the migration of the main body of the Herero to the rich pasture lands further south. The Himba are an ancient tribe of semi nomadic pastoralists, many of whom still live and dress according to ancient traditions and live in scattered settlements throughout Kaokoland. They are a slender and statuesque people. The women especially are noted for their unusual sculptural beauty, enhanced by intricate hairstyles and traditional adornments. They rub their bodies with red ochre and fat, a treatment which protects their skins against the harsh desert climate. The homes of the Himba are simple cone shaped structures of saplings bound together with palm leaves and plastered with mud and dung. A family may move from one home to another several times a year to seek grazing for their goats and cattle.

In terms of wildlife Kaokoland is probably most famous for its desert elephant. The possibility of obtaining a glimpse, however brief, of a herd of desert dwelling elephants is what draws most tourists to the area. Between 1977 and 1982 a crippling drought gripped the area and wiped out large numbers of game. However, the biggest threat came from poachers, and between 1970 and 1983 the number of desert dwelling elephants in the Kaokoveld declined from an estimated 300 to 70. Although the desert dwelling elephants are not a separate sub species they have adapted to their extremely harsh environment, the only other place in Africa where elephants live in such harsh conditions is in Mali on the edge of the Sahara Desert. The secret of their survival in the arid wastelands is an intimate knowledge of their limited food and water resources. During the dry periods they will even dig deep holes to obtain water and in this way also provide other animals with water. Unlike other elephants which drink daily, these ones have been observed going without water for up to four days. The black rhino of Kaokoland suffered a fate similar to that of the elephants and by 1983 the population in the east had been exterminated, while only a few individuals survived in the extreme western parts of Kaokoland which makes them a very rare sight. Nowadays, there are a few organisations doing their best to ensure the continuing existence of these rare and unique animals.

Fort Sesfontein On the border between Kaokoland and Damaraland this fort was built at the same time as the fort of Namutoni in Etosha.

Luderitz is a quirky town lodged in one of the best harbours on the least hospitable coast in Africa. It was founded in 1883 when Heinrich Vogelsang purchased Angra Pequena and some of the surrounding land on behalf of Adolf Lüderitz, a hanseat from Bremen, from the local Nama chief. It began life as a trading post, fishing and guano-harvesting town, but when diamonds were discovered in 1909 in nearby Kolmanskop, Lüderitz enjoyed a sudden surge of prosperity. Now the diamonds are mostly found elsewhere and offshore, so Lüderitz has reverted to its former self. Its appeal as a town lies in the fact that little has changed since the early 20th century (and in fact it has hardly grown at all).

LUDERITZ: There are many historic buildings in Luderitz these include the Deutsche Afrika bank, the Railway Station, the Old Post Office, and the 'church on the rocks' or Felsenkirche. Built from proceeds of the diamond industry and situated on the wonderfully named Zeppelin Street is the Goerke Haus. Other important buildings are the Krappenhof and Lampe building, Woerman House, Troost House, Kreplin House, and the Turnhalle.

Unfortunately for Luderitz the harbour has a rock bottom and the shallow depth has meant that modern ships have not been able to use the harbour, this has meant that the main thrust of the Namibian shipping industry is based in Walvis Bay, recently the addition of a new quay has allowed larger fishing vessels to dock at Luderitz. Luderitz has re-styled itself in an attempt to lure tourists to the area, and there is a new waterfront shopping and office area.

Those seeking accommodation in Luderitz will find that the town has a variety of hotels, guest houses and self catering establishment on offer. There are also several interesting activities and day trips available from the town.

One of Luderitz' main attractions is Kolmanskop Ghost Town. This previously bustling diamond town is now abandoned and fights a constant struggle with the sand dunes of the Namib desert. There are tours every morning around Kolmanskop which are very informative, a particular highlight of the tour is a visit to the bowling alley where you are invited to try your hand. After the guided tour you are welcome to explore the town at your leisure.

Also highly recommended is the Zeepaard Catamaran daily boat trip to Halifax Island, where you will see 1000+ African penguins (unique in Namibia) with heaviside dolphin often swimming across the bows and seals in their natural habitat just below the famous Diaz Point (1487). Whales are sometimes spotted. You will return in time to drive out to Kolmanskop for the start of the ghost town tour.

The drive to Diaz Point and Grusse Bucht (Big Bay) is also a worthwhile activity, the original cross that Batholemeu Diaz planted on his early excursions to Southern Africa is long since gone but a replica still stands. There are numerous small bays and inlets on the rocky coastline many of which have evocative names such as Griffin Bay and Conception Bay. Another point of interest is that Shark Island which now houses the Luderitz campsite was once a concentration camp where thousands of prisoners were kept in under terrible condition leading to an extremely high mortality rate.

When the wind blows, which is quite frequently, the final 10km of road into Luderitz may be covered by low sand dunes, which seem eternally determined upon crossing the road. The drifts can pile quite high before the road crews clean them

The Namib Desert is often referred to as the world's oldest desert and has been in existence for some 43 million years, remaining unchanged in its present form for the last 2 million years. The Namib is an immense expanse of relentlessly moving gravel plains and dunes of all shapes and sizes that stretch along the entire coastline. The most widespread and dominant type of desert sand dune are linear dunes, with crescent shaped dunes common along the coast and clusters of star dunes, such as the towering horseshoe of dunes at Sossusvlei, found in the eastern reaches of the sand sea.

It comes as no surprise therefore to discover that the entire western section of Namibia is comprised of the Namib, which spreads beyond the borders of Namibia and flows into southern Angola and the northern Cape Province of South Africa. With ephemeral rivers flowing unexpectedly across an ancient landscape, its dunes, plains, rivers and a foggy coast have all become vital components to support an outstanding and fascinating array of bizarre desert flora and fauna.

Evidence of humans living in the Namib through time extends back to the early stone age era. But perhaps the most documented of mankind's existence can still be seen today in the many rock paintings, stone circles, tools and pottery that have been discovered over the centuries. The most famous rock paintings are at Brandberg and Twyfelfontein. The Topnaar are a well-known clan of long term residents of the Namib. More famous for living in the Namib-Naukluft Park, there are at least a dozen villages scattered along the lower Kuiseb River today.

A section of the central Namib Desert incorporates the Namib Naukluft Park, the largest park in Namibia and the 3rd largest on the African continent. The present day park is a combination of the Namib Desert Park and the Naukluft Mountain Zebra Park as well as sections of the Diamond Area. The combined area is just under 50,000km², from Luderitz to the Swakop River some 400kms. Its main attractions are Sossusvlei, Sandwich Harbour and the Naukluft hiking and four wheel drive trails

The Naukluft Mountain section of the park was initially created as a sanctuary for the Hartmann's mountain zebra. There is also an interesting historical back story to the region as they were the base of Hendrik Witbooi, an important player in

the history of Namibia. The celebrated freedom fighter terrorized German Colonizers at every opportunity from his well protected mountain strongholds. In recognition of his exploits, Hendrik is fondly remembered with portraits on Namibian bank notes, an honour he shares with the founding father of Namibia, Sam Nujoma.

The harsh environment of the park challenges man and mammal alike. Carnivores are no exception and 3 of the larger species – black-backed jackal, brown hyena and spotted hyena have adapted to life in the desert. Spotted hyena live in the central and eastern regions, travelling in small groups where gemsbok, mountain zebra and occasionally Namib feral horses are taken. Black-backed jackals often scout the beaches in large groups for marine carrion, Cape fur seal pups and breeding birds. Brown hyena search for smaller items of food, usually alone and also take seal pups, eat insects and fruit as well gemsbok and springbok carcasses. Mountain zebra, chacma baboons, kudu, klipspringer, Cape fox, gerbils, steenbok and a healthy population of leopard are also resident.

Reptiles such as lizards and geckos, the sand snake and the side-winding adder inhabit this long, narrow wilderness. Smaller still are the scorpions, spiders, fishmoths and beetles that have adapted over centuries to survive in the dune dynamics of the desert. Insects use a swimming motion to travel through the sand beneath the surface, others dig burrows whilst certain adaptations such as shovel-snouts, protective eyelids and tubular nostrils allow other lizards to live below the surface.

Hiking around Naukluft Mountains is a very rewarding wildlife experience. As the mountains themselves touch the southern limits of Damaraland and the northern extremes of the Karoo, several bird species such as Herero chat, Karoo lark, Karoo scrub robin, cinnamon-breasted warbler, lesser honeyguide, pearl-spotted owlet, rockrunner, black-headed canary and Monteiro's hornbill can be found here. Namaqua sandgrouse gather in the morning at waterholes in their hundreds, the Karoo eromomela can be seen along the hilly areas of the escarpment and water in the rivers attract amongst other the rosy-faced lovebird. The riverine forests of the Swakop and Kuiseb Rivers entice pririt batis, swallow-tailed bee-eater and long-billed crombec.

Sossusvlei in the Namib Desert is the one attraction that should not be missed while you are in Namibia; the dunes are amazing and even though this is a popular tourist destination it is still easy to gain a sense of solitude while climbing one of the dunes or walking to *Dead or Hidden Vlei*. The Namib Desert section of the Namib-Naukluft Park also includes the Swakop and Kuiseb River Canyons.

Vegetation and wildlife are seemingly scarce in any desert and this is one of the most harshest environments in Namibia. Wild flowers in the Namib Desert can be defined as growing in the following areas:

- **The southern Namib** - is characterized by winter rainfall and succulent plants falling into the northernmost extension of the Succulent Karoo biome of southern Africa, notably from the Orange River in the south and to the coastal town of Luderitz further north.
- **The central Namib** - an area confined by the Atlantic Ocean in the west and the escarpment to the east, sandwiched between the Kuiseb River in the south and Huab River in the north. The central Namib provides a number of habitats for plants, notably expansive gravel and gypsum plains, rocky outcrops and dry river courses with associated drainage lines.
- **The northern Namib** – is a very dry place with low and unpredictable ranges and amounts of rainfall varying from zero to over 100mm. Rain and the chances of it become less towards the coast. It is fog that provides reliable moisture and as with the central Namib area, a fog belt can stretch some 20 and 30 km inland and on occasions further inland.

Unique meteorological phenomenon distinguishes the Namib from all other deserts. In the southern Namib, continuous high wind speeds are channelled through valleys. They batter the landscape without respite, forcing the surface of the earth to become uncharacteristically dry. In particular, the Sperrgebiet experiences the highest wind speeds ever recorded on earth.

Erratic annual rainfall compounds the regional aridity. Rain can only fall over the Namib Desert when warm, moist air is blown onto the eastern side of the African subcontinent by south-east trade winds. It is highly seasonal and coincides with weak South Atlantic anticyclone activity.

Coastal fog regulates the climatic extremes. Desert rainfall is sporadic and unpredictable. Fog isn't. It is a most reliable source of moisture and although the amount of water captured from a blanket of fog is relatively small, plants and animals have adapted to the amounts on offer. But like rain, it is life-giving.

Over and above these constraints, the southern Namib is home to over 600 species of plants, the central Namib 400 species and some 1,000 species in the northern Namib. Despite being starved of water for most of the year, succulents and shrubs still survive in ridges and valley floors during periods of extremely windy conditions.

For people wanting to experience a sense of Namibia's vastness a few nights at one of the *campsites* at Kuiseb Bridge, Homeb, Mirabib, Bloedkoppie, Ganab, Vogelfederberg or Kriess-se-Russhoud prove to be very exhilarating. All of these camp sites offer very basic facilities, and as they do not have receptions or shops (or even game wardens) a permit is required to visit them.

On the coast Sandwich Harbour is a paradise for ornithologists and nature lovers visiting Namibia. The lagoon is fed by fresh water and is a sanctuary for large numbers of coastal birds. Sandwich Harbour is only accessible by four wheel drive vehicles due to the large Namib Desert sand-dunes that meet the Atlantic Ocean. Angling is not permitted from January 25 to April 15, camping is not permitted in the area.

Visitors to Swakopmund should take time to visit the Welwitschia trail. This drive through the Namib Desert takes a few hours and visits the Moon Landscape, the Welwitschia Plains and the Namib desert oasis of Goanikontes. The route has several numbered beacons which identify areas of *particular interest*. A *map and brochure* as well as permits to visit the area should be obtained from the MET office in Swakopmund.

Other notable tourist destinations in the Namib Desert include the Cape fur seal colony at Cape Cross, Fish River Canyon, the ghost town at Kolmanskop, Luderitz, the NamibRand Nature Reserve, the Orange River and the Skeleton Coast.

Sossusvlei

sand dunes in the Namib Desert

The sand dunes of Sossusvlei in the Namib Desert are often referred to as the highest dunes in the world. Various arguments are laid out to support this claim, but all miss the point, which is that Sossusvlei is surely one of the most spectacular sights in Namibia. Located in the Namib Naukluft park, the largest conservation area in Africa, and fourth largest in the world - the sand dunes at Sossusvlei are just one excellent reason to visit Namibia.

The best time to view Sossusvlei is close to sunrise and sunset; the colours are strong and constantly changing, allowing for wonderful photographic opportunities. The midday heat is intense and best spent in the shade.

'Vlei' is the Afrikaans word for a shallow depression filled with water (well, a depression that might sometimes be filled with water!), and the name 'Sossusvlei' should strictly only be applied to the pan that lies at the place where the dunes close in, preventing the waters of the Tsauchab River from flowing any further - that is, on the rare occasions that the river does flow as far as this. During exceptional rainy seasons, Sossusvlei may fill with water, causing Namibians to flock there to witness the grand sight, but normally it is bone dry. This particular 'vlei' is actually a more-or-less circular, hard-surfaced depression that is almost entirely surrounded by sharp-edged dunes, beyond which lies a formidable sea of rolling sand, stretching in unbroken immensity all the way to the coast. However, the name 'Sossusvlei' nowadays applies to the whole area - an area that encompasses the great plain of the Tsauchab River together with the red dunes that march along like giant sentinels to south and north of the plain.

The second attraction of the area is Sesriem Canyon, which is only a few kilometres from the campsite, the entrance gate, and main Nature Conservation office. The canyon derives its name from the fact that early Afrikaner trekkers had to use six ('ses') leather thongs (a thong is a 'riem') so that their buckets could reach the water far below. The canyon begins as an almost imperceptible but nevertheless deep cleft in level, stony ground, and then widens until it finally flattens out onto the plain. Because it is so deep and sheltered, it often holds water well into the dry season - an invigorating sight in such a barren and stark environment.

Climbing to the top of Big Mama, as it is known to the locals, is well worth every bead of sweat. Catch your breath, take a drink and try to avoid camera shake before capturing some unique moments in your life. From the top you can see Naravlei; so-called because of the countless cucumber-like melons growing around the edge of the pan. The !Nara plant is a vital source of nourishment for many desert creatures, including man. Cessna Pan is to the east and the rocky ridges of Witberg have proved to be a valuable landmark for adventurers over the years. Dead Vlei is at the foot of Big Mama. Its' dead

camelthorn trees, some over 800 years old, stand helplessly as photographers worldwide attempt to capture that unique, ageless desert shot. Out of view from the 2x4 car park, tucked behind a dune, is Hiddenvlei. Many species of bird shelter here on both dead and live camelthorn trees. For most of the year all 3 vleis are little more than huge hollows in the ground with no water whatsoever.

The belief that nothing could survive in temperatures that surpass 40°C during the day and fall to below freezing at night is a real one. Water is scarce but life still manages to exist under the sand. Tiny tracks at the base of Sossusvlei's dunes give the game away. A fine example is the toktokkie beetle, one of over 200 species of tenebrionid living in the Namib Desert. Whilst under the surface they communicate between sexes by tapping their abdomens on the ground. The shovel-snouted lizard is another sub-sand survivor, a reptile that has the ability to store water in its body. Other desert-dwelling creatures drink droplets of the desert's periodic fog or lick minute tear-drops of water trickling down rocks and plants. Others simply burrow a channel in the sand, an action that will allow them to accumulate moisture such as Grant's golden mole. This amazing little rodent spends almost its entire life under the sand and as a result of this evolutionary adaptation, has no need for eyes.

You are more likely to see or be shown larger tracks though. Black-backed jackal, a notorious scavenger, springbok and ostrich tip-toe across the dunes frequently. Gemsbok (oryx) last for weeks without drinking water. Moisture is not allowed to leave the body and therefore they stop sweating. Some unique moments in your life can be small ones as well.

Logistical Information:

The sand-dunes at Sossusvlei are some 60km from the Sesriem gate (the entrance to the park) and the drive takes about an hour. The gate into Sesriem only opens at sunrise, so those staying outside of the park (which includes all the lodges in the area with the exception of Sossus Dune Lodge) will have to wait until sunrise to begin their journey to the dunes.

Although the roads in the area are renowned for their high accident rate, possibly the highest in Namibia, they are traversable with a normal sedan vehicle (two wheel drive). The road from Sesriem to the 2x4 car park (4 kilometres from the vlei) is tarred but is in poor condition and is pot-holed. Because the dunes close in and the road becomes a sandy track near the vlei itself, if you do not have your own 4x4 you will have to walk the final stretch from the 2X4 parking area to the vlei - many people do - or use the 4x4 transfer service.

Swakopmund

Palm-lined streets, seaside promenades, fine accommodation, a pleasant summer climate and decent beaches. Welcome to Swakopmund - Namibia's premier holiday resort! During the summer holidays and long weekends, thousands of Namibians flock to the coast, and this human migration happens for a number of reasons; Swakopmund has a real holiday feel to it and everyone wants to be there; during the December holidays, the cool Namibian coast offers relief from the intense heat of the interior; and more importantly as far as the tourist is concerned in these modern times, Swakop has changed, and has become the countries leading adrenaline destination, with a wide range of activities to suit all ages and (most) egos.

The area of Namib Desert around Swakopmund is named the West Coast Recreational Area. And recreation is the towns number one draw card. There are countless pursuits to help you spend your time, and money. For those interested in adventure activities Swakopmund offers sandboarding, quad biking, dune carting, parachuting, hot air ballooning, shark fishing, deep sea fishing and beach angling to name but a few. For the more sedentary there are restaurants, cafes, art galleries, the Swakopmund Museum, a snake park and aquarium.

If danger isn't your middle name, then the architecture and general feeling of Swakopmund might be more to your liking. This town has the ambiance associated with a small German village, and the town seems to be stuck in time. (Less for those who care to jump out of perfectly serviceable aircraft shouting 'Geronimo' before it lands safely.) Although in recent times the new generation have woken up to the tourist potential of the area, Swakopmund still manages to create a feeling of timelessness.

Buildings and monuments of note in Swakopmund include the Hohenzollern Building, the Marine memorial, the War memorial in memory of those killed in World War 2, Princess Rupprecht House originally a military hospital now a private guest house. The Kaserne buildings originally served as a barracks and is of a similar design to the Alte Feste

in [Windhoek](#) and [Fort Namutoni](#) in [Etosha](#). The old [Swakopmund Prison](#) is still fully operational and provides budget accommodation for the criminal fraternity of the Namibian coast.

The Swakopmund Railway station was completed in 1901 and now houses the [Swakopmund Hotel](#), while the bells of the [Deutsche Evangelical Church](#) were imported from Germany. Standing close to the State House (Kaiserliches Bezirksgericht) is the Swakop Lighthouse at just over 20 meters it has been functional since 1902.

The main beach area is called the Mole, and is the result of a largely unsuccessful attempt to construct the artificial harbour (as South Africa owned the only natural harbour in the area at Walvis Bay). The town's most iconic symbol is the Swakopmund jetty, initially used as mooring for ships it later became a popular area for anglers and walkers, it has fallen into disrepair on numerous occasions and has been subject to several attempts to rescue it from complete dereliction. Recently large scale work has been completed on the jetty which now proudly boasts a small restaurant and bar area.

True to its German traditions early mornings and evenings in Swakopmund can be cold throughout the year, as the cold Atlantic Ocean meeting the Namib Desert creates a fog bank. This coolness is often a relief from the heat of the rest of Namibia, but does mean that Swakopmund is not the tropical sunbathing mecca that most people imagine.

There is a great variety of [accommodation in Swakopmund](#) which cater for all tastes and budgets. It should be noted that these establishments will definitely need to be booked in advance especially if you are travelling in the busy December holidays.

For day trippers a visit to the [Cape Cross Seal Colony](#) is worth a visit as it offers a taste of the Skeleton Coast and the seals are worth a visit. The Welwitschia drive is an interesting way to spend a few hours and introduces you to some of the fauna and flora of the Namib Desert. Bird lovers can pay a visit to the Swakopmund Salt Works or the [Walvis Bay](#) Lagoon, which in season is frequented by thousands of flamingos.

Waterberg Plateau

The striking sight of Waterberg Plateau's brick-red sandstone crowned with lush vegetation has supported a wide diversity of flora and fauna for thousands of years. Rising to 420m in places and enveloped by Namibian savannah, the untouched fortifications of this unmistakable feature have provided nature with the perfect wildlife sanctuary.

The Waterberg Plateau and 41,000 hectares of surrounding land was declared a Nature Reserve in 1972. The table land is largely inaccessible, enabling several of Namibia's endangered species to be relocated here to protect them from predators and illegal hunting. The reintroduction programme was so successful that surplus species are released from Waterberg to supply other Namibian parks with rare animals. Poaching has since been eliminated. Africa's largest antelope, [eland](#), were the first and herds of up to 100 often congregate. Presently there are some 25 species of mammal including black & [white rhino](#), Cape buffalo, giraffe, kudu, [impala](#), warthog, tsessebe, sable and [roan antelope](#) and blue wildebeest. Sightings of the elusive leopard prowling along the cliffs, cheetah, caracal, black-backed and side-striped jackals have been seen on the plateau or in the savannah below. Rarer visits from lion and [African wild dog](#) have also been documented.

Evidence of early human occupancy can be established by viewing rock engravings at Okarakuvisa waterhole. The last remaining community of [San Bushmen](#) were still living here until the late 1960's. Previous residents of the region, the Herero, were involved in a number of military conflicts with the German colonial forces. One of their most significant events, which also changed the course of the [Namibia's History](#), took place here on the foothills of Waterberg at the turn of the 20th century.

In 1904, the proud [Herero people](#), led by [Chief Samuel Maharero](#), were defeated in their final and most epic battle against the Germans. They were eventually forced from Waterberg and retreated eastward to British Bechuanaland (now [Botswana](#)). Thousands were killed by the ensuing Germans and many perished with their cattle in the barren and inhospitable Omaheke plains on the way. Estimates were that nearly two thirds of the Herero population lost their lives during this period. The graves of German soldiers killed in these hostilities can still be viewed in a small cemetery near the entrance to the park.

While visiting the Waterberg Plateau you will have the opportunity to note some of the 200 plus species of bird that have been recorded here. Black eagles, peregrine falcons and Namibia's only breeding colony of Cape vultures are amongst 33 types of birds of prey. The latter are the rarest birds in Namibia. Hartlaub's francolin, Rüppell's parrot, Bradfield's swift, Monteiro's hornbill, red-billed and violet wood-hoopoe, short-toed rock thrush, rockrunner and Carp's tit are included on your tick list. Migrants include yellow-billed kite, Abdim's stork, paradise flycatcher and European roller.

The geological arrangement and variation of vegetation of Waterberg can best be explored along a series of trails either on the base of the plateau (9 unguided hiking trails) or on 3 guided hikes accessible on the summit, led by a park ranger or warden. Keen hikers can also arrange to undertake a 42km self-guided trail. This adventure is 'strictly controlled' and participants are expected to be self-sufficient. There are some shelters and water but fires are not permitted. Your route meanders along well-defined tracks and through dry river courses. The scenery is fantastic and plant and wildlife can be viewed and photographed along the way at your leisure.

There are several privately owned lodges around the Waterberg Plateau and the Waterberg Rest Camp lies within the park borders.

ACCOMMODATION AROUND THE COUNTRY



Zambezi & Kavango Lodges

Includes: Rundu, Katima Mulilo, the Zambezi Region (formerly the Caprivi Strip) and Kavango



Central Namibia Accommodation

Includes: Windhoek Lodges, Okahandja, the Erongo Mountains & Karibib, southern Damaraland (around Twyfelfontein & Brandberg), Waterberg & Otjiwarongo, Rehoboth, the Gamsberg & Spretshoogte Passes and the Kalahari Desert east of Windhoek towards the Botswana border



Coastal Namibia Accommodation

Includes: the Skeleton Coast, Henties Bay, Swakopmund Accommodation, Walvis Bay and Luderitz



Northern Namibia Accommodation

Includes: Etosha Lodges, northern Damaraland, Kaokoland & Epupa Falls, Tsumeb, Grootfontein and Owamboland



Southern Namibia Accommodation

Includes: Sossusvlei Lodges and surrounds, the Namib Naukluft Park, Fish River Canyon, Orange River and southern Kalahari