



Namibia

Experience a true sense of freedom

Namibia is home to vibrant, clean and safe cities, the highest sand dunes in the world, Africa's deepest canyon and richest rock art sites, spectacular wildlife and the oldest desert in the world where one can listen to the silence and where stargazers can observe our galaxy at night, like they've never seen it before. Namibia's population density ranks among the lowest in the world giving visitors a true sense of freedom.

by M. Bluemner

History

Namibia, then known as South West Africa, was proclaimed a German protectorate by Otto v. Bismarck in 1884. The conquest of German SW Africa by South African forces during World War I resulted in its subsequent administration by South Africa under a 1920 League of Nations mandate, which only ended in 1988 in accordance with a United Nations peace plan for the entire region. In 1989 the first free elections were held and after 106 years SW Africa attained its independence on 21 March 1990, with Dr Sam Nujoma becoming the Founding President of the Republic of Namibia, followed by Hifikepunjwe Pohamba (Ibrahim Price laureate) and Dr. Hage Geingob, since March 2015.

Windhoek, capital and international airport

The majority of tourists, visiting Namibia on fly-drive safaris, start their adventure in Windhoek as it is the main entry point to the country. Namibia's bustling capital is a modern city but rich in culture and inheritance with an interesting blend of contemporary and colonial architecture. The city is exceptionally clean, well organised and fairly easy to navigate, making it ideal for walking tours and casual sightseeing. The city centre is characterised by German style buildings, a reminiscence of Namibia's early colonial history. Must see buildings include Alte Feste, Christuskirche, Tintenpalast, Reiterdenkmal and Turnhalle building.

The largest shopping mall in Namibia is the Maerua Mall, with indoor pool, gym and lots of well-known retail outlets with affordable price tags. For the less active Windhoek is a great place to while away the time, sipping a cold beer or two. So don't miss out on the famous Windhoek Draught or Lagers, which are still brewed in accordance with the stringent German "Reinheitsgebot" and surely some of the best beers in Namibia.

You can find lots of popular restos and trendy bars. Don't leave Windhoek without a visit to Chopsi's or the Skybar at Hilton, places to mingle with the friendly locals, who might turn into local friends. There are many very good restaurants, like the Stellenbosch Tasting Room, or Joe's Beerhouse. For fine dining maybe JoJo's or Leo's at Heintzberg Castle. City hotels like the Hilton or the avant-garde Marigold Hotel can be listed, but there are many more, which you can check out yourself.

Swakopmund

I like to call Swakopmund a vibrant village with the ambiance associated with small Northern German coastal towns like Travemünde or Husum, with cosy cafes, small shops, galleries, seaside promenades and above all a pleasant summer climate.

Buildings and monuments of note in Swakopmund include the Hohenzollern Building, Marine Memorial, Kaserne, Princess Rupprecht House, and the old Swakopmund prison, which is still fully



Joe's Beerhouse, Windhoek

operational and provides budget accommodation for the followers of the dark side.

There is a great variety of accommodation in Swakopmund catering for all budgets, e.g. the iconic Strand Hotel by the sea promenade or the Europa Hof Hotel in the centre. Also restaurants like the Steamer, Jetty or Tug, the latter especially for seafood, are all in walking distance from the centre.

For day trippers and seal lovers a visit to the Cape Cross Seal Colony is a must. It also offers a taste of the famed Skeleton Coast. Bird lovers should pay a visit to the Walvis Bay Lagoon, which is frequented by large groups of flamingos, pelicans and Damara terns. It is also called the bay of whales and dolphins for a reason. A beautiful coastal place to retire for those who can afford it.

For those interested in adventure activities, be it land, air or water based, quad biking, sand boarding, dune carting, parachuting, hot air ballooning, kayaking, and shark fishing are on offer. For the less energetic, a visit to the Swakop-

mund Museum, the snake park, the aquarium or the galleries featuring gifted local artists, would be more suitable.

Namib Naukluft National Park

Just south of Swakopmund starts the Namib Naukluft Park with 50,000 km² protected area. It stretches on the Atlantic coast all the way down to the Restricted Diamond Area in the south.

There are many places to visit within the park, like the famous Namib Sand Sea, a UNESCO world heritage site, where the oldest desert in the world meets the ocean. Going east from there on a scenic drive through the vast Namib desert all the way to the impressive Naukluft mountains (up to 2,000m), you must pass by the Sossusvlei, a colourful salt-clay pan and home to the highest dunes in the world (up to 390m), not far from Sesriem.

There are multiple lodges and desert retreats along the way that provide excellent accommodation with a variety of nourishment.

Fish River Canyon

Further south (you might want to take the B1), not far from the South African border, you can discover the impressive Fish River Canyon (around 500 million years old). It is the second largest canyon in the world after the Grand Canyon, about 160km long and up to 28km wide with spectacular cliffs that create unforgettable scenic views. The main viewpoint is in Hobas, and only 10km from there you will reach the edge of the canyon.

For hiking enthusiasts this is a vacation on its own if you go for the 5 day "Hobas/Ai Ais Resort" hike, a bucket list item for many. In case you want more, feel free to enrol for the annual Fish River Canyon 100km Ultra Marathon, probably a bucket list item for some "Iron Man" contestants.

There are numerous rustic campsites and more comfortable lodges around the canyon, but you can also choose luxury accommodation, e.g. the Fish River Lodge, built directly on the edge of the canyon.

Zambesi Region (Caprivi Strip)

In the north-eastern corner of Namibia begins the Caprivi Strip, named after Leo von Caprivi, who succeeded Bismarck as German chancellor in 1890. The Strip resembles a panhandle as it is not wider than 30km across in some places whilst 450km long.

The Strip plus a small northern German island, called Helgoland, were given to the Germans by the British in an exchange deal at the Berlin Conference in 1890 for the

Zanzibar islands. The Germans wanted this panhandle because it ended at the Zambesi River, which would provide a route through British Rhodesia and via the Shire River to German East Africa (Tanganyika), so they thought. It seems they didn't know about the Victoria Falls. Oops ...

Namibia's Zambezi Region is entirely different to the rest of the country in terms of climate and vegetation. It's being surrounded and crossed by 5 enduring rivers, Kavango, Kwando, Chobe, Linyanti and the mighty Zambezi. Riverbank forests and vast wetlands are showcasing a great variety of wildlife, perhaps best observed via a boat cruise for an authentic Out-of-Africa feeling. Also there are 4 National Parks in the Region, namely Bwabwata, Nkasa Rupara, Mudumu and Mohango for both overland game safaris and water-based adventures, such as rafting or airboating.

I would recommend to spend one or two nights in Bwabwata Park at the Horseshoe Lake, and then go for an adventurous 3-day houseboat safari tour on Chobe and Zambezi rivers. You also might want to consider extending your trip to see the mighty Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe and the incredible Okavango Delta in Botswana for a once in a lifetime experience.

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Sossusvlei



Fish River Canyon



Zambesi Region



Namib Sand Sea

WHERE
TO GO & WHAT
TO DO IN

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