

From BEACH to BUSH

Beautiful Namibia may be just a heartbeat away from our local shores but, as Lauren Mc Diarmid discovers, it feels out of this world

Namibia's natural diversity is second to none. Driving through the country, you'll pass lush green terrain, steep mountain landscapes, and dry desert, but watching the view change before your eyes, you'll come to appreciate the sentiment that it's not always about the destination, but the journey, too.

Make your visit to this gem of a country an exploration to remember. Just over three hours from Namibia's capital, Windhoek, you can revel in sheer seaside bliss in the coastal city of Swakopmund. Then, hit the road for a scenic five-hour drive to Etosha National Park for a luxe bush break. A best-of-both-worlds holiday you'll love!

Ocean-view opulence

A sense of peace is what you'll discover at Strand Hotel Swakopmund. Before

you've even checked into one of the 125 well-appointed suites, you'll be in awe of the azure scene of the wild Atlantic Ocean straight ahead as you walk through the hotel's front doors. In fact, spectacular views are a given at this stunning establishment. Gazing out of your suite's window, your eyes drift over a pretty courtyard below, before catching sight of the famous 116-year-old Swakopmund Lighthouse peering over the palm trees in the distance.

What better way to kick off your break here than with an indulgent massage, the swish of breaking waves your only soundtrack? Book in for the hour-long Oasis Signature Massage at the hotel's Atlantic Spa, where

a traditional Balinese massage mirrors the rhythmic, rolling motions of the tide's ebb and flow as you breathe in a calming but intoxicating blend of aromatherapy oils. Aaah, bliss!

Feeling suitably relaxed, it's time to take things up a gear, exploring the hotel's surrounds for a day of adventure. Ask the concierge to arrange a half-day tour around Walvis Bay, just a 30-minute drive from the hotel. Here, you can hop

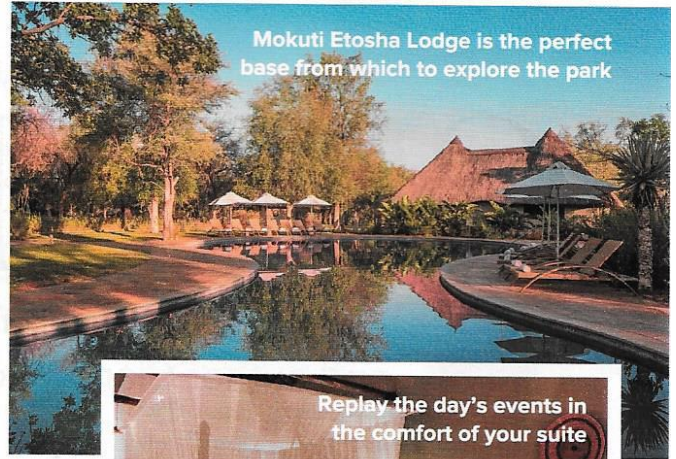
Enjoy a stunning meal
with a view to match



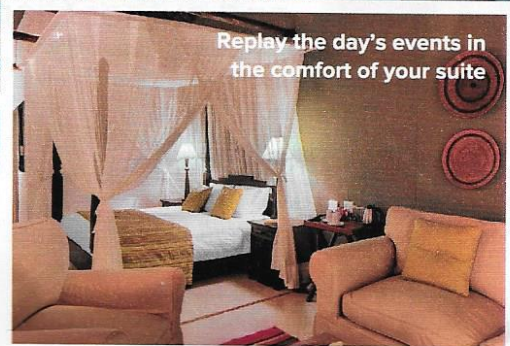


With sights like these, we won't blame you for thinking you're dreaming

The Strand is almost enveloped by the ocean



Mokuti Etosha Lodge is the perfect base from which to explore the park



Replay the day's events in the comfort of your suite



Wild and wonderful

Mokuti Etosha Lodge, on the border of the famous Etosha National Park, is an oasis of a different kind. Here, between time spent soaking up the sights and sound of the bush, relaxation is encouraged and an afternoon nap in the soft embrace of your bed in an air-conditioned Afro-chic suite is never frowned upon.

If you didn't bring a book, pick one up from the library at reception, and set yourself up poolside with a cocktail from the Marula Bar. A visit to Mokuti's spa, set on the outskirts of the lodging ground, is another must. Here, you can unwind as you listen to the sound of bird call and chattering mongoose just outside.

If you're more in the mood for exploring, go on a bush walk along one of the trails leading from the lodge, or take part in one of the lodge's bush drives, to snap photos of the local wild inhabitants, from oryx and giraffe to lions, leopards and white rhino. The park is also a birdwatcher's dream, as it's home to over 300 bird species – so don't forget to pack in your binoculars! During the rainy summer months, the salt pan, which spans a quarter of the park, becomes a flood of pink, as thousands of flamingoes fly in for breeding season – seeing this colourful display first-hand is a once-in-a-lifetime experience!

Chat to the concierge about a unique sundowners offering after your drive. Panoramic views of the sun setting over the bushveld, painting the sky in shades of lavender and peach, will steal your heart – a beautiful way to end the day.

Come dinner, grumbling tummies will meet with a buffet of braai'd meats and a rainbow of salads at the Tambuti Dining Room, followed by a dessert spread to satisfy even the sweetest tooth. Sitting under the night sky, full and content, the festive vibe captures the warmth and raw, natural beauty that's the heartbeat of this captivating country.

aboard a leisurely cruise, marvelling at the hundreds of seals of every size that live on the peninsula colony. Of course, Namibia's sand dunes are not to be missed, so once you're back on dry land, do book a 4x4 drive to explore them – views from the top are, in a word, breathtaking.

Back at the hotel, you'll be ready to dig in to dinner at one of the two superb on-site eateries. Head to Brewer & Butcher if you'd like to sample their German specialities – the cuisine a reminder of Swakopmund's history as a former German colonial town. Highly recommended is the Schweinshaxe dish of roast pork knuckle and bratkartoffeln (fried spuds), to be enjoyed with a craft beer, of course. For something easier on the waistline, head to the upmarket Ocean Cellar for the freshest oysters in town. Enjoy a relaxing sundowner on the terrace, overlooking the ocean and neighbouring Mole beach, toasting to a day well spent in this paradise.

'Thousands of flamingoes fly in on the salt pan – what a sight!'

BOOK YOUR STAY

For a two-person Standard Room at the Strand Hotel, you'll pay from R2 680pn, including breakfast.

Valid till 30 November 2018; strandhotelswakopmund.com

At Mokuti Etosha Lodge, a two-person Standard Room costs from R1 794pn, including breakfast. Valid till 30 June 2018; mokutietoshalodge.com

Lauren's trip was organised by travel specialists at Outlook Africa. Visit outlookafrica.co.za or call on 012 809 2784. w&h