

Namibia

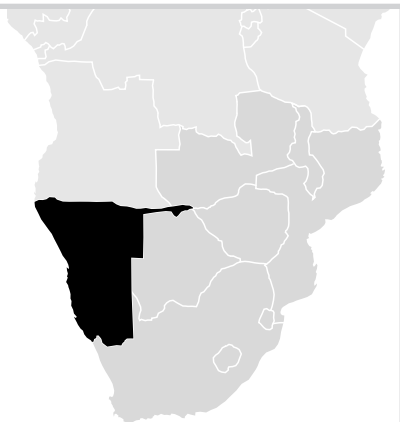
Wedged between the Kalahari and the South Atlantic, Namibia enjoys both vast potential and promise as among the youngest countries in Africa. One of Africa's hidden gems, Namibia remains a frontier realm for intrepid travellers to discover. Here you will find the oldest rust-red desert in the world, quintessential African landscapes teeming with wildlife, preternaturally blue skies stretching above vast open horizons, and silent spaces where emptiness and desolation can quickly become overwhelming. Namibia is also a photographer's dream, boasting wild seascapes, rugged mountains, lonely deserts, stunning wildlife, colonial cities and nearly unlimited elbow room.

A predominantly arid country, Namibia can be divided into four main topographical regions: the Namib Desert and coastal plains in the west, the eastward-sloping Central Plateau, the Kalahari along the borders with South Africa and Botswana, and the densely wooded bushveld of the Kavango and Caprivi regions. This defining geography fosters one of the largest animal congregations on the planet, alongside one of the lowest human population densities, a rare combination that yields unequalled opportunities for wildlife watching. At Etosha National Park, one of the world's grandest safari parks, a single watering hole can foster literally dozens of species.

Namibia also draws its identity – and indeed its name – from the Namib, one of the oldest and driest deserts in the world. This is in marked contrast to the Kalahari, a semi-arid landscape that is covered with trees and criss-crossed by ephemeral rivers and fossil watercourses. It is one of the continent's most prominent geographical features, and stretches across parts of Congo, Angola, Zambia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 825,000 sq km
- **Capital** Windhoek
- **Country code** ☎ 264
- **Famous for** Namib Desert, Kalahari, Etosha Pan
- **Languages** English, Afrikaans, German, Oshivambo, Herero, Nama
- **Money** Namibian dollar (N\$)
- **Phrase** Howzit? (How are you?)
- **Population** 2.1 million



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Sossusvlei** (p362) Watch the sun rise from the tops of flaming red dunes on the edge of ephemeral salt pans.
- **Etosha National Park** (p321) Go on a self-drive safari in one of the continent's premier wildlife venues.
- **Swakopmund** (p346) Get your adrenaline fix at this popular extreme-sports capital of Namibia.
- **Fish River Canyon** (p374) Test your endurance on the five-day hike through one of the world's largest canyons.
- **Off the beaten track** (p340) Have a face-to-face encounter with the Himba, one of Namibia's most iconic peoples.

ITINERARIES

- **Three days** Namibia's tourist highlight is the expansive sand sea of the Namib (p364) and, if you have only a few days to visit, this is where you'll want to focus. From Sesriem (p363), spend a day hiking through the dunes, or arrange for a scenic flyover from the beach town of Swakopmund (p346).
- **One week** Combine a visit to the Namib with a safari through Etosha National Park (p321), one of the continent's most distinctive safari experiences. Splurge on a rental car, and get ready for some hair-raising, self-driven good times.
- **One month** With a month, you can hire a 4WD or use a reputable safari company and see the best of the country: in addition to sights listed above, you could also hike the Fish River Canyon (p374), visit the Himba in Opuwo (p340) and go on an expedition along the Skeleton Coast (p344) and through Khaudom Game Reserve (p329) in the Kalahari.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Namibia's climatic variations correspond roughly to its geographical subdivisions. In the arid Central Namib, summer daytime temperatures may climb to over 40°C, but can fall to below freezing at night. Rainfall is heaviest in the northeast, which enjoys a subtropical climate, and along the Okavango River, it reaches over 600mm annually. The northern and interior regions experience the 'little rains' between October and December. The main stormy period occurs from January to April.

HOW MUCH?

- **Dune surfing** N\$340
- **Foreign newspaper** N\$30
- **Night in a budget hotel** N\$80
- **Package of kudu biltong** N\$15
- **Traditional German dinner** N\$65

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** N\$7
- **1L of bottled water** N\$3
- **Bottle of beer** N\$8
- **Souvenir T-shirt** N\$90
- **Snack** N\$12

Note that accommodation is frequently booked out in national parks and other tourist areas, especially during public holidays. The busiest times are consistently during the Namibian, South African (see p570) and European school holidays. See p745 for more on the climate in Southern Africa.

HISTORY

For information on the general history of Southern Africa, see p32.

The Scramble for Africa

The Germans, under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, were late entering the European scramble for Africa. Bismarck had always been against colonies; he considered them an expensive illusion, famously stating, 'My map of Africa is here in Europe. Here is Russia and here is France and here we are in the middle. That is my map of Africa'. But he was to be pushed into an ill-starred colonial venture by the actions of a Bremen merchant called Adolf Lüderitz.

Having already set up a trading station in Lagos (Nigeria) in 1881, Lüderitz convinced the Nama chief, Joseph Fredericks, to sell Angra Pequena, where Lüderitz established his second station, trading in the stinking guano of thousands of cormorants that nest along the coast. He then petitioned the German chancellor for protection. Bismarck, still trying to stay out of Africa, politely requested the British at Walvis Bay to say whether they had any interest in the matter but they never