

Namibia

Wedged between the Kalahari and the South Atlantic, Namibia enjoys vast potential and promise as one of the youngest countries in Africa. A veritable hidden gem, Namibia remains very much 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, extraordinarily 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, 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 to the northeast. 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.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 825,000 sq km
- **ATMs** Found in most large towns around the country
- **Borders** Angola, Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe – all accessible overland except Zimbabwe, which has no direct border crossing with Namibia
- **Budget** Budget US\$30 to US\$50, midrange and top-end US\$75 to US\$125
- **Capital** Windhoek
- **Languages** English, Afrikaans, German, Owambo, Herero, Nama, Damara
- **Money** Namibian dollar; US\$1 = N\$7.41; €1 = N\$10.64
- **Population** 2.1 million
- **Seasons** Long rainy season (January to April), dry season (May to September), short rainy season (October to December)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 264; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +2
- **Visa** None required for citizens of Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Canada or the USA



HOW MUCH?

- **Dune surfing** US\$45
- **Foreign newspaper** US\$4
- **Night in a budget hotel** US\$10
- **Museum admission** under US\$1
- **Traditional German dinner** US\$9

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$0.95
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.40
- **Bottle of Windhoek, Tafel or Castle beer** US\$1.10
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$12
- **Snack of game jerky** US\$1.60

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Sossusvlei** (p995) Watch the sun rise from the tops of flaming red dunes on the edge of ephemeral salt pans.
- **Etosha National Park** (p1000) Go on a self-drive safari in one of the continent's premier wildlife venues.
- **Swakopmund** (p992) Get your adrenaline fix at the extreme-sports capital of Namibia.
- **Fish River Canyon** (p1005) Test your endurance on a five-day hike through one of the world's largest canyons.
- **Opuwo** (p999) Have a face to face encounter with the Himba, one of Namibia's most iconic peoples.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

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

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Namibia's number-one tourist highlight is the expansive sand sea of the

Namib. If you have only a few days to visit, this is where you'll want to focus. From Sesriem (p995), spend a day hiking through the dunes, or arrange for a scenic flight from the beach town of Swakopmund (p992).

- **One Week** Combine a visit to the Namib with a safari through Etosha National Park (p1000), one of the continent's most distinctive safari experiences. Splurge on a hire car, and get ready for some hair-raising, self-driven good times.
- **One Month** With a month to explore the country, you can hire a 4WD or use a reputable safari company and see the best of the country: in addition to the sights listed above, you could also hike the Fish River Canyon (p1005), visit the Himba in Opuwo (p999) and go on an expedition along the Skeleton Coast (p997) or through Khaudom Game Reserve (p1004) in the Kalahari.

HISTORY**Pre-Colonial Period**

The first agriculturalists and iron workers of definite Bantu-speaking origin in southern Africa belonged to the Gokomere culture. They settled the temperate savannah and cooler uplands of Zimbabwe and were the first occupants of the Great Zimbabwe site, in the southeastern part of modern-day Zimbabwe, where a well-sheltered valley presented an obvious place to settle. Cattle ranching became the mainstay of the community and earlier hunting-and-gathering San groups either retreated to the west or were enslaved or absorbed.

At the same time the San communities were also coming under pressure from the Khoi-Khoi (the ancestors of the Nama), who probably entered the region from the south. The Khoi-Khoi were loosely organised into tribes and raised livestock. They gradually displaced the San, becoming the dominant group in the region until around 1500.

During the 16th century, the Herero arrived in Namibia from the Zambezi Valley and occupied the north and west of the country. As ambitious pastoralists, they inevitably came into conflict with the Khoi-Khoi over the best grazing lands and water sources. Eventually, given their superior strength and numbers, nearly all the indigenous Namibian groups submitted to the Herero.