



Namibia

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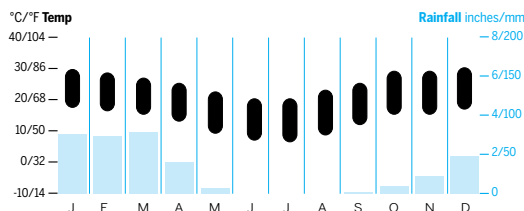
Why Go?

A journey through Southern Africa reveals its otherworldly face when you cross the border into the vast reaches of Namibia. The combination of space and landscapes ensures that a trip through this country is one of the great road adventures of the region. Natural wonders such as that mighty gash in the earth at Fish River Canyon and Etosha National Park enthrall, but it's the lonely desert roads cutting through swirling sands that will stay with you. Here, dunes in the world's oldest desert meet crashing rollers along the wild Atlantic coast, and amongst all this is a German legacy evident in the cuisine, art nouveau architecture and festivals.

Namibia is also the headquarters of adventure activities in Southern Africa, with myriad opportunities for skydiving, sandboarding or camel riding, to name but a few. However, whether your desert appreciation comes from behind an airconditioned window, or from hearing the crunch of earth under your boots, travel in Namibia will sear itself in your mind long after the desert vistas fade.

When to Go

Windhoek



May–Oct Best for wildlife viewing, as animals congregate around the few remaining waterholes.

Jun–Aug Coastal towns of Swakopmund and Walvis Bay are subject to miserable sandstorm conditions.

Nov–Apr The low season as the wet gets into full swing; downpours from January to April.

WINDHOEK

061 / POP 340,000

Central Windhoek is a modern, well-groomed city where office workers lounge around Zoo Park at lunchtime, tourists funnel through Post St mall admiring African curios, and taxis whizz around honking at potential customers.

It's not a big city, making it eminently walkable; add to this a mixed population, a pedestrian-friendly city centre, a relaxed, relatively hassle-free pace and an utterly cosmopolitan outlook and Windhoek makes for very pleasant exploration indeed. Of course, that's only part of the story: a trip into Katutura, the once-ramshackle township on the outskirts of the city – now just another outer suburb – provides an insight into the reality of most people's lives within the boundaries of the capital.

Windhoek makes a great place to begin or break a journey through Namibia and Southern Africa. The accommodation choices, food variety, cultural sights, shopping and African urban buzz give it an edge not found anywhere else in Namibia.

History

Windhoek has only existed for just over a century. The modern name Windhoek, or 'windy corner', was corrupted from the original 'Winterhoek' during the German colonial occupation. At that time, it became the headquarters for the German Schutztruppe, which was ostensibly charged with brokering peace between the warring Herero and Nama peoples. For over 10 years around the turn of the 20th century, Windhoek served as the administrative capital of German South-West Africa.

Sights & Activities

Windhoek is not really known for its tourist attractions, but if you're here for a few days and have time to kill it's an easy and interesting city for a stroll.

Zoo Park

PARK

(Map p250; ☀dawn-dusk) Although this leafy park served as a public zoo until 1962, today it functions primarily as a picnic spot and shady retreat for lunching office workers. Of course, 5000 years ago the park was the site of a Stone Age elephant hunt, as evidenced by the remains of two elephants and several quartz tools found here in the early 1960s. This prehistoric event is honoured by the

park's prominent **elephant column**, designed by Namibian sculptor Dörthe Berner.

A rather anachronous mate to the elephant column is the **Kriegerdenkmal** (War Memorial), topped by a rather frightening golden imperial eagle, which was dedicated in 1987 to the memory of German Schutztruppe soldiers who died in the Nama wars of 1893–94.

Christuskirche

CHURCH

(Map p250; Fidel Castro St) Windhoek's best-recognised landmark, and something of an unofficial symbol of the city, this German Lutheran church stands on a traffic island and lords it over the city centre. This unusual building, constructed from local sandstone in 1907, was designed by architect Gottlieb Redecker in conflicting neo-Gothic and art-nouveau styles. The result looks strangely edible, and is somewhat reminiscent of a whimsical gingerbread house. The altarpiece, the *Resurrection of Lazarus*, is a copy of the renowned work by Rubens. To view the interior, pick up the key during business hours from the nearby church office on Peter Müller St.

Tintenpalast

NOTABLE BUILDING

(Map p250; ☎288 9111; www.parliament.gov.na; admission free; ☀tours 9am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri) The former administrative headquarters of German South West Africa have been given a new mandate as the Namibian parliament building. As a fitting homage to the bureaucracy of government, the name of the building means 'Ink Palace', in honour of all the ink spent on official paperwork.

The building is remarkable mainly for its construction from indigenous materials. The surrounding gardens, which were laid out in the 1930s, include an olive grove and a proper bowling green. In the front, have a look at Namibia's first post-independence monument, a bronze-cast statue of the Herero chief Hosea Kutako, who was best known for his vehement opposition to South African rule.

Turnhalle

HISTORICAL BUILDING

(Map p250; Bahnhof St) The Turnhalle was built in 1909 as a practise hall for the Windhoek Gymnastic Club, though in 1975 it was modernised and turned into a conference hall. On 1 September of that year, it served as the venue for the first Constitutional Conference on Independence for South West Africa, which subsequently came to be