

VIEW OVER AFRICA

SOMETIMES YOU NEED TO
JUST TAKE IT FROM THE TOP –
A 12-DAY NAMIBIAN
FLYING SAFARI



Although not rich with savannah, like Kenya, or bestowed with gorilla rainforests, like Uganda, this sparsely inhabited country in southern Africa has something else – the forever, and ever, dunes. Namibia, named after the oldest desert in the world, the Namib, has now realised that it can capitalise on what it has most of: sand.

There is something primal and truly earthy about Namibia, away from the current mass tourism of South Africa and the adventure-seeking of visitors to Botswana; the country holds a connection to the beginning of time. Although only a small percentage of the tribes still exist, Namibia is home to some of the original hunter-gather people. Their presence, and their untouched virtue, enlivens the remote parts of the land here. Their lessons, which remain ever-fertile with simple life philosophy – valuing that above the constant drone of bigger, better and more – are written in the sand.

“The San have inhabited southern Africa for at least 30 000 years and are one of 14 known surviving ancestral population clusters from which modern humans descend,” I read online as I wait to board my flight. My knowledge of these sand people, with their unique click-sound vernacular, comes from seeing an old BBC production from the 1950s by South African author Laurens van der Post, who referred to these people as the “lost soul” of all mankind.

The flight from Cape Town, a quick two-hour wink with Air Namibia, is the first sip of the country from the skies. If you ask a seasoned Namibia traveller, he



will tell you that seeing it from up above a cloud or two, in complete stillness, is how the universe intended for it to be seen and appreciated. Descending on the capital, Windhoek, the surrounding masculine scenery and isolated beauty are what strike me about this tucked-away little part of Africa.

Stepping into Windhoek is the proverbial step back in time – a small town with Germanic roots and very little connection to the reality of the world. Originally used by indigenous people of the region, due to a spring, it was Jonker Afrikaner who settled here in 1840. But Windhoek holds just a moment's interest for me – an overnight at The Olive Grove and then an early-morning charter to the camp in Damaraland.

A tiny plane ticking off into the big African skies, and the wind creeping in around me, starts my real journey into this desert country. Looking down at a wad of nothingness, framed by cyan and dust,



the understanding of real luxury whispers. Pristine wilderness, nowhere, eternal views and the desert's magical cape have enveloped even me, the city-dweller, as I head out to the northern territory. The space, the endless space – how could anyone ever recover from this sight?

Damaraland, an inland area close to the Skeleton Coast, romances with early-morning mist coming off the cold Atlantic Ocean and hot desert air kissing all the way from the canyons. This is where I find my next moment of meditative calm. Although not thick with wildlife, this tract is a perfect example of how nature's laws of sustenance ordain treks for the animals, and humans just visiting.

Days here, which feel like weeks, are well spent tracking down the shy desert-adapted elephant that lives in the area, the magnificent and iconic oryx, and, of course, the pointy-lipped black rhino. Fast-paced life is something I now look at from the outside in, the window of it slightly smudged. Even my attire changes; t-shirts become more slumped and the need for shoes simply dismantles. My longing for anything digital is replaced by simple moments observing an ant, or stretching out at the sunset.

Moving by charter to Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp, the privilege of access to the wilderness becomes apparent. Located in a private concession between the Palmwag area and the Skeleton Coast National Park, this is as remote as the Kaokoveld can be. Flying over old shipwrecks and stark coasts, ancient navigators and conquerors come to mind – their desire to grasp Africa and its soulfulness liken to my own. How can this continent hold such a grasp on me?



The coastal camp, the latest to open in the area, is accessible only by our light aircraft, and is located in a wide basin at the confluence of two tributaries, with hills smiling from east and west. Besides seeing rare plants like the welwitschia (called a living fossil by some), and animals like the shaggy hyena, the lunar-like landscape awes me. The gravel plains covered with low-lying plants, rock formations, flood plains and dry riverbeds bring me to a state of quiet and calm.

Days are spent on nature walks and game drives, and dunes become playgrounds with buggies and boards. Nights are long in the desert; they allow for proper rest, away from modern-day sidetracks and bright lights. Here the stars rock me to sleep and the silence is what wakes me.

Again by charter, the next stop is Ongava – just a small flutter inland, situated on a hill to take advantage of the watering hole below. Sundowners here are in the company of wildlife. The game drives from Ongava are to the famed Etosha National Park, which encloses a giant pan with silvery mirages toying with the savannah grassland and thorny shrubbery.

The park, proclaimed a reserve in 1907, is known for its abundance of game, and is reported even to be visible from space. In the rainy season the flamingoes congregate in the saltpan, among the 340 bird species to be found in the park. I hang up the binoculars to picnic on the grass, contemplating wildlife sanctuaries and the need for conservation in the world today. The pristine wilderness has become the ultimate in rare luxury.



Whether it's tracking a white rhino or having drinks at the watering hole, Namibia has managed to quiet my overall pace. The gentle flights across the country, with innocent animals mutely staring at my soul from across the desert land, have given me a contemplative headspace that flickers in and out with thoughts.

The city – what I remember of it – comes back into sight. Life goes on as it always has, but Namibia's fingerprints are all over me, reminding me of a simple, reflective existence.

For more information on this trip, and for making bookings, contact African Adventure Company:
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