Namibia’s National Parks

“Our national parks are one of Namibia’s most valuable assets. They are our national treasures and their tourism potential should be harnessed for the benefit of all people.”

His Excellency Hifikepunye Pohamba
President of the Republic of Namibia
Exploring Namibia’s natural treasures

Sparsely populated and covering a vast area of 823,680 km², roughly three times the size of the United Kingdom, Namibia is unquestionably one of Africa’s premier nature tourism destinations. There is also no doubt that the Ministry of Environment and Tourism is custodian to some of the biggest, oldest and most spectacular parks on our planet.

Despite being the most arid country in sub-Saharan Africa, the range of habitats is incredibly diverse. Visitors can expect to encounter coastal lagoons dense with flamingos, towering sand-dunes, and volcanic plains carpeted with spring flowers, thick forests teeming with seasonal elephant herds up to 1,000 strong and lush sub-tropical wetlands that are home to crocodile, hippopotami and buffalo.

The national protected area network of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism covers 140,394 km², 17 per cent of the country, and while the century-old Etosha National and Namib-Naukluft parks are deservedly regarded as the flagships of Namibia’s conservation success, all the country’s protected areas have something unique to offer. The formidable Waterberg Plateau holds on its summit an ecological ‘lost world’ cut off
by geology from its surrounding plains for millennia. The Fish River Canyon is Africa’s grandest, second in size only to the American Grand Canyon. Khaudum and the newly proclaimed Mangetti National Park are two of Africa’s last great wilderness areas.

Namibia is proud of her parks and can take equal pride in her conservation successes. Species like the black rhino that seemed destined for extinction are on the increase. Wildlife migration corridors, once blocked by fences, are being re-opened. Transfrontier parks have been established, linking not only protected areas and nations, but also easing access for wildlife and visitors alike. In the very near future Namibia will be at the heart of the largest conservation area in Africa.

‘Parks and People’ is a Ministry of Environment and Tourism philosophy. The ministry is constantly refining and expanding the protected area network, placing great emphasis on local community involvement and ensuring that benefits are shared and that they spur both local development and conservation success.

So visit our parks and unlock their wonders for yourself. You will treasure your memories.
Mamili (Nkasa Lupala) National Park

Lush, green, wet – three words rarely associated with Namibia’s stunning national parks – aptly describe Mamili (Nkasa Lupala) National Park. A complex channel of reed beds, lakes and islands form the 318-km² Mamili (Nkasa Lupala) National Park, the largest wetland area with conservation status in Namibia. Local conservancies, along with Namibia’s Ministry of Environment and Tourism, play a vital role in protecting the flora and fauna of the park, including Namibia’s largest herds of buffalo and the last remnant stronghold of red lechwe. These magnificent creatures are among the highlights of any game-viewing experience. The waters are also home to families of hippopotamus and elephants that swim between islands and countries that border on the Caprivi Region. Tracks that wind against high river reeds, through deep pools and near rivers where crocodiles lie in wait make the park a dream for 4x4 enthusiasts. Slip through thick black mud, so soft it is called cotton, and dice with the odds of getting stuck! During the rainy season, as much as 80% of the park can become flooded and inaccessible to vehicles, yet throughout the years, the watercourses of the park have been sanctuary to more than 430 bird species. Mamili (Nkasa Lupala) is wild Africa at its best.
Mudumu National Park
A vast, 1,010-km² protected area centred on the Mudumu Mulapo fossil river course, Mudumu National Park offers the best of two environmental extremes – wood and water. Be dwarfed by immense leadwood trees, gaze in wonder at vast herds of wild animals, and experience one of Namibia’s rarest sights and sounds – running water – as perennial rivers provide the lifeline of this region. Dense mopane woodlands are at the core of the park, while the spectacular Kwando River marks its western border. The combination of forest and water ensures a wealth of life. Large herds of Burchell’s zebra and common impala graze on the plains, while rare roan and sable antelope seek shelter in the forest. The waterways are inhabited by small groups of shy sitatunga and red lechwe, and also lone spotted-necked otters and crocodiles. The entire park is alive with more than 400 species of birds. Traversing water and land, herds of elephant and buffalo are equally at home anywhere in the park. Mudumu can be explored on foot, but be careful, with so much game, the park is also a place of predators. Lions roam, leopards hunt at night and packs of lively, yet illusive wild dogs run through the Mudumu National Park, creating a world of unexpected wonders.
Bwabwata National Park
Welcome to the future, the Bwabwata National Park, where human and wildlife populations are now living in a status quo that offers tremendous benefits to both conservation and rural community development. Visit local craft markets and pitch a tent in one of the neat community campsites of the area and watch the hippo-frequented rivers flow gently by. Soak your feet in the spray at Popa Falls, Namibia’s gem on the Okavango River. Take unaccompanied or guided game drives across dramatic flood plains, through mature Kalahari woodland and along the shores of the temporary pans. Fill your Big Five tick list with buffalo sightings and scan the skies for the over 400 bird species that have been recorded here. Experience close encounters of the elephant kind, while being careful to give these giants the right of way. The rivers, wetlands and forests of Bwabwata, Mudumu and Mamili (Nkasa Lupala) national parks are, in fact, part of a vast five-nation conservation area that is home to the largest population of elephant in the world. And remember, your visit will not just be personally rewarding, but will also bring tangible financial benefits to the local community, fostering a harmonious co-existence between wild and human residents and neighbours of the Bwabwata National Park.
Khaudum National Park
Hidden away in Namibia’s north-eastern Kavango Region, the Khaudum National Park is not to be taken lightly. Rarely visited, very large, extremely wild and with only a rudimentary tourist infrastructure, it could be described as Namibia’s ‘forgotten wilderness’. If you have an adventurous streak, however, forgetting it would be a big mistake! Master the challenging 4x4 trails that weave through plains, dry river beds and thick Kalahari forests. The trails may come as a shock to those used to ‘the path well travelled’ – the park receives fewer visitors than elephants in a year. Relax at one of the state-of-the art hides and enjoy watching the wildlife that congregates around the 12 established waterholes. Admire the park’s stately baobab trees. The Khaudum is home to the African wild dog, Africa’s most endangered large predator, plus it is a stronghold for spectacular herds of rare roan antelope. Only the border with Botswana and a 55-km section of the western border of the park are fenced. This open park system ensures that wildlife can pursue hereditary migratory routes to and from the water-rich Okavango River and floodplains, including the Okavango Delta, a mere 150 km from the park boundary. For anyone who relishes the adventures of raw, real Africa, Khaudum National Park is the place to be.
Waterberg Plateau Park

Rising some 200 metres above the surrounding African savannah, the Waterberg Plateau Park with its flamboyant brick-red sandstone formations and lush green vegetation, presents a natural fortress for conservation and discovery. Over 150 million years ago, dinosaurs roamed the plateau at Waterberg. Today, you can too. Thanks to successful breeding and conservation initiatives, eland, Africa’s largest antelope, black and white rhinoceros, disease-free buffalo, and sable and roan antelope are some of the animals you might encounter on the plateau. Take on the challenge of a three-day hike, accompanied by a park ranger, to the summit of the Waterberg, or experience the thrill of setting out on your own 42-km self-guided trail. Visit the Vulture Restaurant, a conservation effort designed to attract hundreds of vultures, including Namibia’s last remaining breeding population of rare Cape vultures. Inquisitive baboons roam the plateau and surrounding cliffs. Dense plant cover provides the perfect shelter for several species of mongoose, 34 species of lizards, and more than 45 species of snake. Guided game drives on the plateau, and time spent in a hide lying in wait for rare species to approach a waterhole, give you the chance to learn more about one of the most unique conservation areas in the world.
Etosha National Park

One of the greatest wildlife spectacles on earth – herds of elephant, black-maned lions and the world’s largest population of rare black rhinos – roam the plains of the Etosha National Park. For more than 100 years through fire, rain and drought, Etosha has provided a vast sanctuary for wildlife. Watch as thunderstorms consume the landscape during the wet season. For a brief period, the plains are alive with colourful flowers and young antelope. But, when the air turns hot and dry, life is drawn to one of Etosha’s 86 springs, fountains and waterholes. Savour the thrill of spotting animals hidden in the bush, or simply wait for animals to come to you. Herds of wildebeest, lines of zebra, groups of ostrich and elegant giraffe emerge out of the heat haze to drink at one of the seeps found at the edge of the magnificent Etosha Pan. At night, soak in both the silence and the charged atmosphere at one of Etosha’s three floodlit waterholes where you never know what might appear out of the darkness. Since 1974, the Etosha Ecological Institute has supported local and international scientists as they explore questions related to animal behaviour, ecology and conservation. Their work is not only vital to Etosha’s future, but to the world beyond the borders of the park.
Skeleton Coast Park
Covering 1.6 million hectares, the Skeleton Coast Park remains one of the world’s last great wildernesses: harsh, still not completely explored, untamed and extraordinarily beautiful. Wreathed in sea fog, lashed by Atlantic waves, and scoured by high gritty winds, the Skeleton Coast is aptly named. Take a stroll into – but not too far into – the stark desert landscape. Search the dunes for a glimpse of the small creatures that scurry across the sand or the larger ones, like desert-dwelling elephants and lions, that move for vast distances in their quest to survive in the desert. Explore the geological wonders of the desert – dunes that roar and rocks that glisten with promise. Or stick to the coast and fish off the rocky beaches. The nutrient-rich Benguela Current provides the potential for a good feast on kabeljou (cob) or a good fight from bronze whaler sharks. For well over 500 years, ships have run aground on the shores of the Skeleton Coast and wrecked mariners have struggled vainly to cross the expanse of waterless dunes, mountains and lichen-covered gravel plains in search of safety. A dreamscape of profound harshness and beauty, and an important conservation area for rare desert-dwelling animals, this is the magic of the Skeleton Coast Park.
Cape Cross Seal Reserve

A dense mat of black carpets the beach at Cape Cross. Then, slowly, the mass comes into focus and thousands of individual seals take shape. Cape Cross Seal Reserve is the largest Cape fur seal colony in the world. During the breeding season in November and December, there may be up to 210,000 seals at Cape Cross. Predators such as black-backed jackal and brown hyaena are drawn to the breeding colony. Human visitors to Cape Cross can take an interpretative walk along the edge of the colony and learn more about these captivating creatures and the intriguing history of Cape Cross. In 1486, Portuguese explorer, Diego Cão, erected a stone cross, establishing Portugal's claim to the territory on this barren coast. But natural life has defined the area before and since. The cold Benguela Current sustains a wealth of marine life. It also produces fog that supports an intriguing variety of animals and plants, including over a hundred species of lichens. On the gravel plains near the coast, the Damara tern, a small swallow-like bird endemic to Namibia, breeds in shallow scrapes. Although protected, the nesting grounds of the terns and the lichen fields are under continual threat from thoughtless off-road driving. Do your part for conservation and adventure and take the road to the Cape Cross Seal Reserve.
Namib-Naukluft Park

One of Africa’s largest and oldest protected areas, the Namib-Naukluft Park covers an area of almost 50 000 km² and protects some of the most varied and extraordinary ecosystems in Namibia, the only country in the world named after its desert! On this grand scale, the Namib-Naukluft provides a sanctuary to large mammals including black rhino (re-introduced to their former range in 2007 to mark the centenary of the park), Hartmann’s mountain zebra, leopard and cheetah. A spectacular study in contrast and extremes, the park provides something for every adventurous spirit to explore. Hike the rugged gorges and paths in the formidable Naukluft mountain massif or test yourself and your vehicle on the two-day, 73 km 4x4 trail. Photograph some of the planet’s oldest and most peculiar plants on the Welwitschia Trail. Explore the Sesriem Canyon. Go birding at Sandwich Harbour, home to up to 50 000 wetland birds including spectacular flocks of greater and lesser flamingos. Feel transported to another realm by the vast and inimical gravel plains of the aptly named Moonscape. Explore the isolated mountains that are sprinkled liberally throughout the park. Search for unexpected botanical treasures, and be rewarded by awe-inspiring views of the Namib-Naukluft Park.
Sossusvlei
Towerimg dunes, shimmering pans and an endless sea of sand, this is Sossusvlei. In the Nama language, Sossusvlei means ‘the gathering place of water’, but it is defined more by its lack of water. Located at the end point of the ephemeral Tsauchab River, Sossusvlei is a huge clay pan, enclosed by gigantic mountains of sand, including one of the highest dunes in the world, rising 325 metres above sea level. Climb to the top of the dunes and slide down them just for fun. Take in the endless vistas of the Namib sand sea, and challenge the inner artist or photographer in you to capture this spectacular landscape. Discover Hiddenvlei and Naravlei, and the highly photogenic Dead Pan, a large ghostly expanse of dried white clay, punctuated by skeletons of ancient camel-thorn trees; these are sunken treasures that shimmer in the dunes around Sossusvlei. Watch the sunrise over one of the oldest, driest places on earth. Be bewitched by the Southern Cross, a part of an astonishing depth of constellations, planets and stars that bring magic to desert nights. Explore nearby Sesriem Canyon, where thousands of years of erosion expose layer upon layer of rock and time in a narrow gorge that plunges down 30–40 metres. Learn more of the plant and animal life that has adapted to survive in extraordinary ways in one of the most captivating deserts on earth.
Sperrgebiet National Park
Known as the ‘forbidden territory’, the 26 000-km² Sperrgebiet National Park is now yours to explore. Namibia’s newest national park, the Sperrgebiet, is home to a profusion of endemic succulent species that is unrivalled anywhere else on the planet, making it one of the world’s top twenty-five Biodiversity Hotspots. While the Sperrgebiet is largely undeveloped and inaccessible, you now have the opportunity to explore this wild landscape. Ministry of Environment and Tourism concessionaires from Lüderitz take visitors into the northern extremity of the park where they can admire the colossal 55-metre tall Bogenfels rock arch, the modern diamond mine and the mysterious ghost town at Elizabeth Bay, the ghost town of Pomona and Marchental – the famous ‘Fairy Tale Valley’, where diamonds were once so common they could be grabbed in handfuls as they gleamed in the light of the moon. Observe the birds and animals that frequent the Orange River mouth, an internationally renowned Ramsar wetland site. And, of course, don’t miss the succulents, some of which grow as tall as trees and many of which put on a spectacular floral display after winter rains. Due to its world-famous diamonds, the Sperrgebiet has been off-limits to the public for nearly a century. Finally it is time to discover the Sperrgebiet.
/Ai-/Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park

Experience wilderness on a scale unimaginable. Stand at the edge of the largest natural gorge in Africa, and the second-largest canyon in the world, the Fish River Canyon. Revel in the dramatic views from Hell’s Corner and Sulphur Springs where it is almost possible to imagine the dramatic natural forces that began shaping this canyon more than 600 million years ago. Today the /Ai-/Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park protects a vast area that crosses the South African border to encompass one of the world’s richest botanical hot spots. The Fish River is also home to one of the most exhilarating adventures in Southern Africa, the five-day, 90-kilometre Fish River Canyon hiking trail, for which you need a permit. Descend down sheer cliffs until the canyon walls tower more 550 metres above you. Rock art and isolation add to the sense of timelessness that marks this challenging hike. Four-by-four drives along the rugged eastern rim of the canyon afford stunning views across the canyon, or take the more leisurely route along the edge of the Orange River. With rare plants and illusive animals, spectacular scenery and thermal springs, the Fish River Canyon & /Ai-/Ais Richtersveld Transfrontier Park beckons the explorer in you.
Popa Game Park
Rushing rapids, melodious bird calls and the swaying of shady, riverine trees are sounds which typify Popa Game Camp. Located on the Okavango River opposite the Bwabwata National Park, Popa Falls is famous for its setting near a series of rapids that cascade down and across the river. Over 400 species of birds have been recorded here, and tigerfish, threespot and greenheaded tilapia are just some of the game fish that occur in the Okavango River, making it a popular destination for anglers. River cabins, fishing permits, camping, a restaurant and bar are available at Popa Falls Camp.

Mangetti National Park
Home to a large variety of large animals, including elephant, eland, giraffe and rare sable antelope, Mangetti National Park is the latest addition to Namibia’s impressive list of national parks. Previously managed as a game camp for breeding rare and endangered game species, such as black and white rhino, the park’s mandate has been expanded to protect wildlife and vegetation and provide tangible benefits to local communities through careful tourism development. Opening soon, the Mangetti National Park is sure to become a must-see for visitors to Namibia.
West Coast Recreation Area
The West Coast Recreation Area is the 200-km stretch of coastline extending from Swakopmund to the Ugab River. It is recognised for its excellent angling potential. The area is also home to fascinating features such as the Cape Cross Seal Reserve; the Brandberg, the highest point in Namibia and the site of one of the largest concentrations of rock paintings in the world; and the ragged, rugged Spitzkoppe, a climber’s challenge. Lichen fields, unique desert flora and ancient craters are also found here. Along the coast at Mile 14, Jakkalsputz, Mile 72 and Mile 108, there are campsites for anglers.

Gross Barmen Hot Springs
Located on the banks of a tributary of the Swakop River just 92 km from Windhoek, the Gross Barmen Hot Springs Resort is an ideal place to warm up and cool down before continuing to any of Namibia's national parks. The highlight of the resort is the thermal spring that supplies water, at 65°C, to both the indoor and outdoor pools. The reed-beds in the dam and the surrounding natural environment provide ideal opportunities for bird-watching. Walks in the surrounding hills are also a popular activity. Chalets and a restaurant are operated by Namibia Wildlife Resorts.
South West Nature Reserve
Better known as the National Botanic Garden, the South West Nature Reserve is one of Windhoek’s gems. Wander along paths and learn about Namibia’s wealth of indigenous plants. Visit the Desert House, home to rare species from the Namib Desert. The South West Nature Reserve is a must for education and recreation. The garden is open on weekdays between 8:00 and 17:00.

Daan Viljoen Game Park
Less than 20 km from Windhoek, Daan Viljoen Game Park has been an ideal retreat for visitors to Windhoek eager for their first – or last – experience in the wild. The park is being turned into a health resort and when it re-opens, will undoubtedly attract even more guests keen to experience the wild in a healthy, healing atmosphere.

Von Bach Recreation Resort
Just 3 km south of Okahandja, Von Bach Recreation Resort is a great place for water-based adventure. Water-skiing, windsurfing and boating are popular activities. Large-mouth bass and blue kurper are prize catches for freshwater anglers. The surrounding park can be explored on foot. Basic bungalows, picnic and camping sites are available.
Naute Recreation Resort
Fifty-five kilometres south west of Keetmanshoop, the Naute Recreation Resort is popular with water sports enthusiasts and freshwater anglers. The Naute Dam is the second-largest dam in Namibia, covering 23 000 ha and providing sanctuary to springbok, kudu and duiker. A 600-ha area on the south side of the dam is open to the public for boating, fishing and camping. Facilities are basic. Campsites have piped drinking water, but there are no shower facilities or hot water.

Hardap Recreation Resort
Surrounding Namibia’s largest dam, the Hardap Recreation Resort near Mariental, the 252 km² Hardap Game Reserve is perfectly placed for visitors travelling by road from South Africa. A popular destination for water sports and freshwater angling enthusiasts, the game reserve also offers excellent game-viewing and birding opportunities. Visitors can explore the park by road or a circular day walk of 15 km. Wildlife present includes black rhinoceros, kudu, gemsbok, springbok, red hartebeest and steenbok. To date 260 species of birds have been recorded, and the reserve has one of Namibia’s three largest colonies of white pelicans. Namibia Wildlife Resorts operates chalets, a restaurant and camping facilities.
Environmental Care Code

Please adhere to the following:

• Do not remove any plant, animal or mineral material from any of the parks.
• Remember that no matter how relaxed animals in the parks may appear, they are wild! Please keep a respectful distance.
• Do not drive off designated roads and tracks.
• Do not exceed speed limits.
• Camp only in designated areas.
• Remove all your litter.
• Only light fires in designated areas.
• Before you enter the park, make sure you have sufficient petrol, water and other supplies.
• Be aware that you enter the parks at your own risk.
• Adhere to the rules and regulations on your park permit.

Enjoy the natural wonders and adventures found in Namibia’s extraordinary national parks!

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