

Namibia is one of the best self-drive destinations in the world. Its roads are consistently good and the infrastructure developed. The country also offers superb game viewing and classic remote camping situations. Namibia is situated along the south-western coast of the African continent and is a truly remarkable country of contrasts. With a land surface of 824,269 square kilometres it is nearly four times the size of Great Britain. Despite the size it is one of the most sparsely populated countries in Africa. The country's landscapes are an ever-changing kaleidoscope, varying from the Namib dune sea in the west to teak woodlands and waterways in the northeast. The Namib Desert in the west and the Kalahari in the east account for about 22% of the country's surface. Namibia's people are diverse, ranging from the pastoral Himba in the northwest, to the San in the east. The San no longer pursue an exclusively hunter – gatherer existence, but are struggling to adapt to a new way of life. Namibia is also one of the top diamond producing countries in the world.

THE CAPRIVI STRIP

The Caprivi is an odd strip of land whose borders extend unnaturally towards the east, at the top right hand corner of Namibia. Hemmed in by Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana, it was a strategic South African military zone for a long time and for the tourist is a gateway to Victoria Falls. Today it is back in the hands of an independent Namibia and contains several National Parks and considerable safari opportunities. It is the only area of Namibia that is lush and green and well watered by rivers.

CAPRIVI GAME PARK

Wedged between Angola and Botswana the Caprivi Game Park extends along the Okavango River for about 112 miles (180km) until it meets the Kwando River in the east. Although it was proclaimed a park in 1968, it was controlled by the South African Defence Force and not managed as a conservation area. As a result there are few tourist facilities and the terrain is extremely sandy so a 4X4 vehicle is a pre-requisite.

The terrain is generally flat with deciduous woodlands, except for some 97-195 feet high (30-60m) dunes covered in vegetation.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

Although game is present, you may not see much as you are restricted to the single road running through the park.

MUDUMU NATIONAL PARK

The Kwando River runs through this National Park which offers a true African wilderness experience. In contrast to the rest of Namibia, the area is lush with marches, riverine forests, dense savannah and mopane woodland.

Unusually for a National Park there is a private lodge within its boundaries – Lianshulu Lodge – which offers guided walks, nature drives, boating and bird

watching. South of Lianshulu the river breaks up into a labyrinth of channels to form the Linyanti Swamp.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

An astonishing 430 species of birds have been recorded which is nearly 70% of Namibia's total, and much game including the rare sitatunga and red lechwe as well as buffalo, elephant, zebra, antelopes, hippo and crocodiles.

MAMILI NATIONAL PARK

This has the distinction of being the largest wetland area of conservation status in Namibia. It is characterised by a complex network of channels, reed beds, ox-bow lakes and tree-covered islands. The focal points are the two large islands of Nkasa and Lupala in the Kwando/Linyanti River. These islands can be reached by road but only in the dry season. After rains the area becomes flooded cutting them off from the mainland.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

Similar to nearby Mudumu National Park

SEASONS

Rainy season: Rain falls during the hot months of November to March and temperatures and humidity is high. Mosquitoes breed well in these conditions and a visit in the heart of the rainy season is best avoided.

Dry season: May to October is dry and animals tend to congregate along the river. Game is at its most dense and easily visible in the middle and end of the dry season. October becomes very hot with the anticipation of rain making the air heavy.

CAPRIVI GAME RESERVE SPECIALITIES

- Wading elephants, hippos and crocs
- Remarkable bird life
- Lovely riverside lodges
- Fishing excursions
- Boat trips
- Limited visitors

FACTS

This is a malarial area.

NAMIB-NAUKLUFT PARK

In the Nama language, Namib means vast, and this is an understatement. The Namib-Naukluft Park is the largest conservation area in Namibia and one of the largest in the world, at almost 19,305 square miles (50,000 km²). Parts of this park resemble a lunar landscape while other places rise with the purple-hued rocky mountains of the

Naukluft Mountain massif. Just as tall and certainly as impressive are the stunning orange sand dunes of Sossusvlei, blown into razor sharp ridges and peaks by the wind. A few gravel roads traverse the northern section of the park and another leads into the middle dune area of Sossusvlei and Sesriem canyon. The park also incorporates the estuarine lagoon at Sandwich Harbour which is a wetland protected from the ferocious Atlantic Ocean and from any treadmill of visitors as permits are required.

Animals, insects and plants have adapted to live in this generally inhospitable region and get most of their water from sea mists that roll far inland. Although almost 200 miles (320km) from any main road, a visit to Namibia would not be complete without venturing into the Namib-Naukluft Park. If not on foot or vehicle then by light aircraft or hot air balloon, for the best view you will ever get of an endless rippling desert. The trip is worth it as the solitude is immeasurable, and your place in the great scheme of life takes on a new perspective and a curious insignificance.

SOSSUSVLEI

The largest sand dunes in the world are awesomely enormous and eerily enticing. The feminine curves of Sossusvlei's rich ochre sea of sand rise tantalisingly to almost 1,000 feet (305metres), which is 300 feet (91metres) more than their nearest rivals in Arabia. Discarding shoes and plunging bare feet into the hot soft sand is the best way to climb to the top, but each step forms a mini sand slide and footprints look more like an insect trail as they are dwarfed by the sheer size and immensity of the dunes.

Geologists suspect that this supreme desert, that covers most of the Namib Naukluft National Park, is the oldest desert known to man. The older the dune the brighter the colour from slow iron oxidisation and a zillion tiny fragments of garnets. These dunes refract spectacular colours with the changing light and turn from burnt orange through reds to deepest mauve.

About two-thirds of a mile (1km) away from Sossusvlei is the Dead Vlei – a salt encrusted dry lake named for its large dead camel thorn trees. These tell of a time when plentiful water allowed them to grow to full height, but as the climate changed and the water disappeared they died. Amidst this desperate scene comes new life in the form of a few young camel thorn trees struggling bravely to survive and on the western slopes, some bright green! Nama melons defying the shifting sand.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

Apart from infrequent rains, the flora and fauna of the interior relies on a regular mist that rolls up to 62miles (100km) inland. All creatures make use of this life-giving moisture and the head-standing beetle has come up with a unique adaptation. As the fog descends it tilts forward and droplets of moisture run down grooves in its body to its mouth.

The Anchieta's dune lizard has an interesting way of coping with the scorching sand, and does a kind of thermoregulatory dance putting only two feet down at a time and hopping from one pair of legs to the other, using the tail as a stabiliser.

Snakes are common in the Namib, but few of the 20 species are ever seen. At sunset you may hear the staccato clicking call of some elusive bird, but this is in fact the nightly call of a male barking gecko.

There are mammals here too and the impressive black and taupe, spiralled-horned Oryx is master of the vast shadeless wilderness. With the conformation of a stocky pony, he is the thoroughbred of the desert with unique adaptations enabling him to live in this harsh environment. The Oryx can survive with a body temperature as high as 113°F (45°C) (which is usually lethal), because the animal cools blood to the brain by passing it through the nostrils first. Springbok are also able to survive for long periods without water, as long as they can find food with a moisture content of no less than 10%. Spotted hyenas inhabit the Namib Naukluft Park but are rarely seen, while black-backed jackals are more visible. Jackals eat almost anything including rats and mice, birds, insects, reptiles, fruits and berries and therefore survive well in almost any terrain.

The Sandwich Lagoon is an important wetland of pristine beauty, which attracts in the region of 200,000 birds to the lagoon and mudflats. Flamingos constitute the largest percentage of water birds here, which usually fly inland to breed during the rainy season. The lagoon also supports several endangered Red Data species such as chestnut banded plover, white pelican and black necked grebe.

SEASONS

On the rare occasions when it rains, the desert responds amazingly quickly, producing a miracle of yellow flowers, green leaves and sprouting grasses. Ephemeral (short lived) plants appear as if by magic and replenish the seed bank for next year.

Rainy Season: rain usually falls in late summer from February to April, but an 8 year study showed that most showers in the southern Namibia (Sossusvlei area), occurred in the months of December, March and April with an average rainfall of 63mm per annum. However, rainfall is erratic and unpredictable and the high summer temperatures cause fast evaporation. As a result the Namib is classified by international standards as 'hyper-arid'.

Temperatures: From November through to March the daytime temperatures rarely peak below 95°F (35°C) or drop lower than 59°F (15°C) at night. From April to October daytime temperatures range between a very pleasant 77°F (25°C) to 95°F (35°C), with June, July and August recording the lowest night-time temperatures around 41°F (5°C). Temperatures are recorded in the shade and the air feels considerably hotter under the scorching sun with heat radiating off the dunes.

NAMIB-NAUKLUFT SPECIALITIES

- Walking up the largest and brightest coloured sand dunes in the world at Sossusvlei
- Photography where a bad picture is almost impossible
- Coming across the 'picture postcard' Oryx standing by a lone dead tree in the undulating desert
- Flying over an endless rippling desert in small aircraft or hot air balloon
- Walking to Dead Vlei and the white cracked arena on which stand long-dead trees

- Appreciating the small creatures of the desert like head-standing beetles and barking geckos
- Water birds of Sandwich Harbour
- Night gazing into a crystal clear sky full of falling stars and satellites
- Immeasurable space
- Heightened self awareness and perspective on the meanings of life

FACTS

Sandwich Lagoon is only accessible with a permit and is difficult to get to. Sossusvlei lies within a national park which is closed from dusk till dawn so there is no off-road or night driving.

Malaria is most unlikely to be contracted in the desert.

SKELETON COAST

Ghostly shipwrecks on remote and inaccessible shores has given the Skeleton Coast its well-deserved name. This 2 million-hectare (20,000²km) park is one of the most inhospitable and least visited places on earth and is divided into northern and southern sections.

4-wheel drive travellers may enter the southern part but never venture past the skull and crossbones sign at the Ugab River Gate, for fear of getting stuck in the soft sand and running out of fresh water. A fly-in safari is the only way to experience the northern section and is the best way to appreciate the remarkable and changeable scenery.

Sand dunes come in a variety of guises and the Skeleton Coast Park has hummock dunes, transverse dunes and crescent dunes - given to roaring when millions of tiny granules slide down the steep surface. At times the dunes are stopped in their flow by large seasonal rivers which often do not make it all the way to the sea. The windswept dunes and flat plains give way in places to rugged canyons and extensive mountain ranges with walls of richly coloured volcanic rock. Such is the extraordinary geology of this area, that some beaches contain a profusion of multi-coloured pebbles consisting of agates, lava, granites and others.

The attraction for visitors to this park is its untouched and mysterious barren beauty, swept by cold sea breezes and often enveloped in a dense fog. This sea mist accounts for the many maritime remains and with each shipwreck, goes a story of man against nature. Nature almost always wins!

The far-ranging sea mist creeps great distances inland and gives life to a singular unique ecosystem and most unusual plants. The strange 'Elephant's Foot' anchors itself in rock crevices while desert succulents like lithops, look just like pebbles until tiny yellow flowers emerge. The ancient fossil plant, Welwitschia, is also found in this region.

By mid morning the mist has cleared and the timeless beauty of the Skeleton Coast is revealed. Such isolation as is found here is not the usual domain for humans, but those

that visit are privilege to one of the few places on earth where you can experience fearless solitude and become attuned to ocean echoes and desert silence.

Nobody can live on this inhospitable coast, but further inland on the peripheries of the desert, the nomadic Himba tribe ekes out an existence. Clad only in goatskins and jewellery fashioned from leather, metal and shells, the Himba are amongst the most beautiful people in Sub-Saharan Africa. They possess an innate elegance and proud bearing that westerners find difficult to emulate. The Himba protect and adorn their bodies and hair with rich ochre mud mixed with animal fat turning their skin the colour of molten milk-chocolate.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

Desert elephants have been seen in the interior of the Skeleton Coast Park and have even been filmed surfing down sand dunes like snow-boarders. Desert dwelling Oryx are completely at home in such dry conditions and springbok, giraffe, brown hyena, ostrich, rare black rhino and even lion are found inland where riverine bush supports the grazers and fresh water can usually be found.

Cape Frio seal colony contains several thousand Cape fur seals, and whales and dolphins swim this coast on their way to and from breeding grounds. Immense whale skeletons are sometimes seen washed up on the sands.

SEASONS

Summer: October to May sees blue skies with cool to warm rather than hot temperatures.

Winter: in May to September the coast becomes shrouded in mist from mid afternoon to mid morning and a strong westerly wind blows. It never drops below freezing at the coast but inland it cools down very fast in the afternoon and as night falls it can become very cold.

Rainy Season: In lieu of rain, the sea mist gives moisture to plant and animal life. If rain comes it will be during the summer months.

SKELETON COAST SPECIALITIES

- Fearless solitude
- Ghostly shipwrecks
- Aerial views of canyons, coastline and dunescapes
- Unique photographic location
- Possible encounters with Himba people
- Fly-in safaris with Skeleton Coast experts
- Desert elephants might be seen
- Cape fur seal colonies
- Unobtrusive luxury in the safari lodges

FACTS

Morning and evening temperatures can be cool or very cold so take appropriate clothing

Sunburn can occur even on overcast days

It is most unlikely to contract malarial in this area

ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK

Etosha is one of the largest and best game viewing parks in the whole of Africa. The reason is in the Ovambo name Etosha, which means 'huge white area' or 'place of dry water', depending upon whom you ask. For most of the year a vast shallow pan, which was once a lake the size of Holland, shimmers a glaring bright white from crystallised salt across its entire surface. Surrounding the pans is a variety of grass and woodlands amongst which live a wonderful variety of animals and birds, insects and reptiles.

The inhospitable pan is 75 miles (120km) long and 45 miles (72km) at its widest, and lone wildebeest or herds of Oryx can be seen crossing it or just standing as if mesmerised.

If ever you are likely to see a mirage it will be here, as the intense hazy sun reflecting against the shimmering pans distorts your eyesight and makes you see all sorts of things that are not really there.

In complete contrast, when the rain arrives, up to three feet (1metre) of water turns the parched surface into an algae-rich soup attracting thousand of birds. The pink mist shifting slowly across the water is a huge flock of flamingos, for whom this is an important breeding ground. After a good watering, the surrounding woodland savannah and scrubland, which is normally sparsely vegetated, bursts with an abundance of yellow blooms and rich grasses.

Etosha has dozens of waterholes; some are natural while others are artificially fed from boreholes. During the dry season, staking out a position at a waterhole viewpoint is a rewarding way to watch game without moving from one spot. A veritable 'Noah's Arc' of species queue up to take a drink, with elephants hogging the lion's share!

ANIMALS & BIRDS

Plains game such as zebra, wildebeest, giraffe, springbok, impala and eland abound in great numbers on the grasslands and congregate at waterholes in the dry season. Herds of fifty elephants are not unusual and often walk right down the middle of the road giving people in cars an incredibly close and thrilling encounter. Lions and hyenas must be searched for, but silver-backed jackals trot around almost oblivious to you. The desert dwelling Oryx, upon which the mythical unicorn must surely be based, will certainly be seen here along with the impressive curly horned kudu. Etosha also contains endangered black rhino and unusual species like the black-faced impala - a larger and darker subspecies found only in south-western Angola and north-western Namibia.

Etosha birdlife is absolutely wonderful with every kind of feathered friend. One to look for is the ground hornbill who looks like a downhearted widow with a red scarf around her face. Other less terrestrial hornbills are the cheeky yellow-billed hornbills whose squawk and loping flight becomes a familiar sight. Lilac breasted rollers are colourful enough at they sit on their favourite perch, but when they take off in pursuit of an insect, their under wings give a blinding flash of electric blue. Eagles and vultures cruise high in the warm air currents or perch on branches with beady eyes alert.

SEASONS

The best game-viewing time is during the coolest dry months of May to September, but bird watching is at its peak in the rainy season from November to March. The average daily temperature is 88°F (31°C) and average minimum is 57°F (13.7°C).

Rainy Season: Rainfall is approximately 14 inches (358mm) per year with January to March the hottest and wettest months. During this time the pans usually fill with water and animals give birth.

Dry Season: July to September are the driest months.

The 'in between' months, which are neither wet nor dry but somewhere in the middle, are very pleasant.

ETOSHA GAME RESERVE SPECIALITIES

- Dry-season waterhole watching
- Glistening salt pans empty or full are a spectacular sight
- Sensational rain clouds forming
- Huge herds of elephants
- Mirages from the distorting heat of the salt pans
- Thousands of flamingos when the pans are full
- Black-faced impala and little dik diks
- Fascinating and colourful birdlife
- Oryx meandering across a salt pan
- Wet season fields of yellow blooms dotted with grazing animals

FACTS

As this is a National Park, no off-road or night driving is allowed. Several days are needed to visit this unique park

One of the world's pre-eminent wildlife areas, at the turn of the century the governor of then German South West Africa proclaimed an area of nearly 100000 square kilometres as a game reserve - until modern times, the largest reserve on earth. Present day Etosha National Park was pared down due to political considerations in the 1960's and is now a modest but still very impressive 23175 square kilometres in extent.

A vast area on Namibia's central plateau, a haven for 93 mammal species and 340 bird species, the park's focal point is the Etosha Pan - a flat saline desert, 130 km long by 50km at its widest in the eastern sector of the park.

DAMARALAND

Namibia is a land of great contrasts and Damaraland demonstrates this with stark plains, petrified forests and ancient valleys leading to rocky outcrops and the soaring peaks of the Brandberg Massive Mountains.

BRANDBERG NATURE RESERVE

The brooding Erongo mountain range of the Brandberg (Burnt Mountain) massif emerges mysteriously from the surrounding flat arid scrubland. These mountains are magnificent when viewed from any direction and the Konigstein peak at 8,362 feet (2,573m) is the highest in Namibia and forms just part of this range. In the ravines and caves of these mountains many prehistoric rock paintings have been found and none more famous than the 'White Lady' of the Brandberg. She was named by the surveyor who discovered her 1917, but remained in obscurity until 1948, when the painting was replicated and brought to light. More recent investigations into her stature suggest that she is no lady after all!

TORRA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY

This dry rocky conservancy is about 60 miles (96km) north of the Brandberg Mountains, on the north bank of the Huab River. It is a conservation partnership formed between the local community and Wilderness Safaris, who operate a lodge in the area. It is an area of endless vistas across stark plains broken suddenly by ancient valleys and soaring peaks, with the Brandberg Mountains rising like a mirage on the far horizon. Mists roll in from the Skeleton Coast some 56 miles (90km) to the west, and drift along the river valley to provide sustenance to a variety of life that depend on this daily moisture. The Huab River only flows once or twice during the short rainy season and seldom breaks through the dunes to reach the ocean.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

The natural law concerning food and water supply dictates the movement and cycles of life in this arid area.

As such there is no guarantee of seeing any of the animals that inhabit Damaraland and whatever you may see is to be a treasured moment. The rare and endangered desert elephant have adapted like all the other animals here to exist on limited fodder and scant water. These rare pachyderms roam around the more vegetated areas by dry riverbeds and stand on their back feet and stretch their trunks skywards trying to reach the very last leaf on each tree. Desert-adapted black rhino range in and out of communal farming areas across a large area and are one of the few populations to survive on land that has no formal conservation status.

Classified as critically endangered by the IUCN, the black rhinos of north-west Namibia have more than doubled in number since 1985. Even lion and cheetah move in and out of the area when antelopes such as Oryx, kudu and springbok are around.

SEASONS

May to December are the best months to visit this region.

Summer: November to April are hot with an average mid-summer daytime temperature around 95°F (35°C) especially in the river valleys.

Winter: The cooler months of May to September are pleasant with an average temperature during the day of 79°F (26°C). Nights can be very cold averaging 43°F (6°C) with a frost not uncommon in June, July and August.

Rainy Season: The variable annual rainfall is between 1.18 inches (30mm) and 4 inches (100mm) per year starting in January and reaching a peak in March. Rain usually comes as heavy late-afternoon thunderstorms.

DAMARALAND SPECIALITIES

- Star-gazing par excellence
- Desert elephants might be seen
- Rare free-ranging black rhino
- Meeting the roaming Damara goat and cattle herders

FACTS

This is a remote area and many visitors fly in to their camp or lodge although overland travel is possible.

This is a low-risk malarial area.

KAOKAVELD

Originally referred to as the Kaokoland district, the remote north-western corner of Namibia is rugged, harsh, untamed and practically devoid of commercial tourist developments. This hinterland, reached by the Herero during the early southward Bantu migrations about 450 years ago and the Dorstlandtrekkers over 120 years ago is still sparsely inhabited by man. The Himba (or Ovahimba) tribe are Herero descendants who continue their semi-nomadic existence in this primitive wilderness today. The Kaokoveld remains a wild sanctuary for small but wide-ranging populations of the renowned desert elephant, rhino, giraffe and lion. Roads are horrendous and basic infrastructure is virtually non-existent - this is prime safari territory!

FISH RIVER CANYON

The Fish River Canyon in southern Namibia is second only in grandeur to the USA's Grand Canyon in Arizona. It is absolutely magnificent and breathtaking in its immensity. Rock strata's of purples, pinks and greys stretch along a 100-mile

(161km) course. Yet it comes as something of a shock when you arrive at the canyon, as you have no idea it is there. It drops vertically by 1,800ft (550m) out of a flat arid plateau without any warning, even though at some points it is 17 miles (27km) wide!

According to the San Bushmen the twists and curves were carved by the serpent, Kouteign Kooru, in an attempt to escape capture. However, geologists say it was initially created by a fracture in the earth's crust 500 million years ago. Erosion and the action of glaciers then further deepened the canyon.

In the base of the canyon only remnants of the great Fish River remain and all you can see from the viewpoints are distant emerald pools. After rains the energetic stream tries to muster up enough energy to be called a river. It is down here in the canyon floor here that hikers pit themselves against the elements on one Southern Africa's most famous and popular hiking trails. The hike covers a distance of 54 miles (86km) over 5 days in the base of the canyon, with absolutely no facilities whatsoever. You have only what you carry on your back and whatever water you can find in semi-permanent pools. Because of its arduous nature, the National Park's office insists on a certificate of fitness before you are allowed to commence the walk. The reason for never turning back is that your hike ends at Ai-Ais Hot Springs, where you can dip your sore feet and weary body in therapeutic hot water.

AI-AIS HOT SPRINGS

Ai-Ais is the Nama word meaning 'burning water' and you can expect water temperatures of around 60°C. The sulphurous springs originate deep underground and are rich in minerals which are reputedly beneficial for those with rheumatic or nervous disorders. Ais-Ais falls within the Fish River Canyon conservation area and the hot springs are a public facility. It is perhaps for this reason that they are not in the least exotic apart from a few alluring palm trees. The spring-water swimming pools are rather unimaginative, but there is an indoors spa with Jacuzzi and spa bath to help takes the knots out of tired muscles.

The landscape is desolate, dusty and rock strewn, but the hills and chasms are enticing. These are wonderful to explore, especially on a horse in the cooler early morning or late afternoon. This barren area is just too hot during the summer so the resort is closed from November to mid March.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

Opportunities for game watching are limited but springbok and steenbok are sometimes seen on the plains at Hobas. Klipspringer and troops of Chacma baboons are happy on rocky slopes and mountain zebra favour the rugged ravines but are rarely seen. Some kudu inhabit the densely vegetated lower reaches of the canyon. The riverine bush of the canyon attracts an interesting variety of colourful birds and raptors such as rock kestrels and lanner falcons ride the thermals.

SEASONS

Summer: November to April are the hottest months with average mid-summer temperatures ranging between 97°F and 100°F (36°C-38°C) and reaching in excess of 104°F (40°C) by midday in the canyon.

Winter: May to September are cooler but you can still expect daytime sunshine and pleasantly warm to hot temperatures. At night it can get very cold with a mid-winter July minimum of 44.5°F (7°C) or less, especially in the canyon.

Rainy Season: The annual rainfall is highly variable and erratic and varies between 2 inches (50mm) and 4 inches (10mm) per year.

FISH RIVER CANYON SPECIALITIES

- 54 miles (86km) Fish River Canyon hike
- Magnificent views of the canyon
- Exquisite photographic opportunities
- Floating in therapeutic hot springs
- Unique desert environment

FACTS

Ais-Ais Hot Springs is closed from November to mid-March as it is just too hot. This is not a malarial area.

WATERBERG PLATEAU PARK

Emerging suddenly out of a uniform scrubland is a 600ft (200m) gigantic orange rock with sheer sides and a flat top. It is what remains of the sandstone casing which once covered large portions of Namibia, and which has formed numerous other peculiar peaks in this region. Glowing gold in late afternoon sun, the Waterberg Plateau looks too tempting to drive past.

It is sometimes referred to as the 'Lost Eden' because once up there, the animals of this lush tableland have no way down. It is as though time has stood still. It seems almost possible that a dinosaur could emerge from this unusual place; after all they once roamed the area and left a prehistoric legacy of several three-toed footprints not far from Waterberg.

This vast scrubland does not seem worth fighting over but nevertheless, it was the scene of a terrible massacre of the Herero people by German colonists in 1904. Almost the entire Herero community was decimated and a graveyard within the Waterberg Plateau Park is a poignant reminder of the dead. At this time, Herero women under the influence of German missionaries were considered inappropriately dressed, and were trussed up in Victorian clothes from neck to ankle, including petticoats and a wide bonnet, in temperatures reaching 104°F (40°C). The Herero women subsequently adopted this garb as their traditional costume and wear it with great aloofness and pride in the nearby town of Otjiwarongo.

In the shadow of the Waterberg plateau is a restful public resort with camp sites, chalets and cottages with impressive views over the surrounding savannah. Inside the resort you can go walking by yourself on marked paths leading around the plateau and up to the very edge, where you should not proceed without a guide. The plateau itself can be explored on a Nature Conservation guided game-viewing vehicle, and although the animals are secretive, you get the sense that you are being watched - probably by a leopard.

ANIMALS & BIRDS

Leopard, buffalo, giraffe, blue wildebeest and the exquisitely coloured and horned roan and sable antelope are amongst the animals living atop this magnificent brick-red sandstone edifice. White and black rhino are well protected up here, as is a rare breeding colony of Cape vultures. More than 200 bird species have been recorded in the park with seven of them endemic to Namibia, including Ruppell's parrots chattering in the trees around the camping area. There are also plenty of raptors with various eagles, buzzards and falcons.

SEASONS

Rainy Season: about 85% of the region's average annual rainfall of 20 inches (500mm) falls between November and March. These are the summer months with temperatures reaching 104°F (40°C)

Dry Season: April to October is generally dry with very pleasant daytime temperatures but cold enough at night to send the barometer below freezing.

WATERBERG SPECIALITIES

- Walking around and up to the plateau's edge
- Standing beneath trees full of chattering Ruppell's parrots
- Game driving atop the plateau
- Swimming in the divine pool of the resort on the slopes of the plateau
- Watching the colours of the plateau turn golden in afternoon sun
- Imbibing the clean clear air

FACTS

You can only access the plateau with a Nature Conservation guide either on foot or by vehicle.

Accommodation at the resort must be booked in advance and there are private lodges nearby.

This is a low-risk malarial area.