

Namibia Adventure Planning Guide



Namibia
Endless horizons

WELCOME TO NAMIBIA

With vast expanses of untamed wilderness, rugged mountains and the oldest, driest desert in the world, Namibia offers a wide range of adventure activities for adventurers of all kinds, from confirmed adrenaline junkies to those seeking less exhilarating but equally rewarding adventures. This planning guide will help you plan your holiday based on the level of adventure you are looking for.

All tour operators in Namibia adhere to strict safety regulations set by the Namibia Tourism Board, so rest assured that even those seeking extreme thrills will do so in a safe environment.

Soft Adventure Activities

Angling

Thousands of anglers head for the coast each year in search of the 'big one'. Angling destinations along the central Namibian coast include the area between Paaltjies and the northern boundary of Sandwich Harbour, and the coastal strip between Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. Especially popular is the newly proclaimed Dorob National Park, which extends from just north of Swakopmund for 200 km to the Ugab River. Along the coast, Anglers can expect to catch cob, steenbra, mackerel, blacktail, and a variety of small sharks. Inland fishing is primarily catch and release. The northern riverways are home to trout, nembwe, tilapia and the ferocious tigerfish.

Ballooning

Hot-air ballooning is like a magic carpet ride. While you fly, you feel no turbulence as you are travelling at the current wind speed. The tranquility of your flight will give you unsurpassed views and plenty of photographic opportunities.

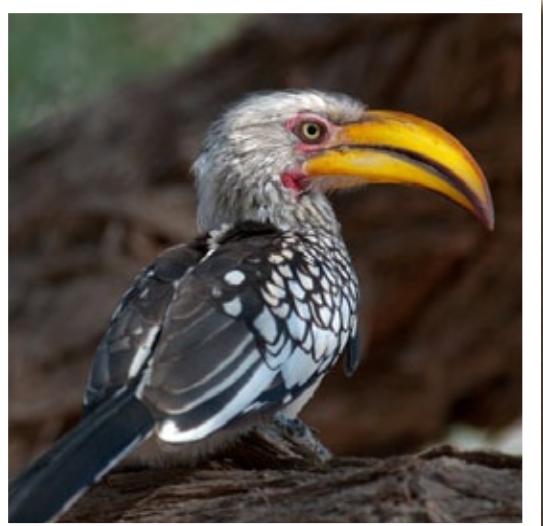
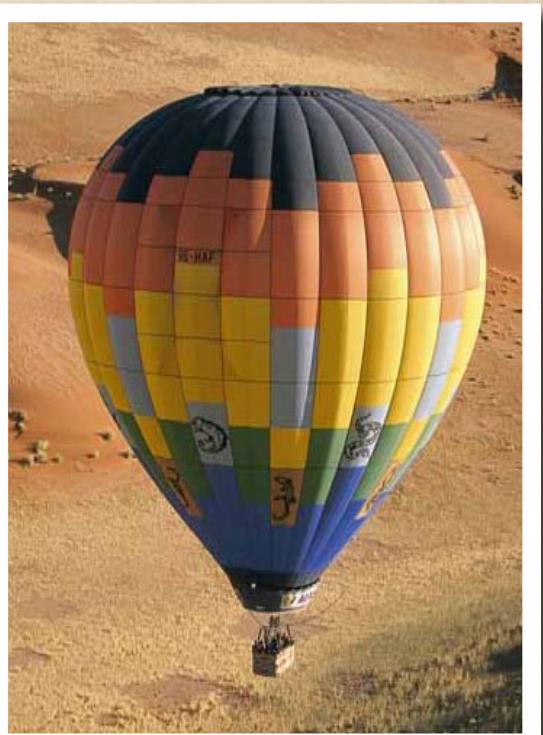
At [Sossusvlei](#) the hot-air balloon takes off as the sun rises over the world's oldest desert. The splendor of the Namib plays out in front of you as you soar with the winds for an hour over the ocean of sand and mountains. Below you is an endless vista of shadow and light, red dunes intermingling with dark mountains linked by pristine gravel plains.

A balloon flight over the [Twyfelfontein Conservancy](#) will give you a bird's-eye view over magnificent Damaraland desert scenery, including a unique variety of desert flora and fauna and fascinating geological formations.

At [Swakopmund](#) you can enjoy an early-morning balloon flight and experience the contrast of the desert with the Atlantic Ocean as you drift along the coast.

Birding

With habitats ranging from the Namib dunes, coastal wetlands and savannahs to the floodplains and waterways of Kavango and Caprivi, Namibia's birding checklist boasts 676 of Southern Africa's 887 species.





The most rewarding birding destination is the north-eastern region of the country. Of the more than 450 species recorded here, several have a limited distribution elsewhere in Southern Africa. Birding hotspots in the north-east are the Bwabwata National Park, Impalila Island (400+ species), the Mudumu and Mamili national parks, Katima Mulilo and the Zambezi River, and the western bank of the Kwando River. The wetlands of Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour rank among the most important coastal wetlands in Africa and make for optimal birding.

When Avis Dam on Windhoek's outskirts holds water, quality birding can be enjoyed close to the capital. Species of interest include the white-tailed shrike, Monteiro's hornbill and the rockrunner. Other well-known birding destinations in Namibia are the Waterberg Plateau Park, Etosha National Park and the Kunene River environs (the latter especially for 'specials' such as the Cinderella waxbill, rufous-tailed palm-thrush and bare-cheeked babbler).

www.birdwatching.com.na

Camel Rides

An entirely new way to explore the spectacular wilderness areas of Damaraland is on the back of a camel. Camels Namibia conducts camel safaris on a five-day/six night basis from [Twyfelfontein Country Lodge](#), ending at Ugab Rhino Camp. The 105-kilometer camel expedition is supported by 4x4 vehicles, while riders travel only with a light daypack and explore the area with knowledgeable guides. A limited number of five adventure trekkers can be accommodated per trip, so each trek is small and sociable.

Canoeing & Rafting

Although Namibia is mostly an arid country, there are plenty of reservoirs and rivers suitable for canoeing and rafting. Canoeing is also offered by lodges on the banks of the Orange, Kunene and Okavango rivers.

[Felix Unite River Adventures](#) offers four-day and six-day canoe trips down the Orange, by all accounts the perfect activity to feed the soul. Only a lucky few go on the ten-day Felix Unite Rio Kunene Safari as it runs just once or twice a year, with a minimum of 16 people.



Dolphin Cruises

The cold Atlantic waters off the Namib coast harbor a wealth of marine life, including three dolphin species and a large colony of Cape fur seals resident at Pelican Point. The 1.3 meter-long Heaviside's dolphin is endemic to the west coast and sightings are 99 percent successful, while the larger Atlantic bottlenose and dusky dolphins are seen less often. In season (July-October), larger mammals like the southern right and humpback whales may be spotted, and with a bit of luck, the mighty killer whales (orcas). Rare sightings of sunfish (mola mola) and leatherback turtles also keep guests on the lookout.

Several operators run catamaran cruises out of Walvis Bay.

Horseback Riding

For accomplished riders there are several options through dramatic landscapes, including the Namib Desert, Kuiseb Canyon, Moon Valley, Fish River Canyon and Skeleton Coast. These trails are all offered by the [Namibia Horse Safari Company](#).

Several lodges offer trips for riders of all levels, including the [Desert Homestead](#) near Sossusvlei, [Grootberg Lodge](#) in Damaraland and [River Crossing](#) just outside Windhoek.

Sandboarding

Buffeted by the predominantly southwest winds, the slopes and slipfaces of the dunes between Swakopmund and Walvis Bay are ideal for sand and dune boarding. With a height of up to 120 meters, sand boarders can accelerate to speeds of up to 80 km/h on the high dunes. Depending on individual skills and balance, sand boarding can be done either by lying down, sitting, or standing on the board.

Numerous operators provide boarding activities, lessons or equipment for hire. Individuals who have no previous experience are advised to use a guided activity operator, as boarding, like any other adventure activity, has an element of risk.



Soaring

The name [Bitterwasser](#), located in the southeast of the country, has become synonymous with the sport of soaring. A combination of the ideal altitude, stable weather conditions and clear skies creates conditions reputed to be amongst the best in the world. Between November and January, the high season for soaring, Bitterwasser becomes a hive of activity, with soarers from Germany, France, Switzerland, Belgium and elsewhere descending on the centre. Soaring altitudes vary from 2,000–4,500 meters. Guest Farm Kiripotib also offers gliding.

Stargazing

With its generally cloudless night sky, especially in the dry winter months, minimal contamination by artificial light and air pollution, and excellent view of the southern constellations, Namibia has superb stargazing conditions. As such, it is favored by professional and amateur astronomers alike.

Many lodges have medium-sized telescopes (up to 16" diameter) for use by guests, and provide novice stargazing guests with a layman's introduction to astrology. An impressive 'farm' of telescopes and other equipment is maintained by the German-based International Amateur Observatory at the guest farm [Hakos](#) on top of the Gamsberg Pass, two hours' drive away from Windhoek.

Intermediate Adventure Activities

4x4 Trails

With landscapes ranging from the Kalahari in the east, the Namib in the west and the desolate expanses of the Kaokoveld in the north-west, there are numerous opportunities in Namibia to explore off-the-beaten-track destinations by 4x4 vehicle.

Hiking

Namibia offers a wide variety of walks, overnight hiking trails and guided wilderness trails for those wanting



to explore the countryside on foot. Keep in mind that the Namib Desert is an arid environment and often extremely hot with no trees to provide shade.

a. Fish River Canyon

One of the major hiking trails in Southern Africa, the Fish River Canyon Hiking Trail takes backpackers on a journey along the second-largest canyon in the world through spectacular scenery, solitude and total wilderness. Hemmed in by sheer canyon walls towering as much as 549 meters above the meandering river, the trail runs between the northernmost viewpoint of the Fish River Canyon and the thermal hot spring at the /Ai-/Ais Spa.

The trail is 85 km long, is self-guided and usually takes four or five days. It can be undertaken only from 15 April to 15 September, due to high summer temperatures and the danger of flash floods during the rainy season. A medical form completed by a doctor no more than 40 days prior to the hike, must be handed in at Hobas before commencing the hike. Hikers must carry all their equipment and food for the duration of the hike. Well worn-in boots with good ankle support are essential.

b. Namib-Naukluft Park and surroundings

The Namib-Naukluft Park can be explored along several interesting walks and an overnight trail. In the Naukluft section of the park are two rewarding day hikes, the 10-km Olive Trail and the more demanding Waterkloof Trail, which covers 17 km and takes six to seven hours to complete.

Also called the Eight Day Trail, the 120-km Namib-Naukluft Hiking Trail is regarded by seasoned hikers as one of Africa's toughest hiking challenges. It has eight-, four- and two-day options, and some sections have to be negotiated by holding on to chains and might prove difficult for hikers with a fear of heights.

c. Waterberg Plateau Park

On the Waterberg Guided Wilderness Trail, the possibility of a face-to-face encounter with a black rhino or a buffalo is very real. The route takes hikers, accompanied by a park warden, through magnificent rock formations and interesting vegetation, affording plenty of time for birding, relaxing and savoring the unique atmosphere of the plateau. The route is 50 km, takes four days to complete and has basic overnight trail shelters with water

and toilets along the way. It can be undertaken from April to November, starting on Thursdays, and the group must consist of six to eight hikers. They must be fit and provide their own food and sleeping bags.

The Unguided Wilderness Trail at Waterberg is 42 km long and is undertaken without a guide. The trail takes four days and is open from April to November. Hikers depart every Wednesday at 9:00am and return on Saturday, and must provide their own food and camping equipment. Groups should consist of three to ten persons.

Kitesurfing

With its fresh southwesterly breezes, the Walvis Bay Lagoon attracts board-sailing enthusiasts, especially for kite surfing and kayaking. The [Lüderitz Speed Challenge](#), a competition for speed sailors, is held annually. The first Lüderitz Speed Challenge was held in September and October 2007, with a number of impressive performances by entrants suddenly placing Lüderitz on the world-sailing map. In 2009, the world speed record for kite surfing was set here, and 2010 was the first time in the history of speed sailing that three different sailing disciplines were included: hydrofoil boating, windsurfing and kite surfing.

The [Walvis Bay Kite Centre](#) offers lessons in kitesurfing, and equipment rentals and sales.

Mountain Biking

Namibia's central plateau running from north to south with an average altitude of between 1,000 and 2,000 meters, the rugged mountainous escarpment that descends into the Namib Desert in the west, and the rolling hills of the Khomas Hochland west of Windhoek, provide many opportunities for exhilarating and truly tough mountain biking. [Mountain Bike Namibia](#) and [Cycletech Adventures](#) specialize in cycling tours.



Paragliding

The dunes south of Swakopmund provide some of the safest locations in the world to learn the art of paragliding. The dune belt between Swakop and Walvis Bay, especially the dunes overlooking Long Beach (Langstrand), are favorite spots. The fresh southwesterly winds offer ideal 'lift', and once air-borne there are spectacular views of the desert and ocean.

[Namib Gliding](#) offers a half-day introductory course that includes at least two ground-skimming flights. They also offer full day flights, a basic pilot's license course and tandem flights.

Quad-biking

One of the best ways to access parts of the sand dunes that even 4x4s can't reach is on a quad-bike. Many lodges around the country offer quad-bike outings to view game and scenery. Quad-biking activities feature especially prominently in the coastal towns of Swakopmund and Walvis Bay.

Rhino Tracking

The more sedate rhino tracking adventure, although a soft adventure has an adrenaline experience. This activity has its origins and focus in conservation, offering the rare opportunity to view the small population of black rhino that has found a home in Namibia's Kunene Region.

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Surfing

Namibia has yet to develop into a commercial destination, which makes it a favorite for those looking to escape the crowds and have world-class waves all to themselves. [Skeleton Bay](#) has been deemed by several professionals as the longest breaking barrel in the world.



Hard Adventure Activities

Extreme Running

Adventure racing, often in the form of extreme running, is extremely popular in Namibia. Races vary in length, challenge and region – but are generally for adventurous tourists looking to push their physical limits. Below is a list of top adventure races. For a complete list of races, marathons and running events in Namibia, visit the Windhoek Harriers [website](#).

a. Namib Desert Challenge

Regarded as one of the toughest footraces in the world, this contest covers 228 kilometers of inhospitable, desert terrain. It is held in the Sossusvlei area, and comprises five stages of high-endurance ultra running, with competitors carrying their own survival kit and food. The NDC is a physical as well as a mental race. Running the equivalent of a full marathon every day for five days, with temperatures reaching the mid-40s (110° F), it is a super test of endurance, stamina and the ability to persevere through personal pain barriers. The NDC takes place every year in March. With a limit of 80 runners, interested parties should jump to secure a place.

www.namibdesertchallenge.com

b. Fish River Challenge

The Fish River Challenge is a 100-km non-stop self-supporting race whereby runners are expected to complete the course in 24 hours. Water is supplied at designated checkpoints that also serve to monitor progress of the various athletes and provide updates to the organizers. The race starts at the top of the Fish River Canyon. The first evening is spent on the edge, affording magnificent views. It finishes at the wonderfully soothing hot-springs resort of Ai-Ais. The race is organized by African Extreme Promotions and was held for the first time in 2011.

www.africanextrémepromotions.com



c. 100 km of Namib Desert

An annual race that subjects the runners to extreme conditions – sandstorms, strong winds, blistering heat during the day and freezing temperatures at night – yet treats its participants to five-star accommodation, is the contradiction on which this unique event was developed. Still a relatively new and innovative programme, it is unique in the world panorama of desert-running contests. Its attractions are running for 100 kilometers over terrain regarded by many as the most beautiful and captivating in the world, experiencing its mysterious and ever-changing atmosphere in an ambience of relaxation and comfort.

The race is arranged by Zitoway Sport & Adventure of Italy, a promoter known for running events such as the 100-km Del Sahara in Tunisia and the Chott El Jerid. Extreme as the route may seem, Zitoway ensures that medical assistance is always close by.

www.100kmofnamibdesert.com



Rock Climbing

Rising abruptly above the Namib plains, the Spitzkoppe is Namibia's top rock-climbing destination. Since the first successful ascent in 1946, there have been more than 500 ascents to the 1,728 meterhigh summit. There are several sport climbing routes that have been secured with bolts. Some 44 sport climbing routes, ranging from South African grades 10 to 27, have been opened in the Spitzkoppe area. The Erongo Mountains also offer excellent rock climbing challenges, such as Omandumba in the western Erongos, offering 30 traditional routes up to the South African grade 20, as well as 20 sport climbing routes, ranging from SA grades 16 to 23.

A selection of climbing routes is available at Aussenkehr in the south, about 50 km west of the Noordewer border crossing. With high summer temperatures, climbing is best done between April and September.

Skydiving

Namibia's premier drop zone is located just outside the coastal town of Swakopmund. The scenery viewed whilst floating peacefully under an inflated parachute is simply breathtaking. Some skydiving clubs have been operating since 1980, and carry on a long tradition of high-quality skydiving, training and fun that has always been associated with the coastal town.

There are two skydiving clubs in Swakopmund that offer a professional training service. If you are already a skydiver, you can arrange a scheduled jump, and if you are a novice, there are two options. A one-day training course will qualify you for a static line jump on the same day, or you can take a much shorter course and complete a tandem, freefall jump.

Soaring

Soaring is the act of gliding while maintaining altitude. The sport involves flying a heavier-than-air craft by using ascending currents of air.

The name Bitterwasser, located in the southeast of the country, has become synonymous with the sport of soaring. A combination of the ideal altitude, stable weather conditions and clear skies creates conditions reputed to be amongst the best in the world. Between November and January, the high season for soaring, Bitterwasser becomes a hive of activity, with soarers from Germany, France, Switzerland, Belgium and elsewhere descending on the centre. Soaring altitudes vary from 2,000–4,500 meters. Guest Farm Kiripotib also offers gliding.

For flying in Bitterwasser, they recommend that you have a total flying time of minimum 500 hours, and you should have been active in the last two years. Pilots with little experience (100 hours after receipt of your license is the minimum requirement) please make early contact the Bitterwasser office.