



Namibia with a capital 'N'

Namibia is characterised by its vast desert of rusty-red dunes (said to be the oldest in the world) and dramatic coastline of shipwrecks along the Skeleton Coast. This enigmatic destination simultaneously offers an abundance of animals and one of the continent's greatest wildlife parks – that's Namibia for you. Iga Motylska reminisces about some of her highlights after a five-week, 7 000 km road trip.

The world's oldest living desert

Namib-Naukluft National Park, located just south of Walvis Bay, is the world's fourth-largest national park – it covers a tenth of Namibia's surface area and is divided into five sections. It is known for its tranquil beauty, romantic remoteness, and seemingly endless vistas. It is best known for the Namib – one of the world's oldest deserts, dating back more than 55 million years – particularly Sesriem Canyon and Sossusvlei. As you gawk over the shadows cast by the enormous sand dunes, you realise that the Namib is everything you might have imagined. Marvel at it from the sky during a scenic flight with Desert Air or up close as you ascend Big Daddy Dune – the world's highest sand dune, standing at 360 m. From the summit, you can see Dead Vlei, where skeletons of ancient camelthorns appear to dance with the sun across the white clay pan.

www.nwr.com.na/namib-naukluft-park



Where to stay: Desert Grace

Seeing the sun reflecting off the Naukluft Mountains from this safari shabby chic hotel is Instagram-worthy in and of itself – and that's before you've even seen the geometric fire-and-water feature at the entrance, the 'One Night in Namibia' bar and lounge, and the larger-than-life collection of portrait photographs of Namibians throughout. The patio and private plunge pool of each room looks out onto the desert dunes, which leaves you daydreaming about sunrise walking safaris with a Khoisan and 4x4 sundowners over the oscillating sands.

www.gondwana-collection.com/accommodation/desert-grace





Damaraland's desert-adapted elephants

Northern Damaraland is a desert of a different kind from that of the Namib. Its ruggedness – a result of millions of years of unending geological movement – has given rise (quite literally) to brick-red, layered sediments punctuated by greyish basaltic rocks and stones that litter the landscape. There's plenty of life in this seemingly inhospitable landscape, from umbrella-shaped camelthorns and candelabra euphorbias with their prickly, fleshy arms that point to a cloudless sky, to the ubiquitous shepherd's tree. Most don't expect to see elephants in these parts, but the desert-adapted elephants are the region's biggest drawcard, along with Twyfelfontein, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site with ancient rock engravings dated at some 2 000 years. Many of the region's lodges offer sunrise or half-day game drives in search of these rare ellies with a high likelihood of getting lucky, particularly along the Huab riverbed.

Where to stay: Damaraland Camp

This exceptional camp is ideal for seeing desert-adapted elephants, with guides who are astute in accommodating photographers' need to get the perfect shot. Located within the Torra Conservancy, encircled by ochre mountains and sand dunes, the views from the gorgeous, adobe-style thatch units take in a landscape of craggy beauty. After a day in the desert, cool off in the swimming pool, watch the birds from a hanging cocoon chair, or relax with a drink in the airy lounge, where surreal views and unsurpassable service are the name of the game.

www.wildernessdestinations.com/africa/namibia/damaraland/damaraland-camp



The luscious Zambezi Region

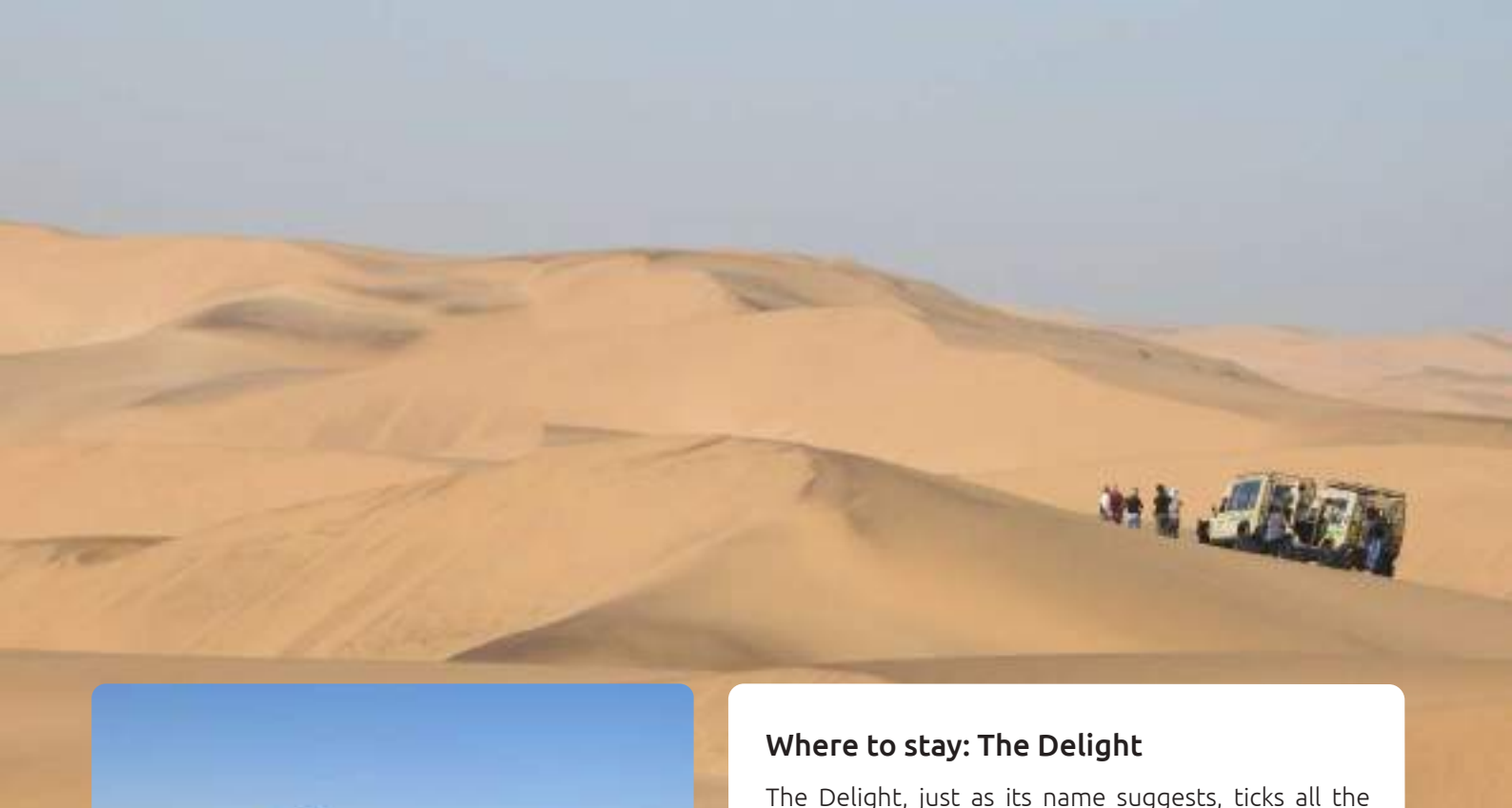
The Zambezi Region (formerly the Caprivi Strip) remains one of Namibia's best-kept secrets because it's so far out from the country's other tourist hubs – situated at the confluence of the Zambezi and Chobe rivers. This is the gateway to Zimbabwe's Victoria Falls and Botswana's Chobe National Park. Its rivers, wetlands, marshes, and forests are a worthwhile reward for those who venture out this way; along with vast game sightings from elephants, hippos, and buffalos to giraffes, sitatunga, and sable antelopes, and even lions, if you're as lucky as we were.

Where to stay: Serondela Lodge

Serondela Lodge, on the flood plains of the Chobe River and facing Botswana's Chobe National Park, is best visited after the rainy season (October to March), when the Zambezi Region is aflush in luscious shades of green. Serondela Lodge can only be reached by boat after the rains but this makes for spectacular game watching and birding during a water safari. You can equally do wildlife spotting from your riverside room, the plunge pool with its sun loungers or the al fresco bar and lounge.

www.serondelalodge.com





Where to stay: The Delight

The Delight, just as its name suggests, ticks all the boxes. The modern – and boldly colourful – décor and rooms, coupled with a funky bar, make for a cheerful stay in central Swakopmund. It serves the best buffet breakfast in town with fresh local oysters, bottomless champers, and a selection of hot and cold and savoury and sweet options to choose from. It's so good that even the locals swing by. www.gondwana-collection.com/accommodation/the-delight-swakopmund



Swakopmund: Namibia's adventure capital

Sandwiched between the sizzling desert and the crisp Atlantic Ocean, it goes without saying that Swakopmund is Namibia's adventure capital. When it comes to sports and adrenaline-packed activities, there's sandboarding and fat-bike tours along the dunes on an e-bike, as well as going in search of the small critters that live in these mounds of sand during a guided 4x4 tour with Tommy's Tours and Safaris. Then there's a sunrise hot air balloon flight over the lunar-like landscapes of the Rössing Mountains or a sunset cruise in search of marine life and birds, coupled with Namibian oysters and bubbles. Another experience you won't forget anytime soon is a two-hour, 630 km Sossusfly sunset flight over Soussusvlei and the Skeleton Coast in a Cessna 210. www.sossusfly.com



Habitas: On the outskirts of Windhoek

If you're flying into Windhoek for business and only have a day or two to spend not too far away from the capital, Habitas Namibia is an unsurpassable choice. Sustainability and conservation are at the heart of the 50 000 ha private conservation area that encircles Habitas. This is the closest you'll get to a safari just 30 minutes from Hosea Kutako International Airport. The luxe tented camp is constructed from natural materials in a low-impact manner that makes it seamlessly blend into its surroundings atop a rocky outcrop. The swimming pool showcases spectacular sunsets and panoramic views of the savannah, while the spa offers treatments, bush meditations, and yoga and breathwork as part of its wellness retreat.

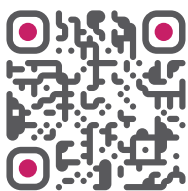
www.ourhabitas.com/namibia

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