

Namibia's Etosha Pan & Skeleton Coast

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London.
Day 2	Arrive Windhoek & transfer Namib Desert.
Day 3/4	Sossusvlei, Namib Desert.
Day 5/7	Walvis Bay.
Day 8/9	Damaraland.
Day 10	Andersson's Camp, Ongava Reserve.
Day 11/14	Etosha National Park.
Day 15	Waterberg Plateau.
Day 16	Depart Windhoek.
Day 17	Arrive London.

Departs

October & November

Focus

Birds, mammals & landscapes

Grading

A mix of gentle bird and game-viewing walks & drives.
Grade A.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code NAM02) or Naturetrek brochure

Highlights

- Explore the spectacular desert landscapes of the Namib-Naukluft National Park & SossusVlei.
- Abundant game in the Etosha National Park
- Look for the 'desert adapted' Elephants of Damaraland.
- Endemic birds such as Rockrunner, White-tailed Shrike & Rüppell's Korhaan.
- Visit Walvis Bay & the Skeleton Coast.
- Expertly led by UK and local naturalist guides.



From top: Sand dunes at SossusVlei, African Elephant & Crimson-breasted Shrike.



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In flight

We depart London's Heathrow Airport this evening on a South African Airways or British Airways overnight flight to Johannesburg.

Day 2

Namib Grens

Following a change of aircraft in Johannesburg we are due to arrive into Windhoek, Namibia's modern capital at around midday. Here you will be met by your local Namibian guide and head off on the 3 - 4 hour drive to the Namib Grens Rest Camp, a short distance from the Namib-Naukluft National Park. Whilst, on the face of it, we may seem to be rushing you off rather quickly into the wilderness, Windhoek has very little to recommend it, whilst the wilderness element of a visit to Namibia is such a major component of any Namibian tour!

Our drive will take us immediately into wide landscapes of rugged red hills and dry, bush-covered plains. A variety of shrikes adorn the roadside fences, as do the endemic Damara Red-billed and the occasional Monteiro's Hornbills, Pale Chanting Goshawks, Mountain Chats and various larks. As we approach the spectacular scenery of the Namib Desert we should start to see our first Springbok and Gemsbok (*Oryx*), the common desert animals of this arid nation, possibly Kudu and the near-endemic Hartmann's Mountain Zebra. We aim to arrive at the Namib Grens Rest Camp late afternoon. The Rest camp is located close to a rocky escarpment deep within the desert. Its grounds are home to a wide variety of animals including Kudu, Klipspringer, Gemsbok and Steenbok and numerous birds. This is also a wonderful place to admire the spectacular African night sky.

Day 3

Namib Naukluft National Park

Our first Namibian morning will begin with a pre-breakfast bird-walk around camp. The grounds hold a wealth of birdlife including Crimson-breasted Shrike, Acacia Pied Barbet, Red-eyed Bulbul, Cape Sparrow and Dusky Sunbird. After breakfast we will leave Namib Grens to complete the drive to the dunes. En route we will stop briefly atop the Sreetshoogte Pass to admire the dramatic parched desert landscape, and perhaps the endemic Herero Chat, before dropping steeply into the outskirts of the Namib Desert itself.

We aim to arrive at Sesriem, the entrance to the Namib-Naukluft National Park, early in the afternoon where we should have time for an afternoon siesta before we take our first trip into the park. The Namib-Naukluft spans an incredible 50,000 square kilometres, and is one of the largest parks in all Africa. It contains within it some of the most spectacular scenery the continent has to offer ranging from flat stony desert to the world's highest sand dunes at SossusVlei. Here a wide range of hardy creatures eke out an existence in this inhospitable environment, such as Gemsbok, Springbok, Ludwig's Bustard and Burchell's Courser. Tenebrionid beetles scamper across dunes and Shovel-nosed Lizards are a common sight as they alternately lift two feet at a time off the hot desert sand. We will spend the next two nights at the small and exclusive Kulala Desert Lodge on the edge of the Namib-Naukluft National Park surrounded by a vista of desert and dunes!

Day 4

Namib Naukluft National Park

Today we must be ready and waiting at the park entrance by dawn in order to drive the 60 kilometres to SossusVlei. Here a large dried-up salt pan is surrounded by the world's highest sand dunes creating some of the most spectacular scenery in all of Africa and an undoubted highlight for the photographers in the group. Driving along the dried up Tsauchab River valley we can watch the colour of the dunes changing as the sun rises and the retreating shadows cast by their sinuous crests. The cool temperatures at this time of day also allow us to take a walk amongst the dunes, and to climb some of them in order to truly appreciate their great height - many of them towering over 1,000 feet!

On our return to the lodge we will have time to search for some of the local wildlife such as Temminck's Courser, the endemic Ruppell's Korhaan and Dune Lark, Karoo Chat, Ostrich and Lappet-faced Vulture, along with Gemsbok and Springbok, the common mammals of the park. After lunch and once the heat of the day has subsided, we may drive the short distance to Sesriem Canyon where centuries of erosion by the Tsauchab River has incised a narrow 1 kilometre gorge into the local conglomerate rock. The name 'Sesriem' derives its name from the time when the early pioneers tied six lengths of rawhide together to draw water from these seasonal pools. Here Rock Martins and Yellow Canaries may be seen along with Familiar Chats and Rock Kestrels.

Day 5 – 7

Walvis Bay, Skeleton Coast

We will use Day 5 to drive north, to Walvis Bay. This is a fascinating drive, taking us through a large portion of the National Park, and offering a wide variety of desert scenery and wildlife. We will pass vast quartz plains with the occasional Kokerboom (Quiver Tree), Kuiseb Canyon, and the unbelievably bleak and barren "Moonland". In particular we will be looking for the Hartmann's Mountain Zebra, Gemsbok and Ostrich which inhabit the dry plains beyond the Moonland. We will also stop to look at the bizarre looking *Welwitschia mirabilis*, the world's longest lived plant. This prehistoric-looking giant lives up to 2,000 years nourished only by the moisture received from sea mists. Before turning south to Walvis Bay, we will drive into the coastal oasis of Swakopmund and make a brief stop at a small wetland which should hold a selection of waterbirds including flamingos, ducks and our first migrant waders.

The small town of Walvis Bay was retained by South Africa long after Namibia's independence and was only incorporated into the country on March 1st 1994. It is Namibia's only deep water port and now plays host to the country's fast growing fishing industry. During our 3-night stay here we will go birdwatching both along the Skeleton Coast and inland, to see the contrasting variety of birds inhabiting such a comparatively small area. The Walvis Bay Lagoon and adjacent saltflats boast one of the highest concentrations of waders in all of southern Africa. The mudflats are home to thousands of Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints along with a wide variety of other waders, including Terek Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Chestnut-banded Plover, Kitlitz's Plover, White-fronted Plover, African Black Oystercatcher and Avocet. Hundreds of Greater and Lesser Flamingos feed in the shallows whilst White Pelicans, Black-necked Grebes, South African Shelducks, Maccoa Ducks, Cape Shoveler and 7 species of tern - including Damara and Crested - should also be seen. Cape Cormorants, Kelp and Hartlaub's gulls abound along this west coast.... in fact the sheer number of birds present can be quite overwhelming!

For those that are interested, it should also be possible to arrange a boat journey out to sea from Walvis Bay. The cost would be around £80 (payable locally in South African Rand and subject to change), and the morning's excursion out to the Continental Shelf and to the sandbars at the edge of Walvis Bay should allow you to see such sea mammals as Cape Fur Seals (thousands!), and both Bottlenose and the rare Heaviside's Dolphin, together with such bird species as African Penguin, White-chinned Petrel, Sooty and Manx Shearwaters, Wilson's Storm-petrel, Cape Gannet, Cape Cormorant, Sabine's Gull, and Black Terns, as well as a host of flamingos, pelicans, grebes, ducks, waders, gulls and terns. During our time at the coast we will also venture into the nearby sand dunes and spend time in the pleasant coastal town of Swakopmund.

Day 8

Damaraland

Today we will first drive northwards along the Skeleton Coast to the huge seal colony at Cape Cross, where Cape Fur Seals breed in their tens of thousands (over 80,000 to be precise!), a spectacular and often highly aromatic spot (fingers crossed for offshore winds!). Journeying further along the barren Skeleton Coast we will pass through an area known as the 'lichen fields'. Here rainfall is close to zero and only a carpet of lichens can survive on the flat stony desert nourished by the daily sea mists. Our route will take us through the parched landscape of the Skeleton Coast Park, past the occasional Gemsbok or Springbok shimmering in the distance and then inland into the heart of Damaraland, a spectacular region of 250-million year old high tabletop mountains bisected by seasonal river valleys. The Damaraland Camp lies on the northern slopes of the Huab River in an isolated part of central Damaraland. We aim to arrive at the camp late in the afternoon from where we can watch the sun set over this dramatic landscape before the camp fire is lit and dinner is served under the spectacular African night sky.

Day 9

Damaraland

Following an early breakfast we will head out into the rugged Damaraland landscape and down into the seasonal Huab River Valley. Our main goal this morning will be to search for the rare and highly mobile 'desert-adapted' Elephants which over the millennia have learnt to survive in this harsh environment. The Elephants eke out an existence in the Huab River Valley where groundwater is close enough to the surface to be tapped by trees creating a green corridor through this desert region. They share the river valley with other game including Springbok, Steenbok, Gemsbok, Grey Duiker and the rare Black Rhino - indeed Namibia is home to the last free ranging Rhino in the world! Ostriches are a common sight and other birds to look out for include Red-billed Francolin, Double-banded Sandgrouse, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Bokmakierie, Monteiro's Hornbill, Sabota, Long-billed and Stark's Larks, Bare-cheeked Babbler, Ashy Tit, Tractrac Chat, Chat Flycatcher, Red-headed Finch, Great Sparrow, Short-toed Rock Thrush and Rock Bunting. Arriving back at the camp for lunch, the heat of the day is once again free to relax or birdwatch around the tents. Later in the afternoon we will visit Twyfelfontein, renowned for its ancient rock engravings which represent one of the finest collections in all of Africa.

Day 10

Andersson's Camp, Ongava Game Reserve

Leaving Damaraland, we will drive eastwards to the Ongava Game Reserve on the southern edge of the great Etosha National Park. We will stop for wildlife and lunch enroute and aim to arrive at the comfortable Andersson's Camp around mid-afternoon.

The Ongava Game Reserve, is a private reserve that borders onto the Etosha National Park, one of Africa's largest game parks being nearly the size of Switzerland. Mammals are abundant and include Elephant, Black and White Rhinoceroses, Lion, Cheetah, Giraffe, Burchell's Zebra, Wildebeest, Springbok, Gemsbok, Greater Kudu and the diminutive Damara Dik-Dik; many of which can be seen around Andersson's Camp permanent waterhole. Birdlife is equally prolific and includes Ostrich, Short-toed Rockthrush, Hautlaub's Francolin, Rockrunner, Rüppell's Parrot, White-tailed Shrike and Chestnut Weaver.

In the evening we will join a night safari into the reserve in search of some of Ongava's nocturnal inhabitants such as Bat-eared Fox, South African Porcupine, Springhare and hunting cats. Birds such as Freckled Nightjar and Spotted Eagle Owl are also possible.

Days 11 – 14

Etosha National Park

Leaving the Ongava Game Reserve, we enter the great Etosha National Park. Etosha covers an area of 22,270 square kilometres and is undoubtedly one of the finest national parks in all of Africa. We will spend four nights in Etosha - two in comfortable chalets at Okaukuejo Rest Camp and two at Mokuti Lodge. The word "Etosha" means "big white place", and the present pan is simply the floor of a large, shallow inland lake, one hundred kilometres across, which has dried up. Permanent waterholes are plentiful along the southern side of the pan, where water, collected during the rainy season, flows onto the dense clay floor of the pan. The wildlife is quite superb, and we will spend our days watching it on game drives exploring the park. In particular we will spend many hours watching the waterholes which attract such large concentrations of Etosha's birds and mammals. Mammals are likely to include Black-faced Impala, Damara Dik-dik, Steenbok, Red Hartebeest, African Elephant, Black Rhino, Greater Kudu, Eland and hundreds of Gemsbok, Springbok, Burchell's Zebra, Wildebeest and Giraffe. With such a large concentration of game available we will also be on the look out for their attentive predators and scavengers. These should include Lion, Hyena and Black-backed Jackal and for the fortunate perhaps Leopard or Cheetah.

At Okaukuejo a flood-lit waterhole presents a unique opportunity to watch some of the more nocturnal mammals, such as Black Rhino, and the occasional pride of drinking Lions or raucous Hyena.

The birdlife of Etosha is equally superb, with over 300 species recorded. Birds of prey are particularly numerous, and include Red-necked, Lanner and Pygmy Falcons, Gabar Goshawks, and many species of eagles and vultures. Other birds of note include Double-banded Courser, Kori Bustard, the beautiful Blue Crane, White-faced Scops Owl, Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Black-faced, Bare-cheeked and Southern Pied Babblers, Violet Wood-hoopoe, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Chat Flycatcher, Pirit Batis, Black-cheeked and Violet-eared Waxbills, Rufous-eared and Barred Warblers, Pink-billed Lark, Cape Penduline Tit and Shaft-tailed Whydah. Vast flocks of Red-billed Quelea are often seen wheeling over the waterholes looking not unlike plumes of twisting smoke or swarms of locust. After the sun has set Rufous-cheeked and Fiery-necked Nightjars fly up from their daytime roosts and hawk for insects around the floodlit waterholes and Spotted Dikkops often venture down to the water's edge to drink.

It is impossible not to be impressed by the sheer number of animals and birds present in Etosha and the diversity of species that live within the park. For many our time exploring the "big white place" will be one of, if

not the, highlight of the tour and it will become quickly evident why Etosha ranks as one of the best national parks in the whole of Africa.

Day 15

Waterberg Plateau Park

It is a long drive back to Windhoek so we will break our journey with one night at the Waterberg Rest Camp in the Waterberg Plateau Park. Rising almost 200 metres above the surrounding African bush, the Waterberg Plateau, with its dramatic brick-red sandstone formations and thick green vegetation forms an island of colour rising up from the flat acacia covered plains. The park covers 405 square kilometres and was originally created in 1972 as a haven for rare and endangered species of the Caprivi region of Namibia such as Cape Buffalo, Sable and Roan Antelope and Tsessebe. These animals were relocated to the park, along with both species of rhino, where they were released to form 'wild' breeding populations contained on the plateau by its steep walls.

These animals live on the very top of the plateau, an area only accessible by joining one of the game drives organised by the park headquarters. Whilst this option is open to those of you who wish, the vegetation on the top is very dense and viewing the game is very difficult indeed. A more productive use of our time, however, would be to walk the trails that criss-cross the edge of the plateau in search of the abundant birdlife found in the sub-tropical dry woodland that covers its slopes. Over 200 species of birds have been recorded here. These include Hartlaub's Francolin, Bradfield's Hornbill, Jacobin Cuckoo, Ruppell's Parrot, Rosy-faced Lovebird, White-browed Scrub Robin, Grey-backed Bleating Warbler, Marico and White-bellied Sunbirds, Rockrunner, Black Eagle, African Paradise Flycatcher and Plum-coloured Starling.

Day 16

In flight

We should have the morning to further explore the slopes of the Waterberg Plateau, before we begin the 4-hour drive back to Windhoek to connect with our South African Airways or British Airways flight to Johannesburg and then home.

Day 17

London

We are due to arrive back at London's Heathrow Airport in the early morning.

Grading

This wildlife tour does not involve any overnight trekking, but we will include walks where ever possible when not within national park boundaries. No great level of fitness is required.

Weather

We will be travelling at the start of the rains (although this does vary from year to year). This does not mean, however, that you should expect a lot of rain, merely that there will be the occasional shower in the interior of the country. This gives the land a less parched appearance, and the arrival of rain ensures a more attractive landing spot for the many birds that are drawn here from the north. As Namibia is a semi-desert country - that

is, with hot, dry days and cool nights - you can expect plenty of sunshine, with daytime temperatures in excess of 30°C plus. Along the coast it will be generally dry but a lot cooler with dense fogs during the mornings and evenings.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All meals and accommodation in Namibia are included. Our accommodation will be mixed, ranging from luxury tented camps such as Damaraland Camp to comfortable government run rest houses and tourist bungalows. All the accommodation has rooms with private facilities with the exception of Namib Grens Rest Camp where most rooms are en-suite, but several are not. Several of the lodges/camps also have swimming pools and air-conditioning.

Please also note that the accommodation outlined above may, very occasionally, need to be amended. Replacement lodges and hotels will always be of the same standard as the ones outlined in the itinerary and will in no way affect your holiday. Should we have to implement any changes to the above we will notify you as soon as possible.

Entry requirements

There are no visas currently required for Namibia and no mandatory vaccinations, although several are recommended. Please visit your GP as soon as possible to discuss your travel plans and arrange necessary vaccinations. You will need a full valid passport with at least six months validity after the return date of travel.

Please note that the South African government requires all parents travelling with children under the age of 18 years to produce a certified copy of their Unabridged Birth Certificates (this also includes travellers in transit). In the event that one parent is not travelling with the child, the other parent's affidavit consenting to such travel should be produced. Failure to produce the necessary documentation may result in travellers being turned away at port of entry.

Mammal & bird lists

Where available these are automatically provided on booking, and will gladly be sent to you before, if you wish for a more detailed preview.

Your safety & security

You have chosen to travel to Namibia. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website – www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/namibia or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure thoroughly and complete and return the enclosed booking form, together with a deposit of 10% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure please give us a call on 01962 733051, and we will gladly post one to you. Alternatively, you can book on line at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or telephone us and make a booking with a credit or debit card.

