Namibia, Botswana & Zambia – Etosha to the Victoria Falls!

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Day 2	Arrive Windhoek & transfer Daan Viljoen
Day 3	Waterberg Plateau Park, Namibia
Day 4 – 6	Etosha National Park, Namibia
Day 7	Kavangoland, Namibia
Day 8 - 10	Zambezi Region, Namibia
Day 11	Katima Mullilo, Namibia
Day 12 – 13	Chobe National Park, Botswana
Day 14 – 15	Victoria Falls, Zambia
Day 16	Depart Livingstone, Zambia
Day 17	Arrive London

Departs

February – March

Focus

Birds, plus mammals and other wildlife.

Grading

A. This is a traditional safari-style holiday with wildlife viewing by vehicle, boat and on foot

Dates & Prices

Visit website (tour code NAM01)

From Top: Black Rhinoceros and African Elephants, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Victoria Falls

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Introduction

Southern Africa is blessed with some of the continent's most spectacular national parks, wilderness areas and natural wonders. From the vast dunes of the Namib Desert and the wildlife-rich waterways of Botswana's Okavango Delta to the thundering cataracts of Victoria Falls, the region boasts an extraordinary diversity of habitats, scenery and wildlife.

By combining Namibia, Botswana and Zambia in a single journey, this tour offers the opportunity to experience three contrasting countries and a remarkable range of birds and mammals across more than 1,000 kilometres of southern Africa. The variety is exceptional, from Namibia's elegant Blue Crane and Botswana's Pel's Fishing Owl to Zambia's striking Schalow's Turaco, alongside an impressive supporting cast of mammals, reptiles, plants and insects.

Operating towards the end of the green season, the landscapes remain lush and attractive, while migrant birds from the northern hemisphere are still present in good numbers. Many resident species will also be in breeding plumage, allowing us to enjoy southern Africa's birdlife at its colourful and active best. Combined with excellent wildlife viewing, dramatic scenery and a rich diversity of ecosystems, this promises to be an outstanding introduction to one of Africa's most rewarding regions.

Black Rhinoceros in Etosha National Park

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & 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 this evening on a flight to Windhoek (via Johannesburg).

Day 2 Arrival and transfer to Daan Viljoen

Following a change of aircraft in Johannesburg we will complete our journey to Windhoek, Namibia's modern capital, arriving early in the afternoon. Here you will be met by your local Namibian guide and head off on the approximately one-hour drive to the Daan Viljoen Game Reserve, where we will spend our first night.

Daan Viljoen Game Reserve should provide us with an excellent introduction to Namibian dry-country wildlife. Commonly encountered species include Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Black-faced Waxbill, Pearl-spotted Owlet and Crimson-breasted Shrike. We will also keep an eye out for the gorgeous Violet-eared Waxbill, as well as sought-after near-endemics such as Monteiro's Hornbill and Rockrunner, both of which are regularly seen here. The reserve is home to a wide variety of herbivores too, and our first Namibian mammals could include Eland, Gemsbok (Southern Oryx), Greater Kudu, and perhaps the threatened Hartmann's Mountain Zebra.

Gemsbok

Hartmann's Mountain Zebra

Overnight: Daan Viljoen, Namibia

Day 3 Waterberg Plateau, Namibia

Our first Namibian morning will begin with a pre-breakfast bird-walk around camp. The grounds are an oasis for a range of birdlife including Mountain Wheatear, Short-toed Rock Thrush, Red-billed Spurfowl and Pale-winged Starling. After breakfast we will leave Daan Viljoen for the Waterberg Plateau. 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 above 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 Zambezi Region of Namibia such as Cape Buffalo, Sable and Roan Antelopes and Tsessebe.

These animals live on the very top of the plateau (and are near impossible to find in the thick vegetation) so we will concentrate our efforts on the bird and animal life inhabiting its forest covered slopes. En route to the park we should see our first Impala of the tour and maybe one or two Red Hartebeest or Greater Kudu. At the park itself Baboons are a common sight as they wander around the lodge grounds or sit in the tree tops feeding on fruit. We should also find the diminutive Damaraland Dik-dik, one of Africa's smallest antelopes and with luck maybe a Dwarf Mongoose or a nocturnal African Civet. Birdlife is abundant and with over 200 species recorded in the park. These include Verreaux's Eagle, Cape Vulture, African Scops Owl, the endemic Hartlaub's Francolin, Bradfield's and Monteiro's Hornbill, Jacobin Cuckoo, White-tailed Shrike, Rüppell's Parrot, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Marico and White-bellied Sunbirds, Rockrunner, Black Eagle, Pied and Bare-cheeked Babblers, Plum-coloured Starling and Violet Woodhoopoe. We will spend our first night in Namibia in chalet accommodation.

Overnight: Waterberg Plateau, Namibia

Days 4 – 6 Etosha National Park, Namibia

African Elephant, Etosha NP

Leaving the Waterberg Plateau we head north to enter Etosha National Park through its Anderson's gate. Etosha covers an area of 22,000 square kilometres and is undoubtedly one of the finest national parks in all of Africa. We will spend three nights in Etosha, in two different locations to maximise the areas we cover, our lodges will be located at the west and east ends of the park respectively. The word 'Etosha' means "big white place", which refers to the great Etosha Pan which dominates the centre of the park. The pan is simply the floor of a large, shallow inland lake, one hundred kilometres long by eighty kilometres wide, which long ago dried up. From September to November large concentrations of game animals crowd the freshwater waterholes that dot the southern edge of the pan. This is a dry and hot time of year, however, when the park is at its busiest and most of the wintering birds have yet to arrive. During the January to March rains, the park is transformed into a lush green mix of bushland and open plains dotted with ponds and marshes. With a plentiful supply of fresh water most of the large concentrations of game have dispersed, but the birdlife is supplemented by thousands of birds moving in from further north and resident species moulting into their breeding dress. The wildlife

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of Etosha National Park is superb at any time of the year, and whilst some people favour the dry season, others choose to visit during or after the rains, the lush green landscape, greater diversity of birdlife and lack of other tourists more than compensating for the slight reduction in game-animal numbers.
Our days in the park will start as the sun just appears over the horizon and the gates of the lodge are pulled opened. We will then head out to explore the open pans, marshy ponds, grasslands and acacia covered plains in search of a wide variety of birds, mammals and other wildlife. Common sights include herds of Elephant, Giraffe, Greater Kudu, Red Hartebeest, Blue Wildebeest, Gemsbok, Springbok, Black-faced Impala and Plains (Burchell's) Zebra. Smaller antelopes such as the Steenbok and Damaraland Dik-dik can be a little trickier to track down, and with a little luck we should find one or two of the park's Black Rhino and hopefully a pride of Lions, or an early morning encounter with a Hyena or Leopard. The first few hours of daylight are excellent for finding some of the more nocturnal mammals and we will be on the look out for the appealing Bat-eared Fox and its slightly larger cousin the Cape Fox.

Birdlife during and after the rains is prolific with over 300 species recorded from the park. Cuckoos such as Black, Jacobin, Striped, Diderick, Klass's and African Grey arrive shortly after the first green shoots start to appear and many of the weavers and whydahs will be resplendent in their spectacular breeding plumage. Birds of prey are particularly numerous, and include Red-necked, Lanner and Pygmy Falcons, Gabar Goshawks, and a wide variety of eagles and vultures. Other birds of note include Double-banded Courser, Kori Bustard, the beautiful Blue Crane, Southern White-faced Owl, Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Black-faced, Bare-cheeked and Southern Pried Babblers, Violet Wood-hoopoe, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Chat Flycatcher, Pirit Batis, Black-cheeked and Violet-eared Waxbills, Rufous-eared Warbler, Barred Wren-warbler, Pink-billed Lark and Cape Penduline Tit to name but a few.

Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters

Violet-eared Waxbills

Late in the morning we will return back to the lodge for lunch and an afternoon 'siesta' before re-entering the park mid-afternoon for another game and birdwatching drive. In addition to the animals mentioned above we hope to see Black-backed Jackal, Yellow and Slender Mongoose, Warthog, Ground Squirrel and perhaps even a Cheetah stalking a Zebra through the grass.

All vehicles have to be back at the lodge by the time the sun has disappeared below the horizon, but with floodlit waterholes to hand there is no need to stop the wildlife viewing. The waterholes are at their busiest as at the end of the dry season with an almost continual procession of animals venturing down to drink. Even after the rains, however, a little patience is bound to pay off perhaps with a few Elephants or a pride of lions coming down to drink. Other nocturnal drinkers of Etosha can include Black Rhinoceros, Honey

Badger and African Wildcat plus Rufous-cheeked and Fiery-necked Nightjars which fly in to hawk for insects around the floodlights.

Overnight: Etosha Pan, Namibia

Day 7 Kavangoland, Namibia

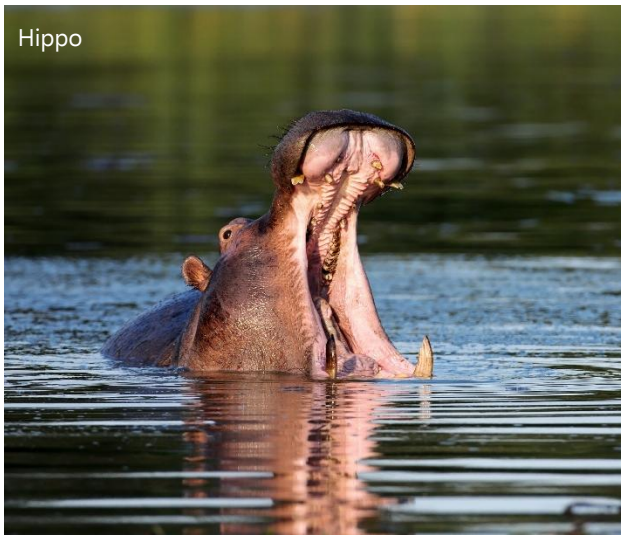
This morning we must leave Etosha and head north to the Namibian region of Kavangoland and the riverine wetlands and forests along the Okavango River. As we travel we will notice a dramatic change in habitats from the flat acacia-dotted plains that surround Etosha through moist palm savannah and teak forests to the lush riverine habitats along the Okavango River. Here we will be based for one night at a lodge on the banks of the Okavango River near Kaisosi. The journey will take us much of the day but we will stop frequently en-route to look for birds and mammals or to take the occasional short walk into likely looking areas of good habitat.

Around our lodge we will be on the look out for birds such as Kurrichane Thrush, Senegal Coucal, White-browed Coucal, African Wood Owl, Marsh Owl, African Barred Owlet, African Rail, African Jacana, Black Crake, Greater Painted Snipe and African Snipe.

Overnight: Kaisosi, Namibia

Days 8 – 10 Mahango Game Park, Namibia

After a pre-breakfast walk around the lodge, we will move east into the Zambezi Region to the Mahango Game Park. As we enter this area, we will also reach the KAZA region (Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area), the second largest nature conservation project in the world, encompassing five countries (Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Angola). The region aims to maintain natural wildlife corridors and is one of the most extensive and ambitious wildlife projects in the world.


Hippo

African Jacana

Sandwiched between the Botswana border and the Kavango River, the Mahango Game Park is a fascinating world of papyrus-lined channels, vast floodplains, dense riverine forests and tall teak

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woodlands. Covering over 244 square kilometres, the park is home to an incredibly diverse range of wildlife. Mammals are common and include Hippo, Elephant, Buffalo, Roan, Sable, Red Lechwe, Reedbuck, Bushbuck, Tsessebe, Blue Wildebeest, Impala and Gemsbok, although in common with Etosha some of these can be a little trickier to see during and just after the rains.

Birdlife is once again superb, however, with over 430 species recorded. During our time here we will be on the look out for Bradfield's Hornbill, Broad-billed Roller, Arrow-marked Babbler, Long-toed Plover, African Pygmy Goose, Grey-rumped Swallow, Brown Firefinch, the beautiful Southern Carmine Bee-eater and perhaps even the localised Greater Swamp Warbler. Mahango also marks the western-most limit of several Okavango specialities including Wattled Crane, Lesser Jacana, Coppery-tailed Coucal and Black Coucal. We will also visit the nearby Popa Falls (more of a series of rapids than a waterfall) to look for Rock Pratincole, Yellow-breasted Apalis and Grey-tit Flycatcher. For the next three nights we will be based at a lodge just outside the game park.

On Day 9 we will leave Namibia early in the morning to spend the day in neighbouring Botswana. Crossing the border at Shakawe we will explore the lush riverine swamps of the Okavango Panhandle, the narrow neck of the huge Okavango Delta. Here the meandering Okavango River is channelled along a narrow 15 kilometre geological fault, only once it leaves this confinement do the crystalline waters fan out to create Africa's finest inland delta.

A few kilometres south of Shakawe we will board a small boat and explore this wonderful region from the water. The birding here is fabulous and during our first venture into Botswana we will look for a wonderful variety of wetland and woodland species including African Green Pigeon, African Fish Eagle, African Skimmer, many kingfishers and bee-eaters, African Pygmy Goose, White-backed Night Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron and Slaty Egret, Botswana's only endemic bird. The papyrus swamps and reedbeds of the Panhandle are also a good place to look for the elusive Sitatunga, and we will make a special effort here to find one of the region's most sought-after birds, the rare Pel's Fishing Owl.

Later in the afternoon we will make the short transfer back into Namibia for our final day in the KAZA region.

Okavango Delta

Overnight: Mahango, Namibia

Day 11 Katima Mullilo, Namibia

After a final morning bird and mammal watching in and around our lodge we will continue our journey east through the Zambezi Region and spend one night on the banks of the great Zambezi River, close to the town of Katima Mullilo. Our long journey will take us through the Bwabwata Game Park, a thin strip of wetlands, teak and copalwood woodlands and dunes (covering 5,715 square kilometres) sandwiched between Angola and Botswana. Whilst the Zambezi Region is home to 35 species of large mammal and numerous smaller mammals and birds, access is difficult, the roads are very bad and there are currently no lodges within the park boundaries. We are most likely, therefore, to be confined to wildlife viewing along the main sealed road (the 'Golden Highway') that bisects the park, but will make plenty of stops as we travel to look for such birds as Dickinson's Kestrel, Western-banded Snake Eagle, African Cuckoo-hawk and Racket-tailed Roller to name but a few.

Overnight: Katima Mullilo, Namibia

Days 12 – 13 Chobe National Park, Botswana

Lions

This morning we must say goodbye to Namibia for the final time as we re-enter Botswana at the Ngoma crossing. From here we continue to Kasane, the gateway to Chobe National Park, where we will spend the next two nights.

Chobe is another of Africa's very finest wildlife reserves covering over 11,700 square kilometres of African bush with the Chobe River forming its northern boundary. It was declared a national park in 1968 and today is probably best known for the huge herds of Elephant and Buffalo which often congregate along the Chobe River in the dry season. In February and March these large congregations have broken up, but we are still sure to enjoy large numbers of mammals along the river, a focus for wildlife throughout the year. This includes Botswana's only population of Puku, plus Lion, Hippo, Impala, Giraffe, Bushbuck, Waterbuck, Spotted Hyenas, Roan and Sable Antelopes, Greater Kudu, Warthog,

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Baboons and many, many others! We are also sure to benefit from the lack of other tourists, for whilst Chobe is a popular destination in the latter months of the year, especially considering its proximity to the Victoria Falls, in the 'green season' it is often pleasantly quiet.

Yet again birdlife in February and March is at its very best and amongst a fabulous collection of species to be found here we will search for Long-toed and Wattled Plovers, Three-banded Courser, White-faced Whistling Duck, Verreaux's Eagle Owl, flocks of vultures, including the menacing Lappet-faced Vulture, African Fish Eagle, Lizard Buzzard, White-fronted Bee-eater, Southern Ground Hornbill, Greater Honeyguide, Grey-headed Bushshrike, Rosy-throated Longclaw and chattering parties of Helmeted Guineafowl and Red-billed Francolin. Eagles such as Lesser Spotted, Tawny and Steppe seem to circle endlessly overhead whilst various bee-eaters, shrikes and rollers adorn every lookout. We will explore Chobe National Park on early morning and evening/sunset boat cruises along the Chobe River (game drives are also available, but at an extra cost payable locally).

Overnight: Chobe, Botswana

Days 14 – 15 Livingstone, Zambia

Following breakfast we must leave Chobe to drive to our final destination and country, Livingstone (in Zambia) gateway to the Victoria Falls. On arrival into Livingstone we will transfer to a comfortable lodge on the banks of the Zambezi River for a 2-night stay. Our time here will give us the opportunity to relax and enjoy one of the world's great natural wonders, the Victoria Falls.

The small Victoria Falls National Park and the riverine forest that lines the Zambezi is also a great area for wildlife. Birds of the area include Rock Pratincole, African Finfoot, Tropical Boubou, Collared Palm Thrush, Brown Firefinch, Peregrine Falcon, Mottled Spinetail, Trumpeter Hornbill and the beautiful Schalow's Lourie. A wide variety of mammals are also commonly spotted along the Zambezi including Elephants, Buffalo, Greater Kudu, Warthogs and many Hippos and Nile Crocodiles. Livingstone is also home to the small Mosi-o-tunya National Park, home to Zambia's only White Rhinos. Whilst Mosi-o-Tunya has a far less of a wild feel about it that Chobe or Etosha (each Rhino has its own armed guard and the park is fenced in), it is nevertheless another fabulous area for birds.

Nile Corocodile

African Finfoot

Your time in Livingstone will include a trip to the Victoria Falls and a sunset cruise on the Zambezi, but you may also like to take advantage of the many optional excursions available such as flights over the

Falls. If you are interested in any of these trips (which are not included in the price of your tour) please contact us as soon as possible as it helps if we book them well in advance of your holiday.

Overnight: Livingstone, Zambia

Day 16 In Flight

You have a morning at leisure to enjoy some last-minute birdwatching around the lodge or perhaps take a trip into town for a spot of souvenir shopping. Early in the afternoon we must sadly transfer to Livingstone Airport to catch our return flight home (via Johannesburg in South Africa).

Day 17 London

We are due to arrive back into London early in the morning.

Victoria Falls

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Tour Grading

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

Weather

We will be travelling at the end of the 'Green Season'. This does not mean, however, that you should expect a lot of rain, merely that there will be some rain from time to time, usually in the form of short, sharp, afternoon showers. 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. You can still expect plenty of sunshine, however, with daytime temperatures in excess of 30°C.

Food & accommodation

All meals and accommodation in Namibia and Botswana are included in the price. Lunches and dinners whilst in Livingstone are excluded. The lodges and hotels we use on this tour are comfortable (not luxurious) and located in excellent locations for birds and other wildlife. All rooms have private facilities and single accommodation is available at the supplement cost outlined at the start of this itinerary. Many 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.

Extra expenses

The following items are not included in the cost of the holiday and must be paid by you locally: lunches and dinners in Livingstone, Victoria Falls entrance fee (USD $30), tips and all other expenses of an entirely personal nature, such as drinks, souvenirs etc. All locally paid expenses are subject to change without notice.

Entry requirements

We suggest you visit your GP to discuss your travel plans as far in advance of the tour as possible to discuss necessary vaccinations and malaria prophylactics which must be taken. Visas are not required for British passport holders visiting Botswana or Zambia for tourism. A visa is required to enter Namibia, but UK passport holders can obtain a visa on arrival or apply for an e-visa before travelling. The Namibian Visa is NAD$ 1600 (approximately USD$ 90) regardless of whether you pay on arrival or in advance. This must be paid online by credit card (you may need to request your bank to open your card for overseas transactions). All arriving passengers must have at least six months validity on their passports from the date of entry. The passport must also have at least 3 full blank pages.

Transport

During our safari excursions, we will travel in specially adapted Toyota Land Cruisers, each accommodating up to eight participants in comfort. Every participant is guaranteed a window seat, ensuring excellent all-round visibility for wildlife viewing and providing superb opportunities for photography.

Tour vehicle

When stationary, the vehicles' pop-up roofs can be raised, allowing unobstructed views of wildlife and the surrounding landscape, as well as additional photographic opportunities. This combination of comfort, visibility and flexibility makes these vehicles ideally suited to exploring Namibia's remarkable wilderness areas.

Booking your place on the tour

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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