

Namibia by Night and Day

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Day 2/3	Arrive Windhoek, transfer to Rooisand
Day 4/5	Sossusvlei and Namib Dunes
Day 6	Drive to Swakopmund
Day 7	Living Desert / Brandberg
Day 8	Twyfelfontein
Day 9/10	Etosha
Day 11/12	Okonjima
Day 13	Depart Windhoek
Day 14	Arrive London

Departs

June – September

Focus

Astronomy, mammals, birds and landscapes

Grading

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

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code NAM04)

Highlights

- A sky filled with stars, planets and the richest part of the Milky Way
- 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.
- Living Desert Tour
- Expertly led by local guides



From top: Sand dunes at Sossusvlei, African Elephant & Milky Way over a quiver tree.



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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

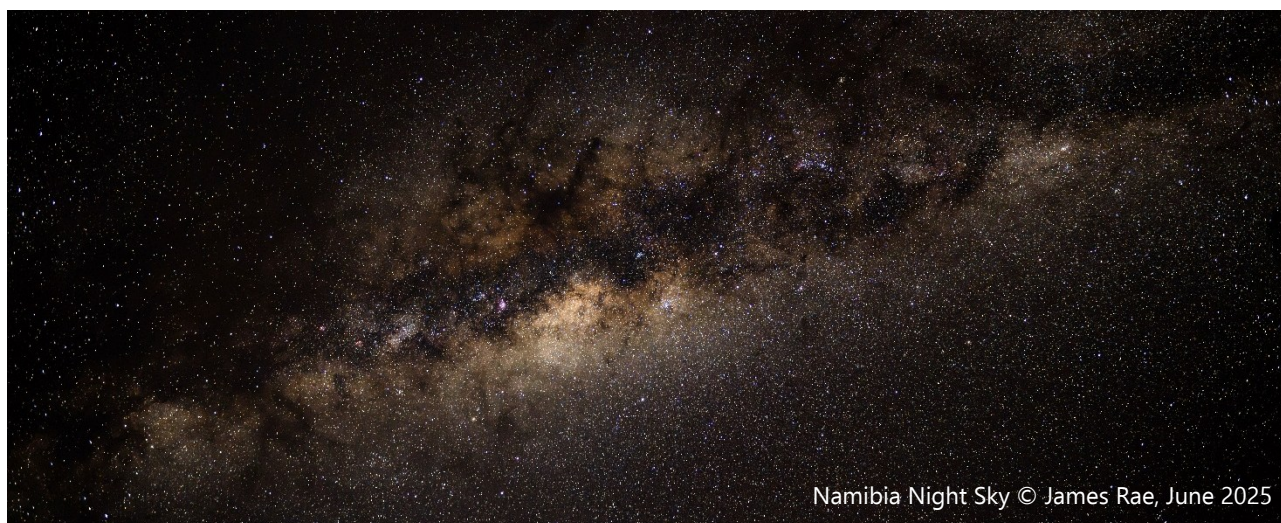
In flight

We depart London this evening on a flight to Windhoek (via Johannesburg).

Day 2/3

Rooisand Desert Ranch

Arriving in Windhoek, Namibia's modern capital, in the early afternoon we will be met by our local Namibian guide at the airport and head off on the three-hour drive to Rooisand Desert Ranch. Here on our first night (for those not too tired from the flight) we will acquaint ourselves with the southern constellations. Many of the stars seen from this southerly latitude cannot be seen from the UK and even those that we do see in the UK appear at a different angle, so it takes a little time to get your eye in and start to become acquainted with them. On the first evening the major features in the sky will be pointed out and a pair of wide-field binoculars will be used to see them in great detail. On the second night the wonders of the sky will be observed using the telescopes that are permanently mounted on a site set away from the accommodation. The observatory houses two refractors mounted piggyback on a 17" reflector telescope.



Rooisand Desert Ranch is situated on the fringe of the Namib Desert in Namibia's Central Region, between the mountain passes of Gamsberg and Kuiseb, halfway between Windhoek and Walvis Bay on the Atlantic coast. The farm has a size of some 12.000 ha, a huge area – by European standards – and surrounded by the magnificent scenery of red sand dunes – deposited over geological time by winds from the Kalahari Desert. During the day we will enjoy the desert scenery by vehicle and on foot and start to familiarise ourselves with the birds of this arid region. Springbok, Oryx and other antelope graze the low scrub and may also be seen.

Overnight: Rooisand Desert Ranch

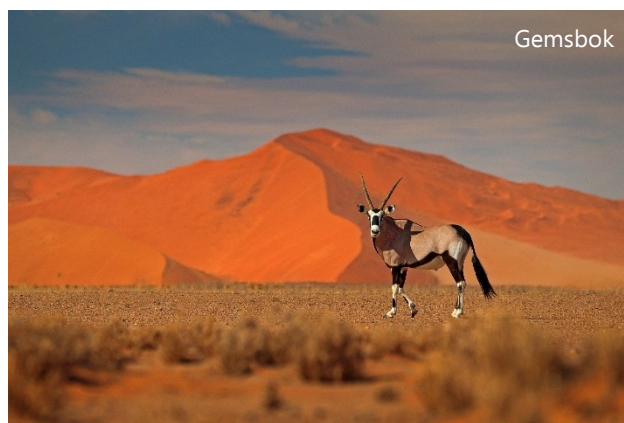
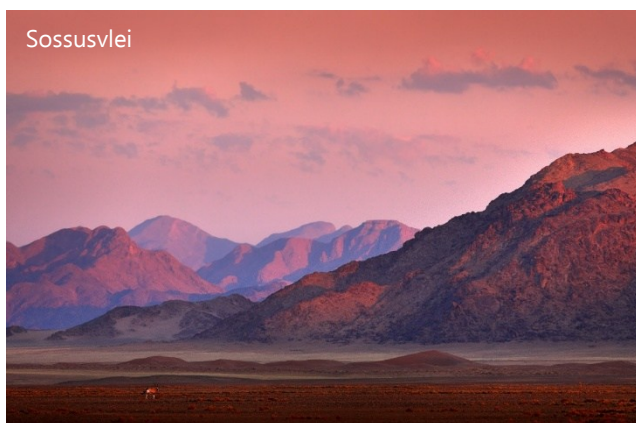
Day 4/5

Namib Desert

After breakfast we drive across scenic desert terrain that skirts the Namib Naukluft Park. This is a fascinating drive 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.

We will cross the Tropic of Cancer and stop at the quirky settlement at Solitaire before continuing to our accommodation for the following two nights.

We will be based at the foot of ancient fossilised dunes with trails that can be enjoyed by the adventurous. Alternatively, it is a wonderful place to relax and take in the desert while cooling off at the pool, watching gemsbok arrive at the waterhole to drink.



On the morning of day five we start early and drive towards the dunes for a beautiful Namib sunrise. This route through the red dune fields takes us into a truly iconic landscape sculpted by the wind. At Dune 45 we will make a short stop and there will be time for the energetic to walk part way up the dune. Further on down the road, the sealed surface changes to sand and employing four-wheel drive we soon reach the start point of a short walk to Sossusvlei, Namibia's famous highlight in the heart of the Namib Desert. This huge clay pan is enclosed by giant sand dunes. Some of the spectacular hills of sand are, at a height of 300 meters, the highest in the world. The many desiccated camelthorn trees on the floor of the vlei have been dated and show that around 500 years ago subsurface water dried up. It is only after a heavy rainfall, which is a rare event in this area, does the vlei fill with water. As the clay layers hardly allow any water infiltration, a turquoise lake will remain for quite some time.

After lunch we visit the Sesriem Canyon, one of the amazing features of the Namib. Here the Tsauchab River has carved a gorge - up to 30 meters deep and about 1 km long - into the conglomerate gravels deposited some 15 - 18 million years ago during a wetter phase in the history of the Namib. From the parking area a track leads to the canyon floor and a walk into Sesriem is like descending through the layers of time.

Overnight: Namib Desert

Day 6

Swakopmund

As we travel towards the Atlantic Coast we see the scenery change from sand dunes to dark craggy canyons and then to flat gravel plains. Swakopmund is situated on the coast and surrounded by desert. It offers a wide variety of attractions in an atmosphere unique in its appeal. The influence of German architecture, dating back to the turn of the last century, can be seen.

We will be based in the center of Swakopmund in a comfortable hotel, with easy access to everything this town has to offer. Many of the small gardens around the town attract birdlife such as Cape Sparrow, Orange River White-eye, Southern Masked Weaver and Common Waxbills. Swakopmund's galleries and craft shops markets are close by and the beach just a short walk so spending the afternoon here is an enjoyable experience.

Overnight: Swakopmund

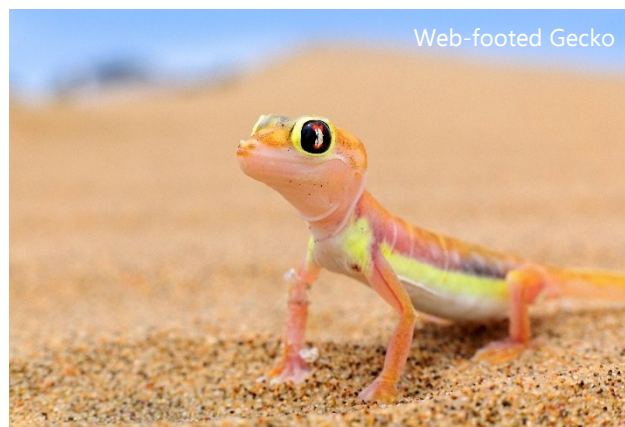
Day 7

Living Desert / Brandberg

In the morning we have a half-day 4x4 excursion into the coastal dune belt Swakopmund with local guides with expertise in finding Namibia's "Little Five". These are the transparent Web-footed Gecko with webbed feet that are used to walk and dig in soft dune sand, the Cartwheeling Spider that curls into a ball and rolls down dunes to escape their enemies. We will look for the Shovel-snouted Lizard dancing on the hot sand and the Namaqua Chameleon, one of the largest chameleon species in southern Africa. The final member of the "Little Five", and perhaps the most sought, is Perinquey's Adder.



Namaqua Chameleon



Web-footed Gecko

In the afternoon we leave the coast and head once more into the arid interior. The broad massif of the Brandberg, Namibia's highest peak, is visible from a great distance. This immense granitic intrusion dates from the early Cretaceous when Gondwana began to split up with the formation of the South Atlantic.

Overnight: Brandberg

Day 8

Twyfelfontein

The breathtaking desert landscapes of the Damaraland with orange granite outcrops rising out of the surrounding plains makes a spectacular morning drive. As we approach Twyfelfontein the landscape becomes dominated by spectacular table mountains consisting of sandstone. These sediments formed when the region was an extensive desert that covered much of the interior of the Gondwana Continent some 132 million years ago.

After settling into our lodge based at the foot of these spectacular sandstone cliffs, we drive the short distance into a neighbouring valley to see the petroglyphs that are some of the best examples of bushman engravings in Southern Africa. The engravings at this UNESCO world heritage site are mostly of animals, but there are also human footprints, animal spoor and some abstract motifs.

Returning to the lodge we will go in search for the Desert-adapted Elephant that commonly move between the ephemeral riverbeds in the valley. They have evolved to cope with the dry, semi-desert environment by having a smaller body mass with proportionally longer legs and seemingly larger feet than other elephants. Their physical attributes allow them to cross miles of sand dunes to reach water. An internal adaptation is the greater length of the Loops of Henle in their kidneys. This allows them to extract more water from everything they eat.



Overnight: Twyfelfontein

Day 9

Drive to Etosha

Heading North we continue over sandy roads, through desert terrain and join the C39 towards Khorixas. A short distance along this road we will reach the site of a Petrified Forest where many fossilised tree-trunks were embedded into 270 million-year-old sediments. Geologists have proved that the trees were transported by a flash flooding event from Central Africa. This is evidenced by the fact that the huge trees of up to 30m in length lie parallel to one another and have few branches or roots.

At the same site there are a number of examples of *Welwitschia mirabilis*, a remarkable desert plant that lives for as long as 2,000 years! The Welwitschia with its short, thick, woody trunk and strap-like leaves that continuously grow from the base is endemic to the Namib Desert. We will make a short break at Outjo, where there is an excellent bakery before continuing towards Etosha.

Overnight: Etosha Region

Day 10

Etosha

We start our full day in Etosha with an early morning game drive entering the park at the Anderson Gate.

Etosha covers an area of 22,270 square kilometres and is undoubtedly one of the finest national parks in all of Africa. 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 explore the park on game drives. The waterholes, in particular attract 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 lookout for their attentive predators and scavengers. These should include Lion, Hyena and Black-backed Jackal and for the fortunate perhaps Leopard or Cheetah.



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, Southern White-faced 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.

Overnight: Etosha Region

Days 11 & 12

Okonjima

Heading south through the heartland of Namibia we reach Okonjima, a private game reserve in the heart of Namibia. This 22,000 hectare reserve is home to a wide variety of African mammals such as Gemsbok, Plains Zebra, Common Eland, Giraffe and Kudu and Common Warthog and provides a superb African scene. The work of the AfriCat Foundation at Okonjima places the big cats centre stage. We will take part in activities such as Leopard and Brown Hyena tracking and learn about the conflicts with humans and the challenges to preserve these magnificent carnivores.

As the sun drops below the horizon at the end of our second excursion into the reserve, we start to look for nocturnal animals such as Bat-eared Foxes, Aardwolves are on the hunt for insects and owls observing their surroundings from a height.

Brown Hyena



Overnight: Okonjima

Day 13

In Flight

After a wonderful holiday, this morning we drive back to Windhoek to connect with our flights home.

Day 14

London

Arrive back in the UK.

Grading

During this wildlife and stargazing tour there are a number of short walks but all are optional. No great level of fitness is required.

Driving

Namibia is a large country and many of its most interesting features are widely separated so we have to cover a lot of ground by vehicle. The roads vary in quality between good, sealed, roads between the major centres and sandy roads elsewhere.

Weather

We will be travelling during the dry season when there is typically very little cloud. 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 the mid-20s°C. The evenings, nights and early mornings will be chilly so warm clothing, including hats and gloves are recommended.

Food & Accommodation

All meals and accommodation in Namibia are included, starting with dinner on Day 2 and ending with breakfast on Day 13. The accommodation has private facilities and several of the lodges 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.

Entry requirements

Starting 1 April 2025, UK citizens will require a visa on arrival to enter Namibia. There are 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.

Mammal, bird and astronomical lists

We will provide checklists of mammals and birds that may be encountered on the trip. Additionally, we will provide a list of objects that we will look for in the night.

Astronomy

Namibia is a truly spectacular place for astronomy. The night skies are filled with stars and the Milky Way arches across the sky with the centre of our galaxy, the richest part of the Milky Way at the zenith.

Whilst at Rooisand, we will have access to some astronomical telescopes and large wide-field binoculars. Throughout the remainder of the tour the group will be accompanied by an astronomer who will show what can be seen with 'birding scopes' and binoculars. The tour is timed to span the period when the moon is waning and rising late in the evening. A new moon occurs when the moon lies between the Earth and the Sun and is therefore absent from the night sky. At this time the skies are darker and it is easier to see the fainter nebulae, galaxies and star clusters. Through a telescope it is possible to see the rings of Saturn.

The Southern sky is rich with star clusters such as the bright globular clusters ω Centauri. Other 'classic' celestial sights from southern latitudes include the Milky Way's neighbouring galaxies: the Large and the Small Magellanic Clouds, the Southern Cross and the stars Alpha and Beta Centauri.

To help you to understand the motions of the stars across the sky and become familiar with the southern constellations, our astronomy guide will pick out stars with the aid of laser pointers. Over the course of the tour the constellations will become familiar and you should develop a greater understanding of the movements of astronomical bodies.



The Milky Way over Etosha National Park

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 20% 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 online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or telephone us and make a booking with a credit or debit card.

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