

Namibia

Naturetrek Photography Tour

Outline itinerary

- Day 1/2** Depart UK and overnight in Windhoek
- Day 3/7** Photography excursions for birds and mammals in Etosha National Park
- Day 8/10** Drive Swakopmund and Living Desert tour
- Day 11/13** Drive Sossusvlei – dune photography
- Day 14** Luderitz
- Day 15/16** Kolmanskop and Quiver Tree Forest – astrophotography, desert landscapes.
- Day 17/18** Drive Windhoek and fly home

Departs

June / July

Focus

Wildlife, landscape and night sky photography

Grading

A. Easy day walks

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code NAM05)

Highlights:

- Photograph classic African wildlife in Etosha - Namibia's premier national park
- Make dawn and dusk images of the world's highest sand dunes
- Stunning night skies above iconic Quiver Trees.
- The deserted mining town of Kolmanskop
- Led by expert wildlife and landscape photographer



From top: Gemsbok, African Elephant and Lion



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Introduction

Namibia combines great African wildlife with some of the planet's most stunning desert scenery. In Etosha National Park, the holiday will concentrate on photographing mammal behaviour of species such as elephant, zebra, giraffe and lion around the most productive waterholes. In the Namib desert, we will photograph the iconic dunes and dead trees around Sossusvlei and Deadvlei at dawn and dusk (staying at Dead Valley Lodge, enabling the dunes to be reached before sunrise and after dusk). We will look for opportunities to capture images of oryx and other desert wildlife in their evocative natural settings. We then proceed to the charming town of Luderitz in the south of Namibia, where we will photograph the evocative ruins of a deserted diamond mining town. The final stage of the tour will stay at the Quiver Tree Forest in southern Namibia. Here in some of the world's darkest and clearest skies, we will make outstanding images of the night sky, including the Milky Way and star trails, using as foregrounds quiver trees and dolerite boulders at Quiver Tree Forest and private access to other dark sky sites. The holiday is scheduled around moon phases to optimise conditions for astrophotography. It includes specialist advice and lectures on astrophotography, desert landscape and mammal photography.

This tour will be led by Kevin Elsby, an experienced and award-winning wildlife photographer. He is on the Nature Group committee of the prestigious Royal Photographic Society (RPS), and has a Fellowship from the RPS in Nature photography. He sits on the Nature Panel of the RPS and judges wildlife images from applicants around the world who apply for a distinction in wildlife photography with the RPS. Kevin is always happy to share his photographic skills, enabling Naturetrek clients to learn new photographic techniques.



Itinerary

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.

Days 1, 2

Fly Windhoek

Following an overnight flight to Johannesburg followed by a night in Johannesburg we continue to Windhoek, Namibia's capital, and meet up with our local leader. After loading up our vehicle we drive to a comfortable hotel to rest and settle in. Photographer Kevin Elsby will give a briefing to help you prepare for all highlights that are to come.

Days 3, 4 and 5

Eastern and Central Etosha

Driving north to Etosha we should start to see some of the African birds and mammals for which the country is justifiably famous. Lilac-breasted Rollers are often seen perching on powerlines and Chacma Baboons and Springbok are a common sight along wide road verge. For the next two nights we will be based at a lodge on the Eastern end of the park. The very comfortable rooms are situated in gardens where families of a Banded Mongoose play on the grass and many species of birds are in the trees. In the evening you might catch sight of a Galago (Bushbaby) in the trees.

Since our base in the park, no time will be lost in visiting some of the many waterholes where the large mammals gather during the dry season. Etosha covers an area of 22,270 km² 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 the floor of a large, shallow inland lake, one hundred kilometres



Swallow-tailed Bee-eater (Kevin Elsby)

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 superb and we will explore the park on game drives. The waterholes, in particular attract large concentrations of Etosha's birds and mammals. Mammals we anticipate photographing 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 as impressive, with over 340 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.



Secretarybird (Kevin Elsby)

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 the highlights of the tour and it will become quickly evident why Etosha ranks as one of the best national parks in the whole of Africa.

After two nights near the eastern entrance, we move to Halali Resort which is in the central part of the park for one night. The resort is set between low hills and thicker vegetation that attract birds and mammals. Within the Haliali complex there is an excellent waterhole with viewing platform.

Days 6 and 7

Etosha (Okaukuejo)

The final two nights in Etosha are spent at Okaukuejo Resort, located 17 km from the Anderson Gate, the southern entrance of the park. It was the first tourist camp to open in Etosha. Okaukuejo is famous for its flood-lit waterhole, where visitors can observe at close quarters a spectacle of wildlife congregating and interacting. Here, virtually every species of large animal comes to drink at one time or another - from elephants to black rhinos; plus hundreds of gazelles, kudus, gemsboks, giraffes and zebras - and the predators that eat them! Some of these species such as rhinos commonly visit at night and it will be possible to photograph them by floodlights using a tripod, cable release and high ISO setting on our cameras.

From our base at Okaukuejo we will travel through the park's south-western region. Numerous water holes give rise to a wealth of wildlife images, including a fantastic white clay elephant wallow. Immense bull elephants roll in this gooey white clay to emerge from the wallow as the famous "ghost elephants" of Etosha. Etosha pan is part of the Kalahari Basin, the floor of which was formed

around 1000 million years ago. Covering around 25% of the National Park, the pan was originally a lake fed by the Kunene River. However, the course of the river changed thousands of years ago and the lake dried up. The pan now is a large dusty depression of salt and dusty clay which fills only if the rains are heavy and even then, only holds water for a short time. This temporary water in the Etosha Pan attracts thousands of wading birds including impressive flocks of flamingos. The perennial springs along the edges of the Etosha Pan draw large concentrations of wildlife and birds. Etosha Pan is surrounded by sweetveld Savanna plains, which sustain extraordinary numbers of wildlife.

To maximize photographic opportunities, we will spend much of our time by the most productive waterholes. Waiting patiently, we will observe and photograph a succession of species such as giraffe, elephant and lions taking their turns to drink.

Days 8, 9 and 10

Swakopmund

With some amazing wildlife experiences and hopefully some excellent photographs, we bid farewell to Etosha and drive South and West to Swakopmund on Namibia's Atlantic Coast.

The four-star Hansa Hotel is nestled in the center of Swakopmund and offers easy access to everything the town has to offer. This classical building dates from 1905, and it is an integral part of the architectural heritage of the area. The Hansa has twice received the Best Hotel in Namibia Award. It is also a 5 time winner of the Award of Excellence, a Golden Award of Excellence and a HAN Gold Award winner.

On the second morning we will embark on a Living Desert Adventure tour. This desert tour concentrates on exploring the local dune belt between Walvis Bay and Swakopmund, taking care not to damage the gravel plains and cause unnecessary harm to the dune ecosystem. The gravel plains are protected and home to the nesting Damara Terns, which are endemic to this area. Conservation, geological structure and the reason why we have a Desert will be discussed in detail en route. Plenty of time is available for frequent stops to take photos of the dunes and the surrounding environment. We will stop continuously to look for animal tracks on the dunes (known locally as "reading the bushman paper"), to determine which animals were active the previous night and wherever possible try to catch some of them to show you. We take great care to share our knowledge with you on each desert animal and plant, including emphasis on special adaptations and perfect design used for survival in the desert.

Geckos, rolling spiders, scorpions, lizards, snakes, chameleons, skinks and a variety of beetles and insects are some creatures to be found on this tour. Many of these make excellent photographic subjects and images can be captured with a variety of lenses, ranging from macro for close-ups to wide angle to show them in their environment. Namaqua Chameleons are especially interesting subjects as they cast instantly recognisable shadows on the sand. Time and care is taken to ensure each animal is returned safely to its home.

Walvis Bay and the surrounding coast, a short drive from Swakopmund, provides us with excellent opportunities for bird photography. With luck we should see thousands of Lesser Flamingos as well

as a smaller number of Greater Flamingos, at close range. In addition, there should be seabirds to photograph here such as Hartlaub's Gull, Caspian Tern (the world's largest tern) and Kelp Gull as well as other waterbirds including Red-knobbed Coot, Black-necked Grebe, African Swamphen and White-fronted Plover. We should also be able to see and photograph some of the songbirds which can be found here, such as Cape Wagtail and Cape Sparrow.

Days 11, 12 and 13

Sossusvlei

Today after breakfast we turn inland, skirting the huge dune field of the Namib Desert. This is a fascinating drive offering a wide variety of desert scenery and wildlife. We will pass vast quartz plains, canyons and the unbelievably bleak and barren "Moonland". We cross the Tropic of Capricorn en route to remote outpost of Solitaire where we will stop for lunch.

The dry plains are home to Hartmann's Mountain Zebra, Gemsbok and Ostrich.

At the Sesriem Gate we stay at the Dead Valley Lodge which is the only hotel within the Namib Naukluft Park and as such, gives us access to the dunes at times when those staying outside the park cannot enter.



Dune No 45

With two full days exploring the desert scenery at different times of day and in different lights our opportunities to capture this iconic landscape is maximized.

The Sossusvlei, Namibia's famous highlight in the heart of the Namib Desert, is a huge clay pan, enclosed by giant sand dunes. Some of the spectacular hills of sand are, at a height of 300 meters, the highest dunes in the world.

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.

The best light for desert photography is in the hour or so after sunrise and the last hour before sunset so we will make maximum use of these times during our stay. On one of our mornings we will ascend a sand dune at first light to photograph the amazing play of light and shadow on the sinuous form of the dunes. Walking uphill in sand is slightly energetic and for anyone who does not wish to climb the dune, fantastic photographs can still be made of the dunes themselves from around their base.

Another morning we will walk into Deadvlei in time for sunrise, to make iconic photographs of the skeletons of dead Acacia trees against a backdrop of golden sand. The trees died hundreds of years ago when shifting sand cut off the water supply to Deadvlei and have been preserved by the

arid desert air. Endless compositions are possible using different lenses and viewing points and detailed guidance will be provided by the tour leader to enable us to make the most of our time in this fascinating location.

Although rain rarely falls in this part of the Namib desert, we expect to observe and photograph wildlife in Sossusvlei. Rüppells korhaan (a small bustard) is superbly camouflaged in the stony desert and cheetahs are sometimes seen.

Days 14

Luderitz

From Sossusvlei we drive for around 6.5 hours to reach Luderitz on Namibia's southern Atlantic coast. We will be sure to enjoy the colonial architecture and relaxed pace of this charming town.

Days 15 and 16

Quiver Tree Forest

A morning visit to Kolmanskop will allow photography at the abandoned diamond mining town, just outside Luderitz. Every amenity was provided in this settlement but when the diamonds ran out, Kolmanskop was abandoned, and everything was left behind. The luxurious villas are now slowly decaying, with sand dunes encroaching into their parlours and sunlight penetrating gaps in their roofs.

Continuing to the Quiver Tree Forest near Keetmanshoop, where we will stay in comfortable (though not luxurious) chalets. This area is undoubtedly one of the finest astrophotography destinations in the world, with exceptionally dark skies and iconic foregrounds of quiver trees and dolerite boulders. On our two evenings here we will explore different, privately owned, locations to photograph the stunning night skies of the Southern Hemisphere. The Milky Way, including the bright galactic centre, is high in the evening sky at this time of year and makes stunning images. Quiver Tree Forest is an area of many kokerboom (Quiver Trees) which are especially beautiful at dawn and dusk, as well as silhouetted against the night sky. During the daytime, we will look for striking compositions such as framing Quiver Trees with other Quiver Trees. On our second afternoon and evening we will photograph the Giant's Playground, where huge piles of dolerite rocks are stacked in improbable shapes. Our final evening will explore the Mesosaurus Fossil Site, deep in the dark countryside, which has both Quiver Trees and dolerite boulders. Here we may have the opportunity to make Milky Way panoramas, photograph the large and small Magellanic clouds and, possibly star trails.

The Mesosaurus Fossil site contains excellent examples of long extinct lizards from a time when Africa was joined to South America. In fact, the findings in these now separate continents represent a convincing example of continental drift.

Days 17 and 18

Windhoek and Flight home

Today we journey north along good roads towards the capital Windhoek, returning to the comfortable hotel on the outskirts of the city. The grounds of the hotels present a chance to enjoy your last evening watching birds in the trees or perhaps taking a swim in the hotel pool.

On the morning of day 18 it is time to head to Windhoek Airport, where we will board our flights home after a memorable holiday with memory cards full of exceptional images from our time in Namibia.

Tour grading

Grade A – Gentle day walks.

Wildlife photography will be mainly from a safari vehicle. Short, gentle walks will be taken in and around the dunes of the Namib-Naukluft Park and Quiver Tree Forest.

Climbing the dunes can be more challenging but these walks are optional.

Equipment to bring

- Digital single lens reflex camera capable of photographing up to ISO 6400 (or higher) for astrophotography and low-light shots at dawn and dusk
- Telephoto lenses (up to 400mm or 500mm focal length recommended) for bird and mammal photography
- Standard and wide angle zoom lenses for desert landscapes
- Ideally, a fast lens with a maximum aperture of F/2 for photographing the Milky Way
- Tripod (essential)
- Monopod (optional)
- Cable release (ideally lockable for photographing star trails)
- Bean bag
- Neutral density and polarising filters
- Flash
- Warm clothing, hat and gloves for nighttime and the early mornings.
- Memory cards to store several thousand images
- Portable device to download and store images (e.g., laptop) and at least one backup drive.
- Sturdy shoes or hiking boots
- Head torch and hand torch
- Spare batteries and chargers for all the above.

Focus

This is a specialist photography holiday, aimed at the keen amateur photographer, focusing on birds and mammals of the Etosha National Park, stunning desert landscapes and astrophotography. We will spend the days travelling in vehicles searching for target species and on foot enjoying the landforms, nature and human interaction with Namibia's Deserts. The wildlife, landscape and astrophotography opportunities of this tour rank amongst the very best in the world.

Food & accommodation included in the price

We stay at the comfortable hotels and lodges throughout the tour, where all rooms have en-suite facilities. All food is included in the price of the tour.

Weather

Namibia's dry season extends from mid-April to late-October. In July the daily temperatures are a comfortable mid-twenties Celsius but drop to zero overnight and in the early morning it can be a cool. You should therefore bring a mixture of clothing including light attire and a sun hat but also warm fleeces, jackets, hats and gloves.

Transport

Please assist our tour leaders (and guides) in ensuring that there is a rotation of seats around the tour vehicle(s) to allow each tour member to enjoy approximately equal time in the front. In order to be fair to all participants, we regret that we are unable to guarantee a perpetual front seat to those who might suffer from motion sickness or other concerns.

How to book your place

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, at the time of booking.

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