The Reptiles and Amphibians of Namibia

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Days 1 – 2	Fly Windhoek
Days 2 – 15	Explore the incredibly scenic landscapes of Namibia in search of reptiles & amphibians
Day 16	Inbound flight

Departs
December to April

Focus
Reptiles and Amphibians

Grading
Important: please read the 'Tour Grading and Focus' section at the end of the document before booking.

Dates and Prices
See website (tour code NAM06)

Highlights

- Wonderfully iconic species such as the Web-footed Gecko, Namaqua Chameleon and Western Barred (Zebra) Spitting Cobra
- Superb but little-known species include Anchieta's Dwarf Python, Namib Ghost Gecko and Wedge-snouted Desert Lizard
- Search for the rare and sought-after Desert Mountain Adder
- Special amphibians may include Common Rain Frog and Marbled Rubber Frog
- Mammals will likely include African Elephant, Southern Giraffe, Lion, Leopard and Black Rhino







Web-footed Gecko (*Pachydactylus rangei*), Namaqua Chameleon (*Chamaeleo namaquensis*) and Peringuey's Adder (*Bitis peringueyi*)

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Introduction

Namibia is an exceptional destination for a herping tour, with superb endemic species found in some of the planet's most stunning desert scenery. In total Namibia has over 200 species of reptile and more than 50 species of amphibians and on this exciting itinerary, planned at all stages with in-depth local knowledge, we'll travel the near length of this picturesque country in search of the biodiversity of reptile- & amphibian-life which abounds in breath-taking scenery in Namibia.

The group size for this holiday is limited to just six participants as we seek to find and photograph some of the most photogenic reptiles on earth. We shall stay in comfortable en suite accommodation throughout, the majority with swimming pools and air-conditioning. Additionally, we shall use customized cruisers throughout, with air-conditioning, wi-fi and purified water inside the vehicle, as we travel between sites hand-chosen by local herpetologist experts. It will be very hard to leave at the end of this special herping holiday!



Deadvlei

Itinerary

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.

Days 1 – 2 Fly Windhoek

Today we fly to Windhoek from London on an overnight flight which will likely have a connection but will always be planned for the utmost ease of transit. Should you wish to join the holiday from another home country, please do get in touch and we will be very pleased to assist with such arrangements. We plan to arrive before midday with plenty of afternoon-time to rest, acclimatise and, for those who wish, use the hotel's swimming pool. The hotel grounds are wildlife-friendly, with indigenous plants implemented into its water-wise landscaping efforts. The pool area is surrounded by palms, Shepherd's Trees, and large cycads. Elsewhere you'll see beautiful specimens of Camel Thorn and Monkey Thorn trees dotted around the grounds and there will be plenty of wildlife to see here for those who wish to rest in the comfort of the hotel. For those who wish to instead, there will be chance to spend the rest of the afternoon and evening herping the hills and dry rivers on the outskirts of Windhoek where we can begin to find our first exciting reptiles which may include such special species as Anchietae's Cobra (*Naja anchietae*), Western Barred (Zebra) Spitting Cobra (*Naja nigricincta nigricincta*), Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*) and the endemic gecko *Pachydactylus reconditus*.

Whether you choose to rest or go out into the field, it will be a fantastic start to our holiday in Namibia and we'll have a good night's rest before the exciting expedition continues the next day.

Day 3 Keetmanshoop

After breakfast we will head southwards to Keetmanshoop. En route, we will search washways and rocky areas for species including Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*), Black Western Barred Spitting Cobra (*Naja nigricincta woodi*), Mole Snake (*Psuedaspis cana*), Egg-eating Snake (*Dasypeltis scabra*) the vibrant Anchieta's Agama (*Agama anchietae*), Rock Monitor (*Varanus albigularis*), Karasburg Tree Skink (*Trachylepis sparsa*) and Serrated Tortoise (*Psammobates oculiferus*). After dinner there will be an optional night walk with great possibilities for starscape photography while searching for geckos and snakes.



Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*) © N. Macleod

After a wonderful second day in Namibia, we'll head back to our hotel for a well-earned night's rest in spacious rooms with air-conditioning, kitchenette, and free wi-fi.

Days 4 – 5 Oranjemund

Today we journey south to within just 1km of the border of South Africa. Access to this region has been restricted until recent years, owing to the area's diamond mining, and has therefore been seldom explored by naturalists.

The world's smallest viper, Namaqua Dwarf Adder (*Bitis schneideri*), the rare Desert Mountain Adder (*Bitis xeropaga*) and the beautiful and photogenic Web-footed Gecko (*Pachydactylus rangei*). We'll have two nights to explore this exciting area, staying in comfortable accommodation with a restaurant serving delicious Argentinian-inspired cuisine.

Day 6 Luderitz

Today we head through changing landscapes towards the Namib Desert. The area is home to a host of endemic specialities. We pass through Aus and have a chance to see Namibia's feral horses in the desert. During our stay, we will visit the ghost town known as Kolmanskop. There are several species we can come across here. A drive out to the peninsula will add some superb endemics. We will embark on night walks during both evenings and some special highlights here may include Many Horned Adder (*Bitis cornuta*), Dwarf Beaked Snake (*Dipsina multimaculata*), Meyer's Blind Legless Lizard (*Typhlosaurus meyeri*), Namib Giant Ground Gecko (*Chondrodactylus angulifer namibensis*), Western Spotted Thick-toed Gecko (*Pachydactylus serval*), Karoo Girdled Lizard (*Karusasaurus polyzonus*) amongst many more species.

The hotel here has spectacular sea views, where we can hope to observe stunning sunsets, and free Wi-Fi.

Days 7 – 8 Sossusvlei area

Today we head to Sossusvlei, home to some of the biggest dunes in the world, as well as the famous Deadvlei, a paradise for photographers with pitch-black tree skeletons contrasted against bleached-white pans, with a backdrop of rust-red dunes and deep blue sky making for incredible images.

We will leave early and have stops en route to search suitable habitats along the journey. Large picturesque red sand dunes tower on either side of the road on the drive to Deadvlei. We will have two nights and a full day to explore and photograph the area while we search for some more of the Namib's specialties which include Peringuey's Adder (*Bitis peringueyi*), Horned Adder (*Bitis caudalis*), Wedge-snouted Desert Lizard (*Meroles cuneirostris*), Brain's Blind Legless Lizard (*Typhlosaurus brain*), Koch's Barking Gecko (*Ptenopus kochi*), and Sossusvlei Gecko (*Pachydactylus etultra*). For those also interested in birdlife, the dunes near Sossusvlei are home to Namibia's only endemic bird, the Dune Lark.



Horned Adder (*Bitis caudalis*)

The beautiful and elegant Gemsbok, an antelope that can endure extreme heat and dry conditions, is often seen from the roads around Sossusvlei as are other mammals such as Springbok and Impala.

For our nights in the Sossusvlei area, we will stay in well-appointed and air conditioned ensuite chalets. There is a shaded patio and an infinity swimming pool which give incredible views over the Namib Desert and Namib Naukluft Mountains.

Days 9 – 10 Swakopmund area

The drive to the central coast should take about 5 hours including stops. We will have the opportunity to photograph the Welwitschia, a dinosaur plant in the Namib which is the country's national plant. Although it may also have been encountered on our travels further south, several iconic Quiver Trees stand close to the road north. A full day in the Swakop will enable to find a range of exciting reptiles which we can hope will include the wonderful and incredibly photogenic duo of Namaqua Chameleon (*Chamaeleo namaquensis*) and Web-footed Gecko (*Pachydactylus rangei*). Other superb species in this region include Namib Sand Snake (*Psammophis namibensis*), Namib Day Gecko (*Rhoptropus afer*), Bradfield's Namib Day Gecko (*Rhoptropus bradfieldi*), Namib Chirping Gecko (*Ptenopus carpi*) and numerous others.

After our time in the desert the refreshing sea air of Swakopmund, with its historic buildings and many shops and galleries, makes a most pleasant place to relax. For the next two nights we stay in comfortable air-conditioned accommodation, just 200m from the beach.

Day 11 Palmwag

Today's scenic drive will take us to Damaraland, home to various desert-adapted wildlife species, including African Elephant, Lion, Leopard and Black Rhino. Unfortunately, due to the presence of large game, we will not be able to wander too far off into the night, so we will stick within the lodge's lights for our night walks, but this still provides opportunity to find Western Barred Spitting Cobra (*Naja nigricinta nigricinta*), Kunene Shield Cobra (*Aspidelaps lubricus cowlesi*), Damara Tiger Snake (*Telescopus semiannulatus*) and a number of lizards.

Tonight we'll stay in air-conditioned rooms with wi-fi, and the hotel has a swimming pool.

Day 12 Sesfontein / Khowarib area

A short drive through the very scenic Damaraland takes us into the arid Kaokoland. We can see some desert-adapted mammals along the way and will make stops to search for any species we missed in Palmwag plus the chance to find specialist species such as Sesfontein Gecko (*Pachydactylus parascutatus*), Viperine Bark Snake (*Hemirhagerrhis viperinus*), Spotted Bush Snake (*Philothamnus semivariegatus*) and Western Keeled Snake (*Pythonodipsas carinata*), amongst commoner species.

Tonight we'll stay in comfortable accommodation nestled in the beautiful Khowarib Gorge, alongside the Hoanib river.

Day 13 Kamanjab

Today we head over the Grootberg pass towards Kamanjab. Enroute stops and a night walk will hopefully add new species to the list.

For those who wish, there will be time for a night drive in search of Aardvark, Aardwolf, Bat-eared Fox and other nocturnal species. New reptiles for the list may include African Flap-necked Chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepis*), Anchieta's Dwarf Python (*Python anchietae*), Leopard Tortoise (*Stigmochelys pardalis*), and Western Giant Plate Lizard (*Matobosaurus maltzahni*).



African Flap-necked Chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepis*) © N. Macleod

Tonight we stay in a comfortable hotel in the untamed wilds of Damaraland, surrounded by wildlife. The lodge has a swimming pool

Day 14 Windhoek

We have time for a leisurely breakfast before making the 4-hour journey south to position ourselves just outside of Windhoek for a relaxing end to our holiday, before our homebound flights tomorrow morning. Our rural location means that there will be chance for a final herping session for those who wish, or this time can be used to relax, upload photos or to use the accommodation's sparkling swimming pool.

Days 15 – 16 Inbound flights

We have time to have breakfast at the hotel before making the 1-hour journey to the airport for a mid-morning flight back to London (if using the group flights), after a most memorable herping and photography holiday in Namibia.

Tour Grading & Focus

On a typical day on our herpetology tours we'll begin searching in the field after breakfast, when the sun has warmed the substrates and landscapes, often getting into the vehicles at 9am and, after stopping for approximately one hour for lunch (which is often a continental-style picnic eaten in-situ), we'll continue into early-evening when we will stop for a rest and dinner. Most evenings it will be possible to do excursions in search of nocturnal species, which will on average be for three hours after dinner. With an equal percentage of the target reptile and amphibian species likely to be nocturnal, these night searches are an important part of the tour but are optional, with some participants preferring to rest on some of the days. On average, 5-8miles are walked per day.

We'll focus our time in the field on building an enviable list of reptile and amphibian species seen. Whilst searching, there is no doubt we'll come across a huge variety of amazing fauna and flora, of which we'll also take time to enjoy, but reptiles and amphibians will strongly remain our focus. Sensitively checking under stones, logs and other refugia is an effective way of finding many species. Some of the target reptile or amphibian species may require longer field hours to locate and therefore this tour is suitable, and most enjoyable, for experienced herpetologists or naturalists who, aside from wishing to see the region's rarely-seen reptiles and amphibians, relish being in the field searching for and identifying the vast array of birds, mammals, butterflies, invertebrates, and other wildlife which can be found sharing the wonderful habitats that we'll explore on the tour. Snakes do, of course, occur at low densities and are notoriously elusive, so it's unlikely that every species mentioned will be encountered. However, with the guidance of a leading herpetologist, your chances improve dramatically. A realistic goal might be to observe around 8-10 species – sometimes more, sometimes fewer – depending on conditions.

In summary, Naturetrek herpetology holidays are suitable, and offer tremendous value, for those of whom spending most of their holiday time in wildlife habitats and for whom seeing some of the world's superb reptiles and amphibians is the focus of their time away.

On this holiday we will of course often be walking on sandy or rocky terrain with some occasional small ascents required.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

Our holiday is planned to 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. This gives the land a less parched appearance, and the arrival of rain enables reptiles & amphibians to become more active throughout their habitats. 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. It would be sensible to come prepared for some rainfall. A strong waterproof torch is essential and amongst the options available a powerful head-torch will be most useful, which keeps your hands free for balancing.

Vehicles

We use customized cruisers throughout, with air-conditioning, wi-fi and purified water inside the vehicle.



The safari vehicle used throughout the tour

What's Included

All meals and accommodation are included in the cost of this holiday, except for any meals required during travel to and from Namibia, and starting with dinner on Day 2 and ending with breakfast on Day 15.

Extending Your Holiday

We can happily arrange extensions to Etosha, Okonjima, and other areas of Namibia, should this be of interest. Please contact Dan Lay (dan@naturetrek.co.uk or 01962 733051) for further information and/or make sure to stipulate any interest in a possible extension upon booking.

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 at the time of booking.

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