



Written for Elegant Resorts Africa Brochure 2011.
Watermark image by Ute von Ludwiger.

Namibia

The word Namibia literally translates as 'big emptiness', a hauntingly beautiful, profoundly silent landscape that is simply awe-inspiring. Here is a land of superlatives and extremes; at 80 million years of age, the Namib Desert is the oldest on the planet and home to some of the highest sand dunes in the world. Covering almost 50,000km², the Namib-Naukluft National Park is one of the largest conservation areas in Africa with towering mountain ranges, deep sculpted canyons and vast gravel plains. Viewed from the air, either by balloon or private charter flight, the rich colours, vast spaces and lunar landscapes are even more inspiring.

Desert rainfall averages no more than 3 inches per year, yet this seemingly inhospitable environment is not as barren as you might expect. The Namib is home to a wealth of desert-adapted wildlife, including springbok and the inimitable shovel-nosed lizard, which deals with the burning temperatures by lifting its feet in turn to 'dance' on the sand. Many animals get the vital liquid they need from the fog which accumulates over the Atlantic and moves in over the Skeleton Coast, one of Namibia's many designated national park and wilderness areas. The coast was named for the bleached whale and seal bones that remain from the active days of whaling, and also for the eerie carcasses of wrecked ships, vivid reminders of the raw power of nature.

The greatest variety and concentration of wildlife can be found in Etosha National Park, a protected reserve the size of Holland. The heart of the park is a vast salt pan which attracts thousands of wading birds including impressive flocks of flamingos after heavy rain. During the dry season, tens of thousands of animals converge to drink at the waterholes beside this pan. The landscape is mainly flat and open, making it easy to spot leopard, cheetah, elephant, black and white rhino, giraffe, zebra and a particularly dense concentration of lion.

Outside of the parks and the wildlife there is plenty more to explore, from the exquisite San rock art to the fascinating traditional lifestyle of the Himba, one of the last true nomadic people in Africa. The Namib and Damaraland offer remarkably clear skies for star gazers, while excellent fishing is available from the banks of the Kavango and Kunene Rivers on the Northern borders. Namibia's main draw however is the epic grandeur of its landscape and the intimate scale of its tourism business. Other African countries may offer a greater density of game or more hospitable coastlines, but Namibia will catch the imagination of those with a true taste for adventure.