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STAY OFF THE TAR

Namibia is a veritable 4x4 playground. From rocky plateaus and sandy dunes to spectacular scenery and wild camping, there's something for novice off-roaders and serious 4x4 adventurers. This guide provides a handy overview of the best off-road routes through some of the country's most beautiful regions, including advice on where to camp, road conditions and vehicle support.

What are you waiting for?

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MAP KEY



RECOMMENDED ROUTE



4X4 ROUTE



VETERINARY CONTROL FENCE



GENERAL ROADS



RIVER



NAMIBIA



OUTSIDE NAMIBIA



NATIONAL PARK



OCEAN



TOWN



CAMPSITE/LODGE/RESORT

Pictured here: Looking east along the Orange River in southern Namibia.





THE ORANGE RIVER

NOORDOEWER TO ROSH PINAH AND AUS

Most visits to southern Namibia focus on Ai-Ais and the eastern edge of the Fish River Canyon (see page 6), but the meandering westward route to Rosh Pinah is just as worth it.

Your starting point is the Engen petrol station beyond Noordoewer Border Post. Here, take a left onto the C13/D212. Although tarred for the first 50 km, it marks the start of a network of well-graded dirt roads that follow the Orange River's northern banks, branch up to the hot springs of Ai-Ais and hook around both sides of the impassable Fish River Canyon.

As tar gives way to gravel, the Aussenkehr vineyards make a

brief, green appearance before the baked mountain vistas return. On the northern riverbank, layers of black dolomite and white limestone form striped cliffs that tower over the road, while granite peaks line the southern shore across the river. Drive this route at dawn or, better yet, in the late afternoon or dusk. The dolomite soon gives way to granite cliffs on both banks, which glow red in the fading light.

Fish-eagles and other river birds congregate on the water; stop to take it all in, especially along the first 60 km from Aussenkehr where there are fewer settlements and mining activities.

ROAD CONDITIONS:

Well-graded to Rosh Pinah with rocky drifts along the D463.

4X4 TRAILS: Quiver tree forest 4x4 trail, 35 km, self-drive, permit costs N\$145 at Norotshama River

Resort (+264-63-29-7215).

WHERE TO STAY: Camping and chalets at **Amanzi Trails** from N\$80 a person (www.amanzitrails.co.za).

Camping and chalets at **Norotshama River Resort** at Aussenkehr from N\$136 a person (www.noordoewerinfo.co.za/norotshama.htm). Camp wild on the deserted D463.

About 80 km from Aussenkehr, there's a manned checkpoint where you'll be asked for your Namibian Road Fund Administration permit (see Border Control on page 44) and driver's licence before turning north to Rosh Pinah.

From Rosh Pinah, the tarred C13 is in good condition and runs rapidly north. It's the fastest route to Aus and Lüderitz, but if you have time, the alternative trip along the D463 is a must.



This gravel road starts at Witputs Cattle Post, 47 km north of Rosh Pinah and heads east beneath black dolomite ridges, silhouetted with hundreds of quiver trees. The road is badly eroded in places with numerous gates and drifts, but the views are worth it. After 95 km the road splits; the right fork continues west towards the Fish River Canyon, but both roads return to the B4 highway after about four hours of driving. The scenery along each route is spectacular as they turn north along either side of a low line of hills. Pick the left-hand D459 for the best sunset views.

PITSTOPS

Noordoewer: padkos, fuel, tyre repair, mechanic.

Rosh Pinah: ATM, shops, bottle store, fuel, tyre repair, mechanic.



FISH RIVER CANYON

AUSSENKEHR TO KEETMANSHOOP

The scenery along the south-eastern edge of the Fish River is like no other, an almost-alien landscape that's vast and barren, not a blade of grass breaking the rocky ground as far as the eye can see. A few hardy bushes survive in a thin band along the Gamchab River, but this ephemeral stream and the well-graded C37/D278 that cuts north across it towards Ai-Ais provides the only sign of life.

The route begins at the D278, 3km west of Aussenkehr. It's the principal road into this region, with just one alternative: a short 4x4 track that starts a few kilometres

further west and follows the Gamchab River parallel to the D278 before rejoining it 12km up the road. The track isn't challenging and is a great way to get close to the sheer cliffs that are otherwise just a distant line from the main road.

Ai-Ais and Hobas are the two main camping options on this eastern side of the Fish River Canyon. Ai-Ais is a popular stop in its own right with its hot springs and a large resort with chalets, powered camping stands, a restaurant and fuel. Hobas Campsite, 60km north, is the gateway

ROAD CONDITIONS: Well-graded throughout the region. Rocky along the canyon viewpoint tracks.

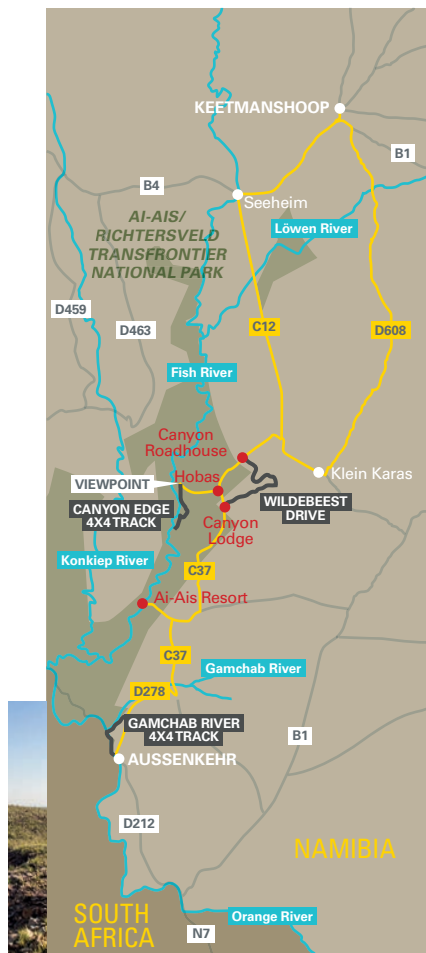
4X4 TRAILS: **Gamchab River 4x4 Track**, 12km, self-drive, no permit.

Wildebeest Drive, 46km, self-drive, permit from N\$50 a person and N\$100 a vehicle at Canyon

Lodge or Canyon Roadhouse. **Canyon Wall 4x4 Track**, 40km, self-drive, viewpoint permit from N\$60 a person and N\$10 a vehicle a day at Hobas.

WHERE TO STAY: Camping and chalets at **Ai-Ais Resort** from N\$143 a person (www.aisresort.com). Camping at Hobas from N\$120 a person (www.nwr.com.na/hobas.html) and **Canyon Roadhouse** from N\$150 a person a night. B&B at **Canyon Roadhouse** and **Canyon Lodge** from N\$920 a person a night (www.gondwana-collection.com).





to the main Fish River Canyon viewpoints; a permit is required to reach these lookouts and can be purchased at the campsite. Once you have your permit, it's 10 km to the canyon edge, which drops 450m into the gorge below.

Don't miss the 20 km 4x4 track that starts 2 km before the main viewpoint (turn left off the Hobas access road). It's not well sign-posted and easy to miss, but the two-and-a-half-hour drive to the southernmost viewpoint and back is a must, with excellent views. The track is in fair condition, but bumpy with sharp rocks in places.

About 16 km north of Hobas is Canyon Roadhouse, an essential stop if just to see vintage cars and the old filling station, now converted to serve meals, drinks and filter coffee. Enquire here for the 4x4 Wildebeest Drive, a 46 km loop that starts across the road and loops back to join the C37

at Canyon Lodge, just south of Hobas. The trail isn't difficult and passes beautiful terrain dotted with quiver trees.

From Canyon Roadhouse there are two dirt roads north: the main C12 and D608, which takes a detour off the C12 at Klein Karas. Take the flat, wide C12 if you're looking for the quickest route north or the 120 km Klein Karas route for the more scenic option. It can't compete with the grandeur of the canyon, but the last 50 km before Keetmanshoop are worth seeing as the road undulates through low hills and crosses the Löwen River.

PITSTOPS

Keetmanshoop: ATM, shops, bottle store, fuel, tyre repair, mechanic. **Canyon Roadhouse:** ATM, padkos, fuel.



SOUTHERN NAMIB-NAUKLUFT

AUS TO SOSSUSVLEI VIA THE SPES BONA LOOP

The small town of Aus lies on the southeastern edge of Namib-Naukluft National Park. Here, the tarred C13 becomes gravel as it crosses the B4 highway and heads towards Sossusvlei, 340 km to the north.

Before you set out, it's worth taking a short 4x4 excursion along the Aus Townlands Trail, up towards the park border. After the two-hour trail, which starts and ends on the B4 and follows a sandy riverbed

under towering granite koppies, take the gravel C13 towards Tiras. Almost immediately, the road begins to fall away, dropping 400m in 30km onto the treeless expanse of Neisipvlakte Plains. Tirol Campsite, right in the centre, makes an excellent overnight stop, with the grasslands fading unobstructed to the horizon in all directions.

About 12 km north of Tirol, take the D707 towards Spes Bona. Sandwiched between the

Tiras Mountains to the east and the first red dunes of Namib-Naukluft National Park to the west, this 120 km, two-hour loop is one of Namibia's most beautiful drives. Flocks of ostriches and large herds of oryx can be seen through the park fence, with the occasional stray grazing the grassier slopes on the opposite mountains. The road is corrugated in places, but the views are unquestionably worth it, especially at dawn when the rising



sun brings out the best in the long line of dunes.

After 67 km, you'll pass the sign for Ranch Koiimasis, an inviting jeep track into the heart of the mountains. The ranch has camping and more upmarket lodge accommodation, but the access road is open to guests only.

The D707 rejoins the main road at Spes Bona, a private farmstead and a landmark at the D707/C27 T-junction, but there's no reason to linger. Instead, drive 25 km south to Aubures Camp and 4x4 Trail, worth the detour if you have time. Alternatively, turn north and continue on to Betta Campsite, 24 km up the road. Here, you'll find a well-stocked farm shop, hot

ROAD CONDITIONS:

The roads on this route are regularly graded, but expect some sand and corrugations on the D707. The C13 and C27 get busy during the holidays and beware of windscreen damage from loose stones.

4X4 TRAILS: Aus Townlands

4x4 Trail, 26 km, self-drive, permit from N\$200 a vehicle at Klein-Aus-Vista. **Koichab 4x4 Trail**, guided, overnight in the Namib Desert, from N\$1500 a person, min eight people, book through Klein-Aus-Vista or Namib Offroad Excursions (+264-81-128-8050). **Aubures 4x4 trail**, 25 km, self-drive, permit from N\$100 a vehicle at Aubures Camp – longer

guided drives also available.

WHERE TO STAY: Klein-

Aus-Vista has camping and cottages from N\$100 (www.klein-aus-vista.com).

Tirool has camping and chalets from N\$90 (www.tirool.com).

Aubures Camp has camping from N\$90 (+264-63-68-3314).

Betta Campsite has camping and chalets from N\$80 a person (www.bettacamp.net).

Ranch Koiimasis in the Tiras Mountain Conservancy has private campsites and chalets from N\$140 a person (www.namibia-farm-lodge.com) and **NamibRand**

Nature Reserve has a range of luxury desert lodges and camps from N\$3310 (www.namibrand.com).



meals, lodging and fuel.

Take the C27 west for the last stretch through NamibRand Nature Reserve, another candidate for best drive in Namibia. From Betta, the wide, graded gravel heads due west before turning north across a wonderful open plain. Low mountains dusted with desert sand grow gradually larger until you pass through the park gate – just a cattle grid, no park fees required – and find yourself directly below Mount Losberg, towering 700 m above the road. Ostrich, oryx and springbok are common sightings from and on the road, and other large mammals are sometimes seen.

Just past the gate, the road passes out of the mountains and drops in a perfect straight line across the 30 km-wide plain. This is where animal sightings are most common – be especially careful of springbok, which blend in with the dun-coloured gravel road.

After 46 km, you'll reach the park exit gate; from there it's just another 35 km to Sesriem and the entrance to Sossusvlei.



PITSTOPS

Aus: ATM, padkos, bottle store, fuel, tyre repair.

Betta: basic supplies, padkos, fuel, tyre repair.



LÜDERITZ

Lüderitz is your starting point for self-drive 4x4 tours into the Namib Desert – only guided tours are allowed and these must be booked in advance. Tours to Walvis Bay cost from N\$7 750 a person for five nights. Day trips into the diamond fields south of Lüderitz are available from N\$1 450 a person (www.coastways.com.na). Visit Lüderitz Safaris & Tours in town for information on other activities, including trips to the abandoned mining settlement of Kolmanskop. Lüderitz has ATMs, shops, fuel, tyre repair or mechanics.

WHERE TO STAY: Shark Island Campsite costs N\$100 a person (www.nwr.com.na). Element Riders Place has dorm beds, rooms and camping from N\$90 (www.element-riders.com). Lüderitz Nest Hotel has B&B from N\$775 a person (www.nesthotel.com).

SOSSUSVLEI

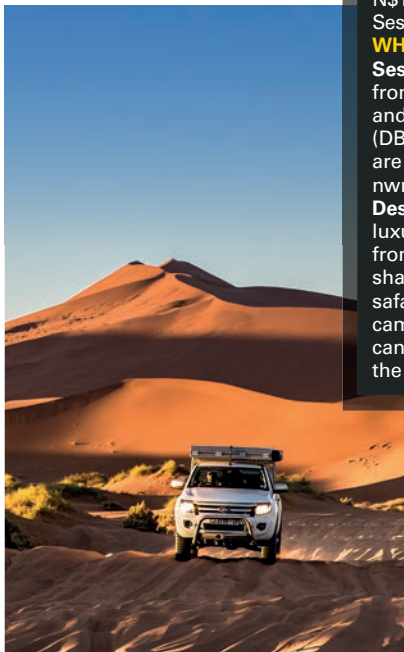
SESRIEM TO DEADVLEI

No Namibian road trip is complete without a visit to Sossusvlei, in the heart of the Namib Desert. Here, the ephemeral Tsauchab River flows through the short Sesriem Canyon before opening into a 60 km-long drainage basin, completely enclosed by some of the world's highest dunes. This river never reaches the sea and only very rarely floods enough to carry water to the far end of the basin. Strictly speaking, Sossusvlei (which translates roughly as 'dead-end marsh') is the cul-de-sac right at the end, although the name commonly refers to the area as a whole.

Access is along a tarred road through Namibia Wildlife Resorts' Sesriem Camp. Only guests staying here or at one of the two lodges inside the park are allowed into Sossusvlei for sunrise.

There are four main attractions in Sossusvlei: Sesriem Canyon, Dune 45, Deadvlei, and the Big Daddy dune. The canyon is 4 km from Sesriem Camp and can be visited at any time of day. Dune 45 is halfway down the basin and makes a great sunset spot, being only 30 minutes from the park gate that closes at 7 pm. Deadvlei and Big Daddy are also spectacular

in the evening light, but try to arrive at sunrise. Hike up the dune (about 20 minutes' walk from the last car park) and watch as the desert is painted red as far as the eye can see.



ROAD CONDITIONS: The last 5 km to Deadvlei car park is thick sand and can't be driven in a sedan. A shuttle runs from where the tar ends but doesn't operate early or late; you'll miss sunrise and sunset if you don't have a 4x4.

PERMITS: Park permits cost N\$60 a person and N\$10 a vehicle from Sesriem Camp.

WHERE TO STAY: Both **Sesriem Camp** (camping from N\$140 a person) and **Sossus Dune Lodge** (DB&B from N\$2300) are in the park (www.nwr.com.na), as is **Kulala Desert Lodge**, which has luxury accommodation from N\$4246 a person sharing (www.wilderness-safaris.com). Numerous campsites and lodges can also be found in the area.

PITSTOPS

Sesriem: the Engen just outside of town has an ATM, padkos, general supplies, fuel and tyre repair.



CENTRAL NAMIBIA

SOSSUSVLEI TO WINDHOEK

This meandering route isn't the quickest to Windhoek and isn't recommended in a single day. The roads east of Sossusvlei are very hard on tyres, with puncture repair signs outside nearly every camp and small settlement you pass. Take it easy – these roads are worth it, especially the passes up the escarpment. If you're short on time, head straight to Solitaire and take Spreets-hoogte Pass. This will get you to Windhoek in about five-and-a-half hours and takes in the best views.

With time on your hands, take the road east out of Sesriem towards the C19. At the T-junction turn south, away from Solitaire, and follow

the road for 27 km before turning left onto the bumpy D854 towards Bullsport; numerous rocky drifts make it particularly tough on tyres but there are some interesting stops along the way. First of these is the Klipspringer 4x4 Trail at Tsauchab River Camp. With a pool, private campsites and a few chalets, it's a great overnight stop and the 4x4 track that loops into the mountains south of the camp has something for everyone. While mostly an easy drive, there are optional grade-five sections (the highest technical 4x4 grading) that aren't recommended for inexperienced drivers. Whichever option you take,

the trail isn't long and even at a leisurely pace you'll be back on the main road within a few hours.

From Tsauchab, continue up the D854 for 30 km to the entrance to the Naukluft region of the larger Namib-Naukluft National Park (which you may also hear called Naukluft Mountain Zebra Park). It's easy to miss, so look to your left for a tall quiver tree breaking the skyline beside of a low, unmanned gate. The park has a single public campsite, Koedoesrus, on the shaded banks of the narrow Naukluft River. Although more of a stream, the channel flows year round and the sound of running water, a rarity

WINDHOEK

Namibia's capital and largest city. If disaster strikes and you find yourself needing parts or major repairs, you'll have to make your way here or get what you need delivered. Stop in Windhoek to pick up Namibian Wildlife Resorts permits before heading west (see National Park Permits on page 44), or for any camping or outdoor equipment you may have forgotten.

Windhoek has ATMs, shops, fuel, tyre repair and mechanics.

WHERE TO STAY: UrbanCamp.net in central Windhoek has free Wi-Fi and shaded, powered stands for N\$140 a person (www.urbancamp.net). Ondekaremba is conveniently 7km from the international airport and has camping and rooms from N\$120 a person (www.ondekaremba.de).

in Namibia, permeates the pretty site. There are only 10 stands, so book in advance especially during holidays. The park offers a number of hikes, from short trails to bathing pools up the river to half- and multi-day routes into the mountains.

Back on the D854, it's a short drive north to the C14 and Bullsport, which has a small shop and tyre repair. Northwest is Solitaire, a popular stop for fuel and supplies, but the three passes to the east are the real attraction on this section.

Remhoogte Pass on the C24 is the southernmost of these: a gradual, 30km ascent through the twists and turns of a narrow river valley with imposing outcrops on both sides. As the road climbs, it cuts back and forth across the riverbed and there are plenty of picnic spots up the usually dry tributaries on either side.

At the top of the pass, take the D1261 left to Nauchas, then left

again on the D1275 to the top of Spreetshoogte Pass. Before the descent it's worth stopping at Namibgrens Guest Farm, which has a campsite, chalets, villas, and hiking and 4x4 trails. The 4x4 routes are short loops through the surrounding farmland, ranging from easy sunset drives to more technical challenges along the edge of the high plateau.

It's 15km from Namibgrens to the bottom of the pass, 600m below; the bulk of the descent happens rapidly as the road (paved for this brief section because of the very steep gradient), switchbacks down the escarpment with wonderful views of the distant Naukluft plains.

Back on the plains, the road hugs the 2000m peaks of the Rantberg Mountains, passing scattered quiver trees as it heads back towards the C14. Solitaire is just a few kilometres to the south but turn north up the C14 instead, across the Tropic of

ROAD CONDITIONS:

Take special care on the D854 and D850. The workshop at Tsauchab River Camp repairs more than 20 punctures there each month. The roads through the passes can be rocky and loose in places and may be flooded during heavy rain. Spreetshoogte Pass isn't suitable for vehicles pulling trailers.

4X4 TRAILS: Klipspringer

4x4 Trail, 13km, self-drive, easy route with 4km optional, very challenging section, free permit for guests at Tsauchab River Camp. **Namibgrens** has a number of short, self-drive 4x4 routes on private farmland, free to guests or negotiable for day visitors.

WHERE TO STAY:

Tsauchab River Camp has exclusive campsites and chalets from N\$250 a person (www.tsauchab.com). **Koedoesrus Naukluft Campsite** has camping from N\$120 a person plus permit (www.nwr.com.na). **Namibgrens Guest Farm** has camping and B&B from N\$150 a person (www.namibgrens.com).

Capricorn and over the Guab River. This picturesque 3km river crossing has sharp corners and steep drops and requires careful driving. Once over the river, the road cuts straight and true across open grasslands. About 20km north of the river, take the C26 to the right and up Gamsberg Pass, the final major pass along this route.

The change in scenery up the pass is its most remarkable quality. From golden plains, the road climbs gradually, crossing and re-crossing the Diab River before rising 400m in 8km with views back down the valley. Take a break at the lookout point at the top of the pass and admire seemingly endless mountains vanishing into the distance.

From the top of Gamsberg Pass, it's a 130km, two-hour drive to Windhoek. The C26 is well graded and in good condition, but after the beauty of the pass, the scenery has little of interest until the short Kapfurberg Pass 13km from the city. Another 5km on, the tar starts again and you're just minutes from the outskirts of Windhoek.

PITSTOPS

Bullspport: padkos and tyre repair (no fuel).

Solitaire: ATM, basic supplies, padkos, bottle store, fuel, tyre repair.



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NORTHERN NAMIB-NAUKLUFT

WINDHOEK TO THE COAST

There are three main routes from Windhoek to the coast. The quickest, via the tarred B1 and B2, is a four-hour journey to be avoided unless time is tight. Of the two alternatives, the C28 is the more direct, passing down the escarpment and on to the beautiful Tinkas Flats, with short detours to Welwitschia Plains and the 'moon landscape' near Swakopmund. South of the C28, the C26/C14 breaks out of the escarpment at Gamsberg Pass (see page 15) and into Kuiseb Canyon, with camping and detours along the Kuiseb River all the way to Walvis Bay. It's the side tracks and surrounding campsites that make these routes special, so take time to explore. Both routes enter Namib-Naukluft National Park; you'll need a permit to leave either the C28 or C14 (see National Parks Permits on page 44).

From Windhoek, the C28 is tarred for the first 25 km with another 48 km of well-graded gravel to the D1412 junction. Here, vehicles with trailers should turn south down Ushoogte Pass to avoid Bosua Pass, 60 km further west, which is steep and not suitable for towing. Both roads descend along twisting gravel to the open expanses of the Tinkas

Flats and take three to four hours, with the C28 slightly quicker.

Once down the escarpment, the best route into the Tinkas is along a 4x4 track that turns north off the C28 just inside the park border. Look out for the distinctive sign – a stone-slab suspended in a wooden frame. A smaller sign nearby specifies 4x4 only, but the loose stone and coarse sand track isn't technical. Quiver trees perch on low rocky outcrops as the track heads towards the scattered campsites to the north. Blutkuppe is the largest of these, with 15 well-spaced stands around an immense granite boulder that glows red in the late afternoon light. There are pit toilets, but no water or other facilities at any of the camps.

From Blutkuppe, drive south back to the C28, then west to Welwitschia Plains and the 'moon landscape' beyond. After a short section of tar, take the Welwitschia turn-off to the right. The well-graded side road continues north towards the Swakop River with hundreds of ancient welwitschia plants, some more than 1 000 years old, plastered low to the ground on either side. Before the river, turn west on the only road left, the D1991, which climbs up along a

ROAD CONDITIONS: The passes down the escarpment are well graded, but rocky in places, especially over drifts and after rain. Bosua Pass is steep with loose dirt and isn't suitable for vehicles with trailers. The main roads to the coast are wide gravel and in excellent condition, with good dirt tracks leading north and south into Namib-Naukluft National Park. Both the Swakop and Kuiseb valleys are sandy, but firm. Be careful of flash floods during the summer rains.

4X4 TRAILS: On the northern C28 route: **Tinkas 4x4 Trail** to Blutkuppe, 27 km, self-drive, permit available at NWR offices (see page 44). **Swakop River 4x4 Trail**, easy self-drive along the Swakop and Khan riverbeds, free permit available from MET (see page 44). South of the C14:

SWAKOPMUND

Swakop is Namibia's seaside holiday town. Beach houses and restaurants line the sandy shore and there are plenty of accommodation options, from hotels to campsites. Major shops and repair centres can be found on the B2 highway as it enters town, where it becomes Sam Nujoma Avenue (Swakopmund's retail hub). The Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and NWR permit offices are at the far end, just before the sea, on the corner of Bismarck Street. Swakopmund has ATMs, shops, fuel, tyre repair and mechanics..

WHERE TO STAY: Alte Brücke Resort has camping and chalets from N\$145 a person sharing (www.altebruecke.com). Tiger Reef Campsite has stands from N\$100 (+264-81-791-0133). Mile-4 Caravan Park has camping and rooms from N\$80 a person, plus N\$50 a vehicle (www.mile4swkp.com).

low ridge overlooking the desolate hills to the north. This is the famous 'moon landscape', a barren, grey wasteland cut through by the (usually dry) Swakop and Khan rivers. It's a spectacular area and with a free Dorob National Park permit (see page 44) you can drive into the Swakop and Khan riverbeds and explore the canyons. At this point, you're less than an hour from Swakopmund – a quick detour if you still need to pick up the permit.

For those taking the C26 from Windhoek, the road to Gamsberg Pass is regularly graded and in fair condition, but there's little to see along the way. Once down the pass and through the rocky, criss-crossing drifts of the Diab River Valley, the road opens onto wide, undulating plains. As the kilometres speed by, rolling hills become more and more pronounced until, after turning north

on the C14, the road feels more like a roller-coaster than a motorway. After 11 km you'll cross a cattle grid that marks the entrance to the national park and the road drops rapidly into the Kuiseb Canyon.

The Kuiseb River forms a clean boundary between the Namib

contact **Live The Journey** for guided 4x4 tours to Sandwich Harbour and into the northern Namib Desert (www.livethejourney.co.za).

WHERE TO STAY:

Blutkuppe is the most spectacular campsite in the Tinkas region, with **Mirabib and Homeb campsites** the best further south. Camping in **Namib-Naukluft National Park** costs N\$80 a night, plus permit (both must be paid prior to arrival – see page 44). **Goanikontes-Oasis** in the 'moon landscape' region has campsites and rooms from N\$90 a stand and N\$80 a person (www.goanikontes-oasis.com). **Gobabeb Training and Research Centre** has rooms and camping from \$150 a person (www.gobabebtrc.org).



Desert's red dunes and the grasslands to the north. It's an extraordinary division of sand and plain, and there's nowhere better to take it in than at Homeb Camp on the northern riverbank. To get to Homeb, exit the Kuiseb Canyon and continue past Aruvlei Camp on the C14. After 20km take a left down a bumpy track that slants across the level plains. A few kilometres later, a right-hand fork heads to Mirabib Camp. The left fork continues to Homeb and descends into the oasis of the Kuiseb Valley. Opposite, the dunes rise over the river, hugging the southern banks as they twist out of sight. There's a

small community settlement about 1 km from the designated camping area at Homeb, but otherwise a few pit loos are the only signs of human activity at Homeb or Mirabib. For isolation, choose Mirabib, but the unique Homeb landscape is not to be missed (thick sands at the latter make it 4x4 only and only guided tours are allowed to cross the river).

Graded dirt tracks continue from Homeb all the way along the north bank of the Kuiseb to Walvis Bay. If you'd like to experience the area with a few more amenities, try the rooms and campsites at Gobabeb, which have power and water.



PITSTOPS

There are no major resupply points along the C28 or C14, so take everything you need with you.





BF Goodrich
TAKE CONTROL

SPITZKOP AND MESSUM CRATER

SWAKOPMUND THROUGH DOROB NATIONAL PARK

North of Swakopmund, the C34 hugs the shore to Henties Bay, a long, straight road with little to see on either side. Stop briefly 15 km south of Henties at the wreck of the *Zeila* of Hangana fishing vessel, which ran aground in 2008 and is still very well preserved. There's a small car park opposite and the wreck is clearly visible from the sandy beach.

Once you've stretched your legs, continue north to Henties Bay and turn right on the D1918 to Spitzkop, a remarkable series of massive granite koppies that rise abruptly from the surrounding grassland. The largest, Grosse Spitzkop, stands roughly 700 m above the plains and the various peaks and narrow clefts are popular with rock climbers and hikers. Just camping at Spitzkop is unforgettable. Although it gets busy in holiday

season, the stands are scattered in small clusters at discrete intervals, and, when quiet, it's easy to imagine that you have the whole majestic scene to yourself.

From Spitzkop, head north along the D1930 to Uis before turning south and then west on the D2342. After 38 km, look out for a rough 4x4 track heading south along the Messum River. It eventually leads back to the coast, but not before passing through the welwitschia-strewn basin of Messum Crater, a must for anyone who loves wide-open spaces. About 18 km across, the 130-million-year-old crater is ringed by low hills, and the bumpy track cuts through the middle as it heads to the ocean. To take the 4x4 tracks west of the crater you'll need a Dorob National Park permit (see National Parks Permits on page 44).

ROAD CONDITIONS:

There's good gravel between Spitzkop, Uis and Henties Bay, but the roads into and around Messum Crater are infrequently graded with bad corrugations and loose rocks for long stretches.

WHERE TO STAY:

Spitzkoppe Campsites has camping and chalets from N\$150 a stand and N\$100 a person (www.spitzkoppe.com). **Cape Cross Lodge** has camping and rooms from N\$400 (www.capecross.org). **St Nowhere Spa and Campsite** has camping from N\$350 a stand, up to five people (+264-81-252-9422).

PITSTOPS

Henties Bay: ATM, shops, fuel, tyre repair. **Uis:** ATM, shops, fuel, tyre repair.

THE SKELETON COAST

SWAKOPMUND TO TERRACE BAY

It's about 200km, or 124 miles, from Swakopmund to Ugab River Gate, the southern entrance to Skeleton Coast National Park. With few landmarks along this monotonous coastline, the distance from Swakopmund has become the principal naming convention and as you drive north the 'mile-stones' zip by: Mile 17 fishing area, Bock's Bay at Mile 100, Mile 108 campsite, and so on.

Fishing is the main, if not only, leisure activity and the profusion of seemingly identical fishing spots demand their own more colourful and intriguing names. On foggy days (which are the norm) the only indication that you're covering any distance at all is their signposts, which appear every few hundred metres, vanishing just as suddenly in the gloom.

Accommodation along the coast is limited. Avoid the 'Mile' campsites in Dorob National Park,

which are little more than fishing spots with few or no facilities. Rather stay at Cape Cross or St Nowhere (see page 20), or cross into Skeleton Coast National Park where there are two more options: camping at Torra Bay or chalets at Terrace Bay – the furthest north you can get without joining a guided tour.

It is possible to transit freely through Skeleton Coast National Park without staying over, but you won't be able to visit the Torra or Terrace Bay camps. About 10km before Torra Bay, take the C39 to the only other public gate, Springbokwasser, and continue from there to Palmwag or Twyfelfontein.



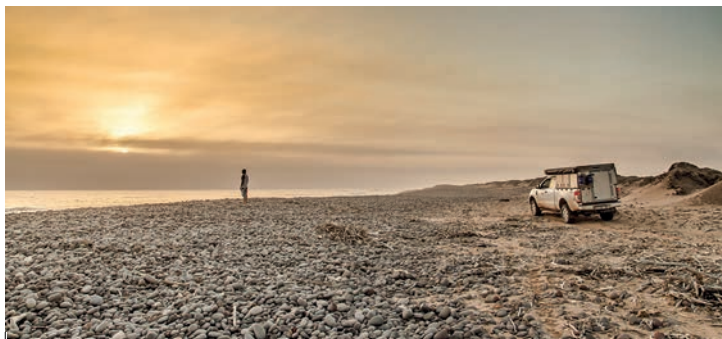
PITSTOPS

Terrence Bay: fuel, basic supplies, padkos, tyre repair.

ROAD CONDITIONS: The C34 from Swakopmund to Skeleton Coast National Park is what's known as a 'salt road', a compressed mixture of salt and dirt that forms a smooth, hard surface that sometimes looks like tar. Don't be deceived – in foggy and wet conditions salt roads get slippery and dangerous. The road becomes gravel at the park gate and deteriorates badly north of Torra Bay, with sharp stones presenting a danger to tyres.

4X4 TRAILS: Contact **Live The Journey** for multi-day, guided 4x4 tours north of Terrace Bay to the Kunene River (www.livethejourney.co.za).

WHERE TO STAY: **Torra Bay Campsite** is open only in December and January, with camping from N\$165 a person. Two-bed chalets at **Terrence Bay** (no camping) are N\$850 a person sharing for DB&B (www.nwr.com.na).



WESTERN DAMARALAND

UGAB RIVER TO DIVORCE PASS AND DESOLATION VALLEY

When the Ugab River is dry, its sandy riverbed is the best route from the coast into Western Damaraland (see National Park Permits on page 44 for Dorob National Park permit information). February to April are the wettest months and heavy rains can make the route impossible, with swampy sections lingering into May and June. When dry, the route is not to be missed, the track winding up an ever-narrowing gorge that climbs slowly into a beautiful high-walled canyon.

Access to the track begins 7 km south of the Skeleton Coast National Park gate and

it's just under 70 km to the only permanently inhabited settlement in the region, Save The Rhino Trust's Ugab Base Camp. Although there are a couple of very rocky exit points along the river en route, the camp is at the main crossroads of the area. Here, you can turn north to Desolation Valley, south to Messum Crater (see page 20), or continue east along the Ugab towards Mount Brandberg. About 10 km east along the Ugab there is another route north up the intimidatingly steep and rocky Divorce Pass which, although spectacular and satisfying to complete, is loose and narrow

ROAD CONDITIONS:

Divorce Pass is particularly challenging with narrow turns and the possibility of vehicle damage. Further north, Desolation Valley is smooth along the Huab River, but rocky and slow going along the valley sides.

WHERE TO STAY: **Ugab Base Camp** has camping from N\$80 a person (www.savetherhinotrust.org). **Camp wild** between Ugab River and Twyfelfontein.



in places and should be attempted only by experienced drivers.

In general, the 4x4 tracks north of the Ugab River are very bad, with steep inclines out of the riverbed and sharp rocks that can shred tyres. It's slow going and tremendously isolated, but worthwhile for anyone in search of adventure. On the more easterly Divorce Pass route, the track crosses high, rocky plains before ducking into a succession of long, sandy riverbeds – tributaries of the Aba-Huab River (see page 26) that congregate around Twyfelfontein. To the west, the bumpy trail leads eventually to Desolation Valley, a wide plain cut through by the shallow Huab River Gorge and surrounded north and south by high, craggy peaks. Away from the river, the sides of the valley are littered with sharp rocks and larger granite boulders. Stay on the central, sandy tracks to explore the valley westwards until they culminate in a swampy, near-impassable drift some 65km from Twyfelfontein. For most drivers, this is a great place for a picnic before turning back east in search of desert elephants along the river.

PITSTOPS

There are no resupply points until Twyfelfontein – you could go days without seeing another vehicle.





NORTHERN DAMARALAND

TWYFELFONTEIN TO PALMWAG

The northern reaches of Damara-land, from Twyfelfontein to Palmwag, are wild and desolate and a good introduction to what you can expect as you travel onwards to Kaokoland and the Kunene River (see page 28). Don't make the mistake of bypassing the region in your haste to get north – it has a lot to offer in its own right, with excellent dirt roads that are easy to navigate.

If you do want to get off-road, the soft sand of the Aba-Huab River offers some challenges, but nothing like the difficulties further west and south towards Ugab River (see page 22). The

river can flood rapidly, especially during the late rainy season from February to April, when it should be avoided. For the rest of the year the riverbed is dry and sandy and, although this may cause problems for inexperienced drivers, any 4x4 vehicle with properly deflated tyres should manage comfortably.

Don't let the fear of getting stuck put you off – this section is relatively busy, so you're unlikely to be stranded for long – because you'll miss the chance to explore an exceptionally beautiful area that is home to desert elephants and large herds of oryx. Mornings and evenings are best for sightings.

Away from the riverbed, a number of cultural and geological attractions are worth a detour. Twyfelfontein World Heritage Site (N\$100 a person, N\$20 a vehicle) is a short drive from Aba-Huab Camp and has an incredible collection of petroglyphs or rock engravings. San artists created these between 6000 and 2000 years ago (well before they were displaced by Damara pastoralists roughly 1000 years ago). Also worth visiting is the Petrified Forest (N\$40 a person, N\$20 a vehicle), about 30km east of Aba-Huab Camp along the C39 to Khorixas. There are a number of

unofficial sites along the road, but the best is the official site where a guide will lead you around a small, rocky hill littered with petrified trunks estimated to be some 260 million years old.

From Aba-Huab, head north along the M128, a well-graded dirt road that passes through wide-open, grassy plains and attractive rolling mountain scenery to Palmwag Concession.

If you're fully self-sufficient, you can camp at one of two

designated campsites in the concession, but we'd recommend choosing the excellent campsite at Palmwag Lodge on the concession's border. Here, campers can join game drives or self-drive through the concession to search for rhinos and desert elephants, as well as use the lodge facilities such as the bar, restaurant, swimming pool and Wi-Fi. While sightings are slim, the rocky roads cutting through large, grassy plains are worth exploring and a stop at Aub Canyon is a must.

BFGoodrich
TAKE CONTROL

PITSTOPS

Omaruru: ATM, fuel, shops,
tyre repair, mechanic
Palmwag: fuel, tyre
repair, mechanic

ROAD CONDITIONS:

Mostly well-graded dirt, but the jeep tracks in Palmwag Concession are stony. The dry riverbeds are easy to navigate if you deflate your tyres to tackle the soft sand.

4X4 TRAILS: No specific trails, but don't miss out on exploring the Aba-Huab River (free).

WHERE TO STAY:

Aba-Huab Campsite costs N\$80 a person a night and N\$10 a car (www.spitzkopperreservations.com); **Palmwag Lodge** offers a range of rooms from N\$1245 a person a night and camping from N\$120 a person a night (www.palmwaglodge.com).





SOUTHERN KAOKOLAND

PALMWAG TO ORUPEMBE

The area between Palmwag and Orupembe must be one of the most beautiful in Namibia. Deserted except for the occasional nomadic Himba cattle herder, the plains are visual masterpieces – think golden grass dotted with gemsbok and springbok and hemmed in by desolate, rocky mountains.

Southern Kaokoland can be explored from the north or south, but there are a limited number of routes to choose from. Navigation is simple, but a GPS with Tracks4Africa and a good paper map are essential.

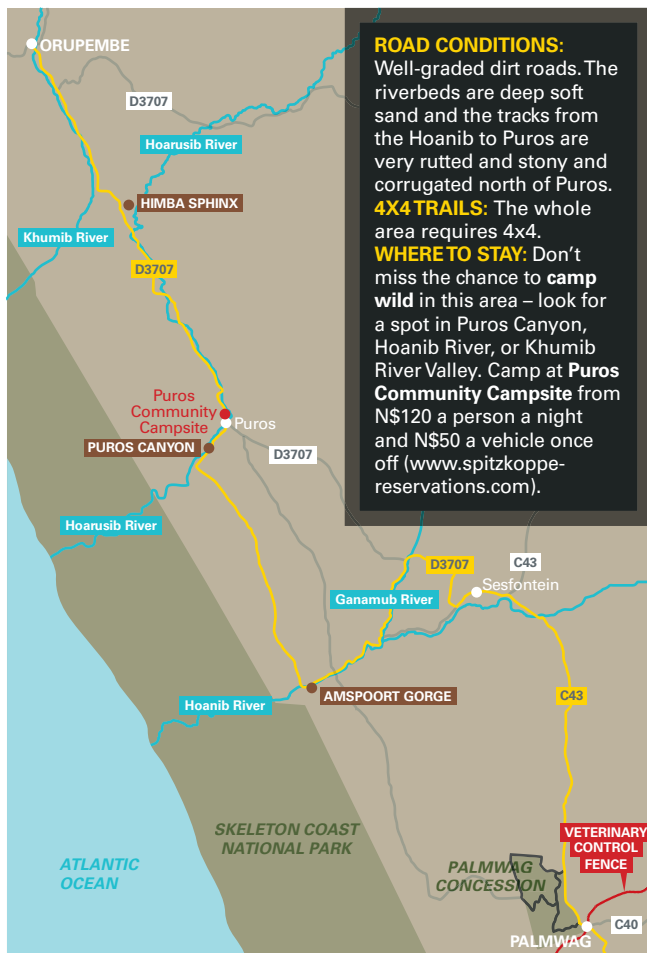
Whatever you do, be sure to drive the dry riverbeds that characterise

the area as these offer the best chance of encountering desert elephants (they are shy and more aggressive than the elephants of parks such as Etosha or Kruger).

While it's possible to drive between Sesfontein and Puros on a reasonable dirt road (D3707), the more scenic option is to drive down the sandy Hoanib River Valley and north cross-country. Most people enter the valley via a turn-off 6km north of Sesfontein, but these tracks cut across a dusty plain criss-crossed with vehicle tracks – take care as dongas, soft sand and mud traps pose a threat in the

bad visibility. A better option is to continue along the D3707 north of Sesfontein for about 25km before turning left along the Ganamub River, which eventually joins the Hoanib. Both routes tricky to identify from the road as they're unmarked; trust your GPS or ask around.

Once in the Hoanib River Valley, follow the sandy tracks along the acacia-lined riverbed. Like any game drive area, it's best explored early morning or late evening. There are no dedicated campsites, so find a spot away from the thoroughfare to wild camp. Take time to explore the mountains on foot.



Follow the valley west to the mouth of Amspoort Gorge before taking the track north towards Puros Canyon (look for desert lions on the plains). Enter the canyon and turn east towards Puros village. While your inner adventurer may scream to follow the river itself, rather choose the defined track to avoid getting stuck in the mud. The canyon is another good spot to camp wild.

There are a number of routes north of Puros, but we recommend following the stony 4x4 track that hugs the banks of Hoarusib River. (You can also follow the sandy tracks in the dry river, but the going is slow and dusty on both.)

After about 25 km, the path leaves the river and climbs steadily past the Himba Sphinx, a distinct peak to the east, rattling all the way to the crest of the spur before dropping down north into Khumib River Valley. Keep on this track until you get to Orupembe, which is the last place to replenish water supplies before venturing further north. You can also grab a cooldrink or beer at the Orupembe shop.

PITSTOPS

Sesfontein: Fuel (unreliable), basic shop, ATM, water, tyre repair, mechanic. **Puros:** basic shop, water at community campsite.

Orupembe: basic shop, fresh water.



NORTHERN KAOKOLAND

HARTMANN VALLEY TO MARIENFLUSS

The very far northwestern region of Namibia (generally referred to as Northern Kaokoland) lies inland of the Skeleton Coast National Park and extends all the way from Orupembe village to the Angolan border in the north.

You must be completely self-sufficient to explore the region and it's best to go in convoy (rent a satellite phone in case of emergency if you're alone). It's extremely dry and characterised by barren, mountainous terrain deeply incised with dry riverbeds and two north-to-south valleys (Hartmann Valley and Marienfluss, separated by Hartmann

Mountains). It's remote, wild and deserted – a paradise for off-road adventurers.

There are two principal access routes into the area, one more challenging than the other. The easiest is from the south, through Orupembe. From here, a number of rough dirt tracks head north towards Green Drum, Orange Drum or Red Drum – these famous landmarks are literally colourfully painted, 44-gallon drums (which route you pick depends on whether you're heading to Hartmann Valley or Marienfluss).

Serious 4x4 enthusiasts access

the region from the east via Van Zyl's Pass along the D3703 from Okangwati. This route ends at the mouth of Marienfluss Valley, so it makes sense to explore this area before moving on to Hartmann Valley and then heading back south to return to civilisation. Take note, Van Zyl's Pass shouldn't be attempted without a 4x4 and a reasonable level of experience (this pass can be driven only from east to west and it's strongly advised not to attempt it in the opposite direction).

There are a few ways to access Hartmann Valley from Orupembe. The best and most common route

ROAD CONDITIONS: All roads in this area are rough and range from stony, rutted tracks to soft, sandy tracks. Deflate and inflate tyres depending on the terrain. The route from Red Drum to Orupembe is very rough and mountainous. There's an indistinct shortcut between Hartmann Valley and Marienfluss, but most people prefer to drive south back towards Red Drum, then north again.

4X4 TRAILS: Van Zyl's Pass is an extreme 4x4 track and requires significant off-road experience (free).

PITSTOPS

There are no fuel facilities and limited clean water in this area. Take into account that driving on sandy tracks uses more fuel.

Orupembe: basic shop, fresh water. **Opuwo:** a large town with good shops, fuel, ATM, tyre repair, mechanic.

is to follow the 4x4 track north out of town, heading towards Orange Drum. You'll cross an immense lunar landscape, barren and deserted, and for most of the way you'll be isolated with only distant mirages for company.

The road is very stony and corrugated and the going is slow, but it's still the easiest route into the valley. Another track further west passes through some spectacular mountainous terrain towards the Green Drum landmark, but it's longer, a lot more remote and less travelled. You can also opt to head along an eastern route towards Red Drum, but this is longer and slower as it passes through rough mountainous terrain for most of the way.

No matter which route you choose though, you'll be treated to wide-open spaces that become golden grasslands after rain. There are no designated campsites in the area and you'll have to make camp in a suitable nook in the mountains that hem in the valley (these desert ecosystems are fragile and every attempt should be made to stay on the main tracks or follow already-existing side tracks during your explorations). However, most travellers head north and base themselves at an area 20-odd kilometres south of the Kunene, driving out to see the region's magnificent desert landscapes.

In the extreme northern parts



of the Hartmann Valley, large dunes of red Kalahari sand lead down to the banks of the Kunene River and it is in this area where Wilderness Safaris has a luxury lodge called Serra Cafema. There are also a few deserted Himba kraals in the area. Take note, however, the tracks in these dunes are confusing (even if you have Tracks4Africa on your GPS) and care should be taken before wandering into this area without first consulting a detailed map or by exploring Google Earth.

The Van Zyl's Pass route enters Marienfluss from the east and all you need do is follow the track north through the valley towards the Kunene. But if you're coming from Orupembe, take the eastern route across the mountainous terrain towards Red Drum and travel northeast from there.

The southern part of Marienfluss Valley is at first stony before giving way to 4x4 tracks across very soft, red, Kalahari sand. These cross the valley floor, which is characterised by knee-high grass stretching into the distance in all directions.

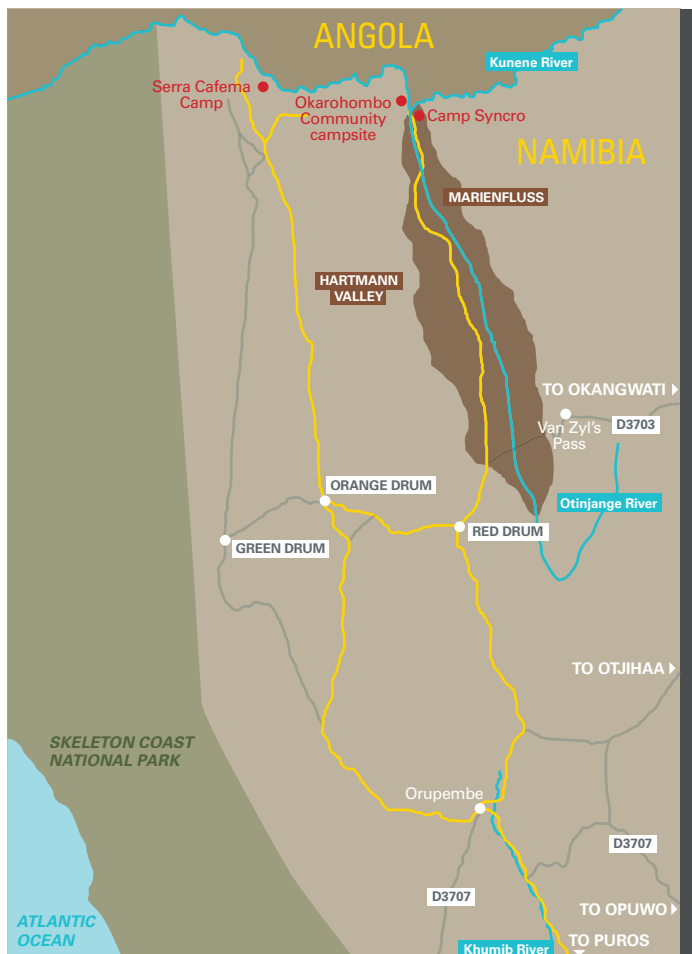
While this is a wildlife conservancy and you will see zebra, gemsbok and springbok, you will also encounter herds of cattle belonging to the villagers who live in the area. Unlike Hartmann Valley, you may not camp wild in this valley.

Heading south from both the Hartmann Valley and Marienfluss,

the easiest route (longer but quicker on better roads) is to head back through Orupembe and then south along Khumib Valley to the turn-off onto the D3707 which heads east towards Opuwo. There is another route further north on the D3703 via Otjihaa to Opuwo, but this is much slower due to the bad road conditions.

WHERE TO STAY: **Camp wild** in Hartmann Valley – there are a number of excellent spots in its northern parts. In Marienfluss, stay at **Camp Syncro**, which is run by a young Swiss couple and costs N\$140 a person a night, or **Okarohombo Community Campsite**, which costs from N\$140 a person a night – just turn up at both. In Opuwo, stay at **Opuwo Country Lodge**; camping is from N\$140 a person a night and there are chalets available (www.opuwolodge.com).





EPUPA FALLS

No visit to northern Namibia would be complete without visiting Epupa Falls. The name is derived from the Herero word for the foam created by the turbulent water. Here, the Kunene River spreads out into a braided floodplain some 500m wide, with a number of channels of falling water. To access the falls, head north on the C43 dirt road from the large town of Opuwo, passing through Okangwati. The road passes through lush mopane veld with numerous baobabs before descending to the lush banks of the Kunene River complete with dense stands of Makalani Palms. To get the best view of the falls, follow the river downstream to Sundowner Hill just before sunset.

ROAD CONDITIONS: The C43 is well graded, but watch out for unexpected dips and potholes.

WHERE TO STAY: Epupa Falls Lodge has chalets and campsites right on the edge of the falls. Camp from N\$110 a person and chalets from N\$1050 (SADC N\$600) a person a night, including dinner and breakfast (www.epupafalls.com).

ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK

GALTON GATE TO NAMUTONI

Unquestionably Namibia's most famous game reserve, Etosha National Park is a must-visit destination in the country's northern reaches. It doesn't offer the most challenging off-road driving, but somehow the graded dirt roads and smaller tracks around that magnificent, desolate salt pan give the entire reserve a remarkably adventurous feeling. Wildlife is incredible – no matter whether it's elephants caked in white mud, mixed herds of antelope thronging the waterholes, or sightings of lion and cheetah walking nonchalantly past your vehicle.

The reserve has four gates and there is little advantage of one over another, so pick the gate that's closest to you. When it comes to

camp, the best by far in terms of sightings is Okaukuejo even though its campsite is not as comfortable as either Namutoni or Halali. Its permanent waterhole is arguably the best in the park – and one of the most spectacular in Southern Africa – so plan to spend a few nights watching its comings and goings.

Your best bet for seeing animals in the reserve, especially predators, is to drive at first light and as late as possible in the evening. Wildlife tends to congregate around waterholes, so make these the focus of your day's driving.

From March 2014, the previously restricted western area of Etosha was opened to all tourists (only Namibian tour operators with

ROAD CONDITIONS:

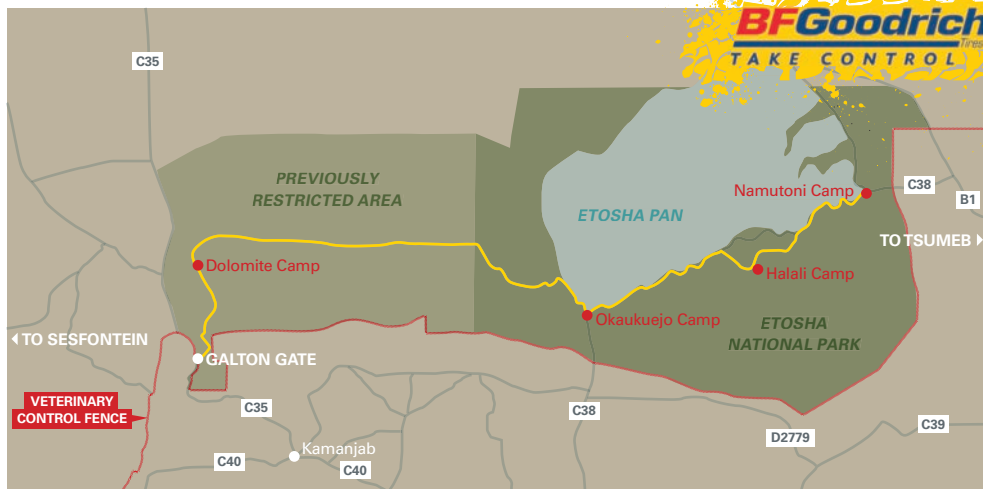
Well-graded dirt roads in excellent condition and smaller, slightly rutted dirt tracks. Some routes could be a little tricky in places during wet conditions.

4X4 TRAILS: None

WHERE TO STAY:

Okaukuejo is the park's best camp in terms of wildlife and its in-camp waterhole, or stay at **Halali** or **Namutoni** for a change of scenery. Camping from N\$100 a person a night. Park fees are N\$100 a person a day. +264-61-285-7200, www.nwr.com.na.





special permits used to be allowed access). The sightings don't compare with those at the waterholes surrounding Etosha Pan itself, so it's not worth exploring unless your route takes you that way. Dolomite Camp is in this area, on the western boundary of the park, but it consists only of a number of chalets – there are no camping facilities.

PITSTOPS

Okaukuejo, Halali and Namutoni camps: ATM, fuel, basic shops, restaurant.





CAPRIVI

RUNDU TO KATIMA MULILO

One look at Namibia and you can't help but wonder at the strange protruding panhandle in the northeastern corner popularly known as the Caprivi (officially, this recently changed to the Zambezi Region). This thin strip of land roughly 50 km wide and 450 km long is bordered by Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana and was originally acquired in 1890 by German

Chancellor Leo von Caprivi (hence the name) to ensure Namibia had access to the Zambezi River and thereby the East Coast of Africa. He wasn't to know that it would prove to be non-navigable and unsuitable for trading, but the river remains an important tourist attraction.

Bordered by four rivers – Okavango, Kwando, Chobe and Zambezi – the Caprivi remains

somewhat of an enigma for travellers and it's unlikely you'd plan a trip specifically to visit the region unless you were crazy about tiger-fishing – the Zambezi frequently offers up trophy fish of five-plus kilograms.

Fishing aside, there are a few very wild, 4x4-only game reserves well worth exploring if you have time to meander through the region.

Impalila Island and Mudumu

ROAD CONDITIONS:

The main tar road from Rundu to Katima Mulilo is excellent and as straight as an arrow. At the time of going to print, some Caprivi roads were being upgraded. In particular, the C49 that runs in a southern loop around the bulge at the end of the handle from Katima Mulilo to Kongola was being tarred, which will lessen the wilderness feeling of this area. While not absolutely crucial in the dry season, a 4x4 is essential during the rainy season (September to February). In the wet, be prepared for muddy off-road adventures and try to travel in convoy to facilitate recovery.

National Park aren't well suited to overlanders, so they're not covered in any depth in this guide. Mudumu doesn't allow self drives and the only accommodation is an upmarket lodge. Impalila is inaccessible by vehicle and as access is by boat you'll need your own free-standing tents.

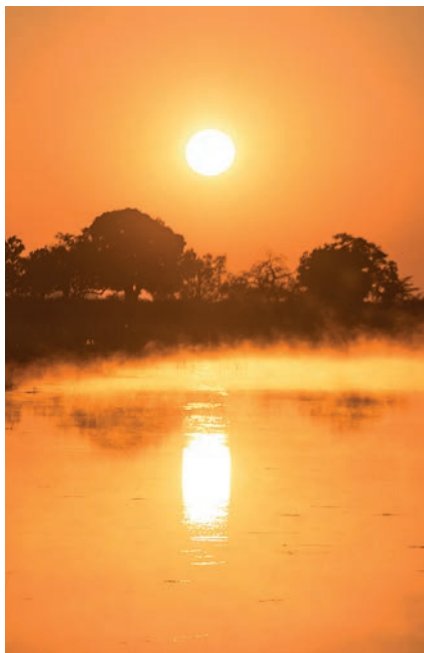
Located south of Divundu, the small Mahango Game Reserve that hugs the western banks of the Okavango River offers up a surprising array of animals including lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and specialised wetland antelope such as the lechwe. Although you may not need a 4x4 in the dry season, certain tracks are accessible only to off-road vehicles. In the wet season, take care on all roads apart from the C48 main road that passes through the park to Mahembo Border

BFGoodrich
TAKE CONTROL

Post with Botswana. While most animals are concentrated along the river, it's also worth exploring the 4x4 tracks to the west of the main road. There's no accommodation or camping within this park. Entrance from N\$30 a person and N\$10 a car a day.

On the banks of Kwando River, Susuwe Triangle is arguably the pick of the reserves in the area. The entire park is strictly 4x4 only – you wouldn't make it 500m from the gate before getting stuck in incredibly deep, soft sand without one and it just gets worse from there. These off-road challenges





lend the entire park a terrific sense of wilderness. No wild camping is allowed, but Nambwa Community Campsite is as wild as it gets – the park is famous for its large elephant herds and they often wander through camp. Don't miss the chance to take a boat out on the Kwando from the campsite. Note: during our visit in May 2014, a community lodge was being constructed adjacent to Nambwa.

Another attractive reserve at the southern tip of the bulge of the handle, Nkasa Rupara National Park (formerly Mamili) lies along the Linyati River and borders Botswana's Linyati Swamps. In the wet season, the tracks are treacherous, but during our visit in the dry season it was relatively easy going. Wildlife can be sparse and easily spooked by vehicles, probably due to the proximity of nearby villages. Birding is excellent, especially waterbirds and waders. Unfortunately, the wonderful campsites that used

TIGER-FISHING

Whether you're a fishing enthusiast or not, don't pass up on the opportunity to spend a day or two tiger-fishing on the Zambezi. It's a thrilling experience even in the unlikely event that you don't catch anything. Birdlife along the banks is also spectacular – look out for nesting African skimmers and carmine bee-eaters from September to October. Of the lodges in the area, the best suited to overlanders is Island View Lodge. It has a large fleet of fishing boats for hire (with guides), chalets and grassy campsites with excellent ablutions.

4X4 TRAILS: All of these reserves require 4x4.

WHERE TO STAY: **Island View Lodge** has a number of grassy campsites with excellent ablutions on the banks of the Zambezi and costs N\$115 a person a night; there are also chalets available (www.islandview-lodge.com). **Nambwa Camp** in Susuwe Triangle costs from N\$150 a person a night plus reserve entrance fee of N\$30 a person and N\$10 a car a day (+264-61-400-510, reservations@africanmonarch.com.na). You can't book ahead for **Nkasa Rupara's Rupara Community Campsite**, which costs from N\$80 a person a night plus a reserve entrance fee of N\$30 a person and N\$10 a car a day. There are a number of camps and lodges outside Mahango Reserve, but the pick of the bunch is **Ngepi Camp** on the Okavango River; camping from N\$100 a person a night and there are chalets available too (www.ngepicamp.com).

to exist within the reserve have now been officially closed due to flooding, but Rupara Community Campsite on the park's border is excellent. While a 4x4 is not mandatory in the dry season, you'll need good ground clearance to navigate the jeep tracks that criss-cross the reserve.

PITSTOPS

Rundu: fuel, supermarket, tyre repair, mechanic.

Divundu: ATM, fuel, supermarket, tyre repair, mechanic.

Kongola: ATM, fuel, shop, tyre repair.

Katima Mulilo: everything you'll need – ATM, fuel, shops, tyre repair, mechanic.



KHAUDUM GAME RESERVE

DIVUNDU TO TSUMKWE

Most travellers to the northern part of Namibia are put off from visiting Khaudum Game Reserve by the deep, soft sand you have to negotiate to reach it from the north and widely circulated reports that a minimum of two vehicles are required to access the park. In reality neither of these two hurdles proved insurmountable.

The main access road to Khaudum from the north leaves the B8 tar road about midway between Rundu and Divundu. The turn-off is well signposted and the sandy conditions begin immediately, but don't be intimidated – the road is easily passable with properly deflated tyres and a tough 4x4. What's more, reserve officials were

unconcerned by how many vehicles we were travelling in (by all appearances, they were unconcerned by most things and facilities across the reserve are rundown). There has been extensive construction at Khaudum Camp in the north and a number of wooden chalets will soon be available. What that will mean for overlanding campers isn't clear at this stage.

Relatively isolated Khaudum is well off the tourist radar and fun to explore with some challenging off-road conditions, but it's not worth visiting outside of the best season (June or July to October).

Much of the park consists of large tracts of deserted, unnervingly quiet woodland (very few birds)



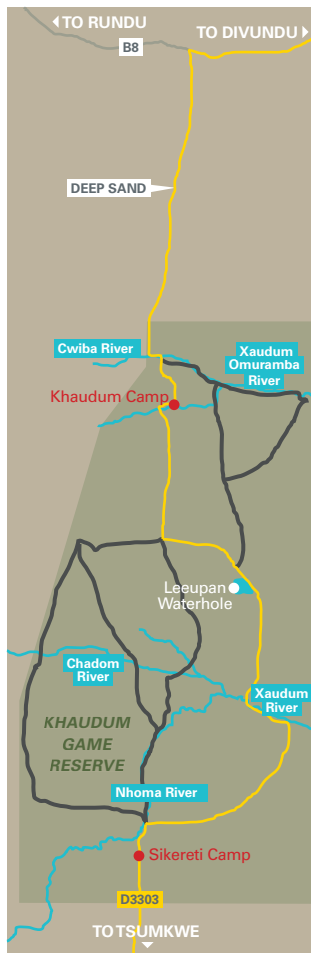
ROAD CONDITIONS:

The deep sandy tracks leading to and around Khaudum Game Reserve are legendary; they are very slow going and will play havoc with your fuel consumption. That said, they shouldn't pose any difficulty to a half-decent 4x4 with suitably deflated tyres (probably around one bar) and an experienced driver.

4X4 TRAILS: The entire reserve is serious 4x4 territory.

WHERE TO STAY:

Khaudum Camp in the north of the park has basic facilities and the ablutions are very run-down but construction and revamping was in progress during May 2014. **Sikereti Camp** in the south is similarly rundown and basic. Camping is free, but you need to pay a park entrance fee of N\$30 a person and N\$10 a vehicle a night.



PITSTOPS

Tsumkwe: ATM, fuel, shop.

Divundu: ATM, fuel, basic shop, tyre repairs, mechanic.

Rundu: ATM, fuel, shops, tyre repairs, mechanic.

and it's best known for large elephant herds. Very good rains in the wet season preceding our visit (in the early dry season) meant very few animals were around – the park felt dead. That said, fresh lion prints through Sikereti Camp in the south left us feeling a wee bit nervous...

WATERBERG PLATEAU

OTJIWARONGO TO WATERBERG NATIONAL PARK

While not necessarily an off-road destination, Waterberg Plateau National Park is a great stopover on the way to or from northern Namibia. It's located just off the B1 along the C22 roughly 60 km east of Otjiwarongo. The campsite, which lies at the foot of the attractive red cliffs of the plateau, has a number of shaded grassy spots and the facilities are excellent (be aware there is a severe baboon problem in camp).

Plan enough time to walk within the reserve; two or so hours will get you to the top of the plateau.

The reserve is an important site for Namibia's efforts to breed endangered species and restock reserves affected by poaching. The site also has historical significance. In 1904, the local Herero people lost their final and arguably most important battle with German colonial forces here. Two-thirds of the Herero population were killed at this battle before the survivors escaped to Bechuanaland (in what is now Botswana). Today the only evidence of the battle is the neat German cemetery a short walk from the camp reception.

ROAD CONDITIONS: The access road to the reserve is an excellent dirt road off the C22.

4X4 TRAILS: None, guided morning and evening game drives are available at N\$300 a person.

WHERE TO STAY: The **Namibian Wildlife Resorts** camp has a number of small brick chalets and an excellent campsite. Camping costs N\$110 a person a night. Park entrance costs N\$80 a person and N\$10 a vehicle a night, payable in cash.



PITSTOPS

Otjiwarongo: fuel, tyre repair, mechanic, excellent supermarkets.

Okahandja: shops, fuel, ATMs, mechanic, tyre repair.



NEED TO KNOW

BORDER CONTROL

The two main border posts from South Africa, Vioolsdrift/Noordoeuw and Nakop/Ariamsvlei, are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Make sure your passport is valid for at least six months from date of entry and pay your Namibian Road Fund Administration (R220 a car and R140 a trailer) at the border.

MONEY MATTERS

Carry cash. Credit cards are not universally accepted in Namibia and you should be prepared to pay cash for fuel, park entrance fees and campsites, even in some of the larger towns. One Namibian dollar is equivalent to one rand and rands are accepted for cash transactions throughout Namibia.

NATIONAL PARK PERMITS

Namibia Wildlife Resorts central reservations handles bookings for all public rest camps inside the national parks (www.nwr.com.na), but you'll also need a separate permit to enter the reserves. Buy permits from a Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) office, located in most major towns and at park gates (www.met.gov.na). These cost N\$60 a person plus N\$10 a vehicle a day for Ai-Ais, the Skeleton Coast, the

Sossusvlei region of Namib-Naukluft National Park and Etosha. Permits for the Namib-Naukluft's Kuiseb and Tinkas regions are cheaper (N\$30 a person, plus N\$10 a vehicle a day), but as there are no gates to these areas, they must be purchased at a MET office before arrival. The Dorob National Park permit is free and valid for three months, allowing drivers to use the 4x4 routes connecting the coast and the interior between Swakopmund and the Ugab River, as well as designated areas along the dune belt between Swakop and Walvis Bay. No permit is required along the C34. In the north, many areas are wilderness and don't require permits. Mahango, Susuwe Triangle, Nkasa Rupara, Khaudum and Waterberg cost N\$30 a person a day and N\$10 a vehicle a day.

PAYING FOR FUEL

Most service stations in Namibia don't accept debit or credit cards and will take cash only.

TYRE PRESSURE

Driving with the correct pressure prolongs a tyre's life, reduces the risk of punctures and can mean the difference between getting stuck in thick sand or gliding over easily. Experts differ on the exact pressure

for different situations, but it's crucial to change pressure to suit the terrain: low pressure for sand and mud (to get as much of the tread in contact with the surface as possible), higher pressures for rocks and dirt (including Namibia's coastal 'salt roads'), and the highest certified pressures for tar. In general, softer tyres (around 2 bar) cope better with sharp rocks and loose surfaces, but also provide less protection to your wheel rim. If you turn too aggressively at pressures below 1 bar, tyres may come off the rim completely. With Namibia's rapidly changing conditions, it's essential to have a compressor – you may have to inflate and deflate tyres a few times a day. If possible, take pressures when tyres are cold. Hot tyres can increase relative pressure by half a bar.

VETERINARY CONTROL FENCES

To prevent the spread of infectious animal diseases such as foot and mouth, a veterinary control fence stops unrestricted movement of animals from the north to the south of Namibia. You may take meat in a south-to-north direction, but you can't take any uncooked meat products from north to south, including frozen meat of all cloven-hoof animals. Chicken is okay.