

Namibia

Wedged between the Kalahari and the South Atlantic, Namibia enjoys vast potential as one of the youngest countries in Africa. In addition to having a striking diversity of cultures and national origins, Namibia is a photographer's dream – it boasts wild seascapes, rugged mountains, lonely deserts, stunning wildlife, colonial cities and nearly unlimited elbow room.

A predominantly arid country, Namibia can be divided into four main topographical regions: the Namib Desert and coastal plains in the west, the eastward-sloping Central Plateau, the Kalahari along the borders with South Africa and Botswana and the densely wooded bushveld of the Kavango and Caprivi regions. Despite its harsh climate, Namibia has some of the world's grandest national parks, ranging from the wildlife-rich Etosha National Park to the dune fields and desert plains of the Namib-Naukluft Park.

Namibia is one of those dreamlike places that make you question whether something so visually orgasmic could actually exist. Time and space are less defined here. Landscapes collide. Experiences pile up. Watch a lion stalking its prey on a never-ending plain in Etosha. Fly down a giant dune on a sandboard. Spend a night alone in the desert under a sky so thick with stars you can't differentiate between constellations.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 825,000 sq km
- **ATMs** Found in most large towns around the country
- **Borders** Angola, Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe – all accessible overland except Zimbabwe, which has no direct border crossing with Namibia
- **Budget** US\$20 to US\$25 per day
- **Capital** Windhoek
- **Language** English, Afrikaans, German, Owambo, Kavango, Herero, Khoikhoi (Nama/Damara), San dialects
- **Money** Namibian dollar (N\$); US\$1 = N\$7.5
- **Population** 1.83 million
- **Seasons** Long rainy season (January to April); dry (May to September); short rainy season (October to December)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 264; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC +2
- **Visa** None required for citizens of Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Canada or the USA



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Sossusvlei** (p968) Watch the sun rise from the tops of flaming-red dunes on the edge of ephemeral salt pans.
- **Etosha National Park** (p972) Go on a self-drive safari in one of the continent's premier wildlife venues.
- **Swakopmund** (p964) Get your adrenaline fix in the extreme-sports capital of Namibia.
- **Fish River Canyon** (p978) Test your endurance on the five-day hike through one of the world's largest canyons.
- **Skeleton Coast** (p970) Get off the beaten path (and the tarred road) on this desolate strip of fog-covered coastline.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Namibia's climatic variations correspond roughly to its geographical subdivisions. In the arid central Namib Desert, summer daytime temperatures may climb to over 40°C, but can fall to below freezing during the night. Rainfall is heaviest in the northeast, which enjoys a subtropical climate, and reaches over 600mm annually along the Okavango River. The northern and interior regions experience 'little rains' between October and December, while the main stormy period occurs from January to April.

ITINERARIES

- **Three days** Namibia's tourist highlight is the expansive sand sea of the Namib, and if you have only a few days, this is where you'll want to focus. From Sesriem (p968), spend a day hiking through the dunes, or from the beach town of Swakopmund (p964) arrange for a scenic flyover.
- **One Week** Combine your visit to the Namib with a safari through Etosha National Park (p972) for one of the continent's most unique safari experiences. Splurge on a rental car and get ready for some hair-raising, self-driven good times.
- **One Month** With a month, you can hire a 4WD or use a reputable safari company and see the best of the country: do a tour of the Namib (p985), splurge on some extreme sports in Swakopmund (p964), safari through Etosha National Park (p972), hike Fish River Canyon (p978) and go on an expedition through the northwest (p970) and the Skeleton Coast (p970).

HOW MUCH?

- **Internet connection** US\$3 per hour
- **Campsite (for four) next to a watering hole** US\$20
- **GPS unit** US\$100
- **Traditional German meal** US\$8
- **4WD rental** US\$75 to US\$100 per day

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1.50
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.25
- **Bottle of Windhoek Lager** US\$1
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$12
- **Meat pie** US\$0.50

HISTORY

Pre-Colonial History

The first agriculturalists and iron workers of definite Bantu-speaking origin in southern Africa belonged to the Gokomere culture. They settled the temperate savannah and cooler uplands of Zimbabwe and were the first occupants of the Great Zimbabwe site, in the southeastern part of modern-day Zimbabwe, where a well-sheltered valley presented an obvious place to settle. Cattle ranching became the mainstay of the community and earlier hunting-and-gathering San groups either retreated to the west or were enslaved and/or absorbed.

At the same time the San communities were also coming under pressure from Khoi-Khoi (the ancestors of the Nama), who probably entered the region from the south. The Khoi-Khoi were organised loosely into tribes and raised livestock. They gradually displaced the San, becoming the dominant group in the region until around 1500.

During the 16th century, the Herero arrived in Namibia from the Zambezi Valley and occupied the north and west of the country. As ambitious pastoralists they inevitably came into conflict with the Khoi-Khoi over the best grazing lands and water sources. Eventually, given their superior strength and numbers, nearly all the indigenous Namibian groups submitted to the Herero.

By the late 19th century, a new Bantu group, the Owambo, settled in the north along the Okavango and Kunene Rivers.

Colonial History

Because Namibia has one of the world's most barren and inhospitable coastlines, it was largely ignored by the European nations until relatively recently. The first European visitors were Portuguese mariners seeking a route to the Indies in the late 15th century, but they confined their activities to erecting stone crosses at certain points as navigational aids.

It wasn't until the last-minute scramble for colonies towards the end of the 19th century that Namibia was annexed by Germany (except for the enclave of Walvis Bay, which was taken in 1878 by the British for the Cape Colony). In 1904 the Herero launched a rebellion and, later that year, were joined by

the Nama, but the rebellions were brutally suppressed.

The Owambo in the north were luckier and managed to avoid conquest until after the start of WWI, when they were overrun by Portuguese forces fighting on the side of the Allies. Soon after, the German colony abruptly came to an end when its forces surrendered to a South African expeditionary army also fighting on behalf of the Allies.

At the end of WWI, South Africa was given a mandate to rule the territory (then known as South West Africa) by the League of Nations. Following WWII, the mandate was renewed by the UN, who refused to sanction the annexation of the country by South Africa.

Undeterred, the South African government tightened its grip on the territory and, in 1949, it granted parliamentary representation to the white population. The bulk of southern Namibia's viable farmland was parcelled into some 6000 farms owned by white settlers, while indigenous families were confined by law to their 'reserves' (mainly in the east and the far north) and urban workplaces.

Nationalism & the Struggle for Independence

Forced labour had been the lot of most Namibians since the German annexation. This was one of the main factors that led to mass demonstrations and the development of nationalism in the late 1950s. Around this time, a number of political parties were formed and strikes organised. By 1960 most of these parties had merged to form the South West Africa People's Organization (Swapo), which took the issue of South African occupation to the International Court of Justice.

The outcome was inconclusive, but in 1966 the UN General Assembly voted to terminate South Africa's mandate and set up a Council for South West Africa (in 1973 renamed the Commission for Namibia) to administer the territory. At the same time, Swapo launched its campaign of guerrilla warfare. The South African government reacted by firing on demonstrators and arresting thousands of activists.

In 1975 the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) was officially established. Formed from a combination of white political interests and ethnic parties, it turned out to be a toothless debating chamber, which spent much of its time in litigation with the South African government over its scope of responsibility.

The DTA was dissolved in 1983 after it had indicated it would accommodate members of Swapo. It was replaced by the Multiparty Conference, which had even less success and quickly disappeared. And so control of Namibia passed back to the South African-appointed administrator-general.

The failure of these attempts to set up an internal government did not deter South Africa from maintaining its grip on Namibia. It refused to negotiate on a UN-supervised programme for Namibian independence until the estimated 19,000 Cuban troops were removed from neighbouring Angola. In response, Swapo intensified its guerrilla campaign.

In the end, however, it might not have been the activities of Swapo alone or international sanctions that forced the South Africans to the negotiating table. The white Namibian population itself was growing tired of the war and the economy was suffering badly.

The stage was finally set for negotiations on the country's future. Under the watch of the UN, the USA and the USSR, a deal was struck between Cuba, Angola, South Africa and Swapo, in which Cuban troops would be removed from Angola and South African troops from Namibia. This would be followed by UN-monitored elections held in November 1989 on the basis of universal suffrage. Swapo collected a clear majority of the votes but an insufficient number to give it the sole mandate to write the new constitution.

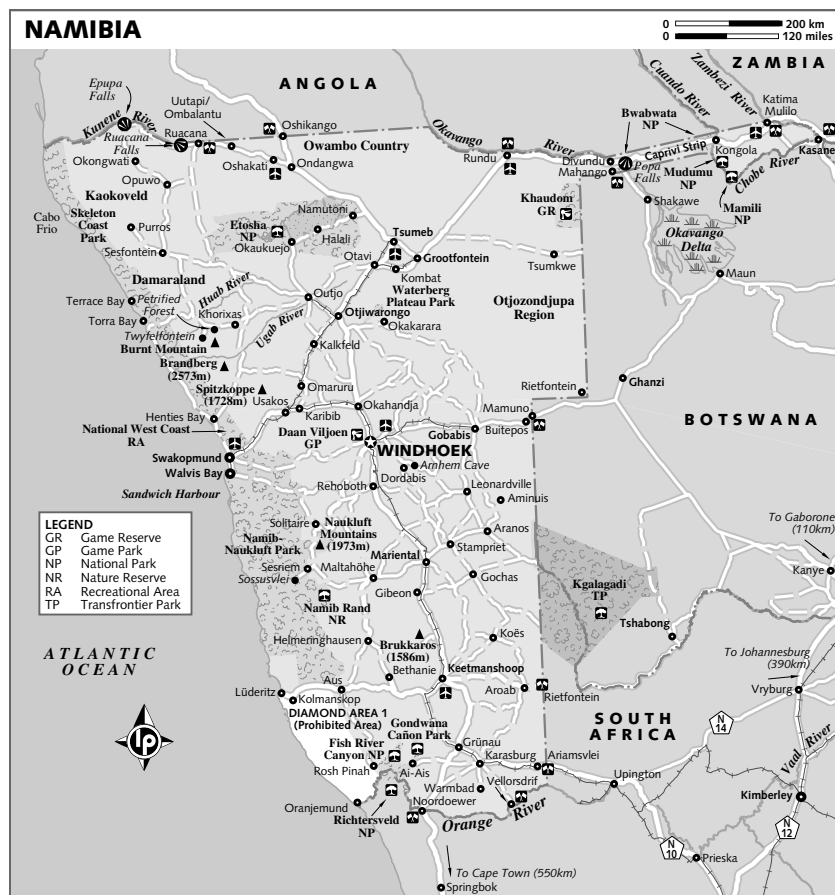
Independence

Following negotiations between the various parties, a constitution was adopted in February 1990. Independence was granted the following month under the presidency of the Swapo leader, Sam Nujoma. Initially, his policies focused on programs of reconstruction and national reconciliation to heal the wounds left by 25 years of armed struggle. In 1999, however, Nujoma had nearly served out his second (and constitutionally, his last) five-year term, and alarm bells sounded among watchdog groups when he changed the constitution to allow himself a third five-year term, which he won with nearly 77% of the vote.

In August 1999, a separatist Lozi faction in the Caprivi Strip launched a coup attempt – which was summarily put down by the Namibian Defence Force. In December of the same year the Caprivi Strip also suffered a spate of violent attacks on civilians and travellers, which were rightly or wrongly blamed on Unita sympathisers from Angola (see p825 for information on this group). These attacks destroyed tourism in the Caprivi Strip, but since Angola signed a peace accord in April 2002, the region is slowly starting to come back to life.

Namibia Today

In 2004 the world watched warily to see if Nujoma would cling to the office of power for a fourth term, and an almost audible sigh of relief could be heard in Namibia when he announced that he would finally be stepping



down in favour of his chosen successor Hifikepunye Pohamba.

Like Sam Nujoma, Pohamba is a Swapo veteran and swept to power with nearly 77% of the vote. He leaves behind the land ministry where he presided over one of Namibia's most controversial schemes – the expropriation of land from white farmers to black citizens.

This 'poverty agenda', along with Namibia's AIDS crisis and a nascent secessionist movement in the Caprivi Strip will be the defining issues of his presidency.

CULTURE

Despite Namibia only gaining independence less than 20 years ago, racism is not as blatantly obvious as it is in South Africa. Whites, on the whole, are more open-minded, do not refer to their black countrypeople in overtly negative terms and do not speak about apartheid in a positive manner. Perhaps one of the most interesting differences between the two countries can be seen in the use of Afrikaans. Blacks in South Africa will tell you it is the language of apartheid, and although many were forced to learn the tongue in school, speaking it is considered insulting. In Namibia, where intermarriage between different tribes is common, Afrikaans has become a vital form of communication. Those of diverse ethnic backgrounds will tell you it is how their parents communicate with each other, and was the first language they learned at home as children.

PEOPLE

With a population of barely 1.8 million, Namibia represents one of Africa's lowest population densities, with approximately two people per square kilometre. This number comprises 11 major ethnic groups, including Owambo, Kavango, Herero, Himba, Damara, Nama, Basters, Caprivians, German, Afrikaner and Tswana. About 75% of the population inhabits rural areas, but the uncontrolled urban drift for work or higher wages has resulted in increased homelessness, unemployment and crime in the capital and other towns.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Although Namibia is still developing a literary tradition, its musical, visual and architectural arts are fairly well established. The country also enjoys a wealth of amateur talent in the production of material arts, including carv-

ings, basketware and tapestry, along with simple but resourcefully designed and produced toys, clothing and household implements.

ENVIRONMENT

A predominantly arid country, Namibia can be divided into four main topographical regions: the Namib Desert and coastal plains in the west; the eastward-sloping Central Plateau; the Kalahari (often mistakenly called the 'Kalahari Desert') along the Botswana and South African borders; and the densely wooded bushveld of the Kavango and Caprivi regions.

Despite its harsh climate, Namibia has some of the world's grandest national parks, ranging from the world-famous wildlife-oriented Etosha National Park to the immense Namib-Naukluft Park, which protects vast dune fields, desert plains, wild mountains and unique flora. There are also the smaller reserves of the Caprivi region, the renowned Skeleton Coast parks and the awe-inspiring Fish River Canyon, which ranks among Africa's most spectacular sights.

In addition to the national parks, Namibia has a network of conservancies, which are usually amalgamations of private farms, and private wildlife reserves, which are individual farms supporting either tourist lodges or hunting opportunities. The latter designation includes both the 200,000-hectare Namib Rand Nature Reserve and the 102,000-hectare Gondwana Cañon Park.

Facilities in Namibian national parks are operated by the semiprivate **Namibia Wildlife Resorts** (NWR; Map p962; ☎ 061-285 7000; www.nwr.com.na; cnr John Meinert & Moltke Sts, Windhoek). Bookings may be made up to 12 months in advance, but fees must be paid by bank transfer or credit card before the bookings will be confirmed. Note that camping fees are good for up to four people; each additional person up to eight people will be charged extra. In addition, parks charge a daily admission fee per person and per vehicle, payable when you enter the park. Prebooking is always advised. While you may be able to pick up accommodation at the last minute by just turning up at the park gates, it isn't recommended (especially for Etosha and Sesriem), as you may be caught out. Note that pets aren't permitted in any wildlife-orientated park.

Namibia is home to an amazing array of wildlife. Etosha, Namibia's greatest wildlife

park, contains a variety of antelope species, as well as other African ungulates, carnivores and pachyderms. Damaraland, in the northwest, is home to antelopes and other ungulates, and also harbours desert rhinos, elephants and other species that have specially adapted to the arid climate. Hikers in the Naukluft Mountains may catch sight of the elusive Hartmann's mountain zebra, and along the desert coast live jackass penguins, flamingos, Cape fur seals and the rare *strand-wulf* (brown hyena).

With a small human population spread over a large land area, Namibia is in better environmental shape than most African countries, but challenges remain. The Ministry of Environment & Tourism (MET) is largely a holdover from pre-independence days and its policies strongly reflect those of its South African counterpart. Although changes are afoot, at the time of research the country still lacked coherent environmental guidelines.

While local people are increasingly seeing more benefits from wildlife-oriented tourism, the activities in and near protected areas continue to affect local ecosystems. Many ranchers in the south view wildlife as a nuisance, while people in the more densely populated north see wildlife reserves as potential settlement areas and wildlife itself as a food resource and a threat to crops and human life.

WINDHOEK

☎ 061 / pop 240,000

Namibia's Central Highlands are dominated by its small, German-influenced capital, Windhoek, which serves as the country's geographical heart and commercial nerve centre. Set among low hills at an elevation of 1660m, the capital city enjoys dry, clean air, a healthy highland climate, and an optimistic outlook that sets an example for all of Africa.

Windhoek's population reflects the country's ethnic mix: on the streets, you'll see Owambo, Kavango, Herero, Damara and Caprivian people, together with Nama, San and Europeans, all contributing to the hustle and bustle – but only during working hours. While Windhoek provides about as much action as Namibia has to offer, 'vibrant' probably isn't the best word to describe this surprisingly staid and orderly capital city.

ORIENTATION

Central Windhoek is bisected by Independence Ave, where most shopping and administrative functions are concentrated. The shopping district is focused on the Post St pedestrian mall and the nearby Gustav Voigts Centre, Wernhil Park Centre and Levinson Arcade. Zoo Park, beside the main post office, provides a green lawn and shady lunch spots.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Windhoek Book Den (Map p962; ☎ 239976; wbd@mweb.com.na) Just off Post St Mall, the best place to look for novels, European and African literature, and travel books.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 211111)

Crime report (☎ 290 2239) 24-hour phone service.

Fire brigade (☎ 211111)

Local police (☎ 228328)

National police (☎ 10111)

Internet Access

Most backpacker hostels offer internet and email services. You can also try:

Club Internet (Map p962; 78 Bülow St; per hr US\$3;

☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Near John Meinert St.

Laundry

Tauben Gien Launderette (Map p960; ☎ 252115; wash & dry US\$2) At Village Sq.

Medical Services

Rhino Park Private Hospital (Map p960; ☎ 225434; Sauer St) Provides excellent care and service, but patients must pay up front.

Windhoek State Hospital (Map p960; ☎ 303 9111)

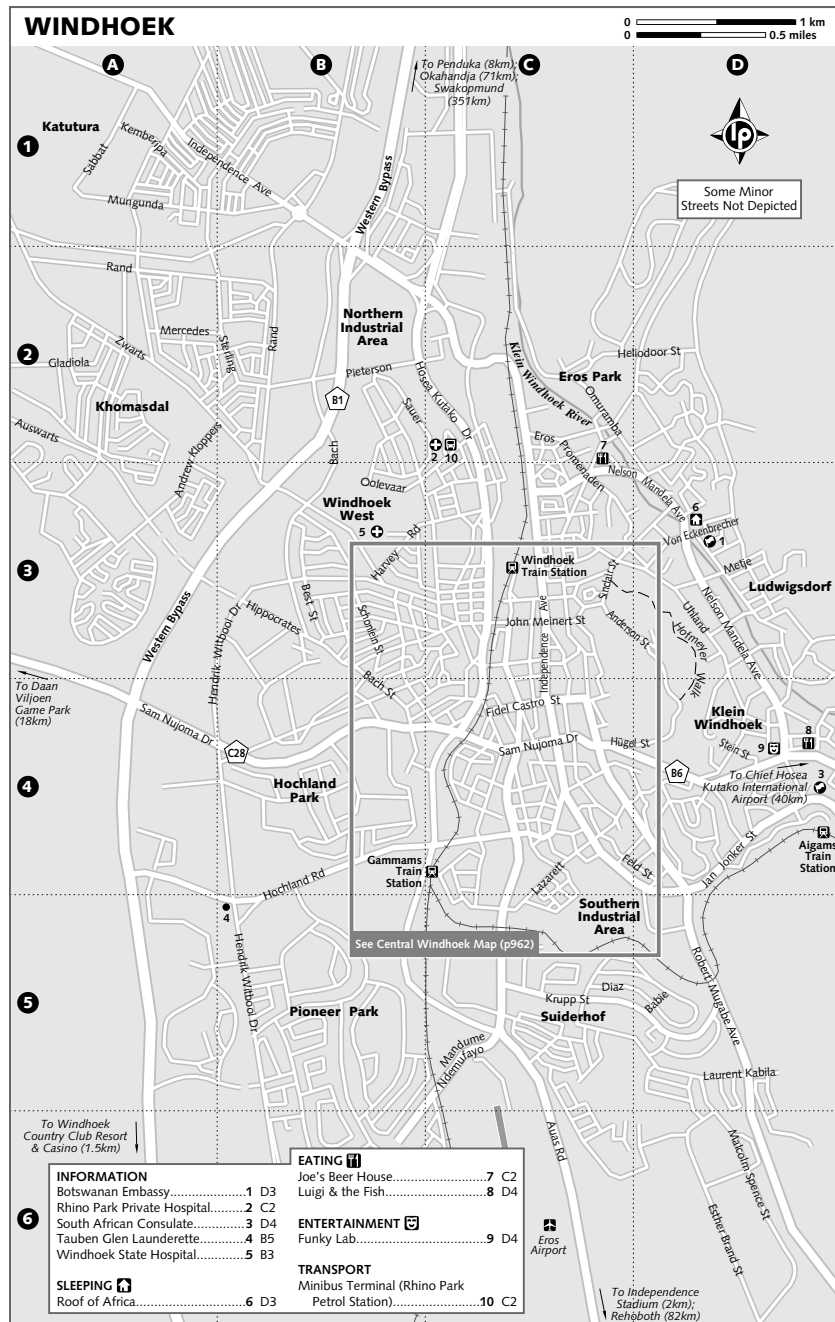
An option for those who are short of cash but have time to wait; the hospital is located off Harvey Rd.

Tourist Information

Namibia Tourism (Map p962; ☎ 220640, 284 2360; www.namibiatourism.com.na; Independence Ave, Private Bag 13346) The national tourist office; can provide information from all over the country.

Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR; Map p962; ☎ 285 7000; www.nwr.com.na; cnr John Meinert & Moltke Sts) In the Oode Voorpost. Books national-park accommodation and hikes.

Windhoek Information & Publicity Office (Map p962; ☎ 290 2058; fax 290 2050; Post St Mall) This friendly office answers questions and distributes local publications including *What's On in Windhoek*.



Travel Agencies

Cardboard Box Travel Shop (Map p962; ☎ 256580; www.namibian.org; 15 Johann Albrecht St) Attached to the backpacker hostel of the same name (see below), this recommended travel agency can arrange both budget and upmarket bookings all over the country.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Windhoek is generally safe by day, but avoid going out alone at night. Don't make yourself a target by walking around with a backpack or expensive camera and never leave anything of value visible in a rented vehicle. Windhoek's townships are generally safer than those in South Africa, but use caution and try to take a local guide if you visit.

SIGHTS

The whitewashed ramparts of **Alte Feste** (Map p962; ☎ 293 4437; Robert Mugabe Ave; admission by donation; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-12.30pm Sat & Sun), Windhoek's oldest surviving building, date from the early 1890s. It houses the historical section of the State Museum, and exhibits focus mainly on Namibia's independence struggle.

At the affiliated **Owela Museum** (Map p962; ☎ 293 4358; 4 Lüderitz St; admission by donation; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-12.30pm Sat & Sun), the exhibits focus on Namibia's natural and cultural history. The most interesting part of this museum is the big AIDS-awareness display at the entrance.

The heart of the Windhoek shopping district is the bizarrely colourful **Post St Mall** (Map p962). At the eastern end is a display of Gibeon meteorites; the rest of the mall is lined with vendors selling curios, art, clothing and other tourist items, mostly from Zimbabwe.

The **National Art Gallery** (Map p962; ☎ 231160; cnr Robert Mugabe Ave & John Meinert St; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) features work by local artists in various mediums, some of which is for sale. It also houses a permanent collection of works reflecting Namibia's history and nature.

SLEEPING

Cardboard Box Backpackers (Map p962; ☎ 228994; www.namibian.org; 15 Johann Albrecht St; camping per site US\$4, dm/d US\$6/18; ☎) This lively, colourful and perennial shoestringers' favourite is conveniently located just 15 minutes by foot from the city centre. 'The Box' also runs an excellent travel centre that gives unbiased in-

formation about Namibian tour operators and can help sort out all your travel plans.

Chameleon City Lodge (Map p962; ☎ 244347; www.chameleonbackpackers.com; 5 Voight St; camping per site US\$4, dm US\$6, d from US\$18; ☎) This well-matched rival to the Cardboard Box is also extremely convenient to the city centre, and boasts an inviting atmosphere, immaculate facilities, comfy couches for lounging and a professional and well-informed staff.

Chameleon Guesthouse (Map p962; ☎ 247668; www.chameleonbackpackers.com; 22 Wagner St; d with/without bathroom and breakfast US\$25/20; ☎) Occupying a quiet spot in Windhoek West, the older sister to the Chameleon City Lodge is a budget-orientated guesthouse that is home to a couple of friendly meerkats.

Roof of Africa (Map p960; ☎ 254708; www.roofofafrica.com; 124-126 Nelson Mandela Ave; camping per site US\$5, dm/s/d US\$8/35/40, d with air-con US\$50; ☎) This pleasant haven is located about 30-minutes by foot from the city centre and has a rustic barnyard feel complete with a frog pond and goats and ducks in a pen by the pool.

Villa Verdi (Map p962; ☎ 221994; villav@mweb.com.na; 4 Verdi St; s/d US\$70/115; ☎) This utterly unique Mediterranean-African hybrid features whimsically decorated rooms complete with original paintings and artsy finishing.

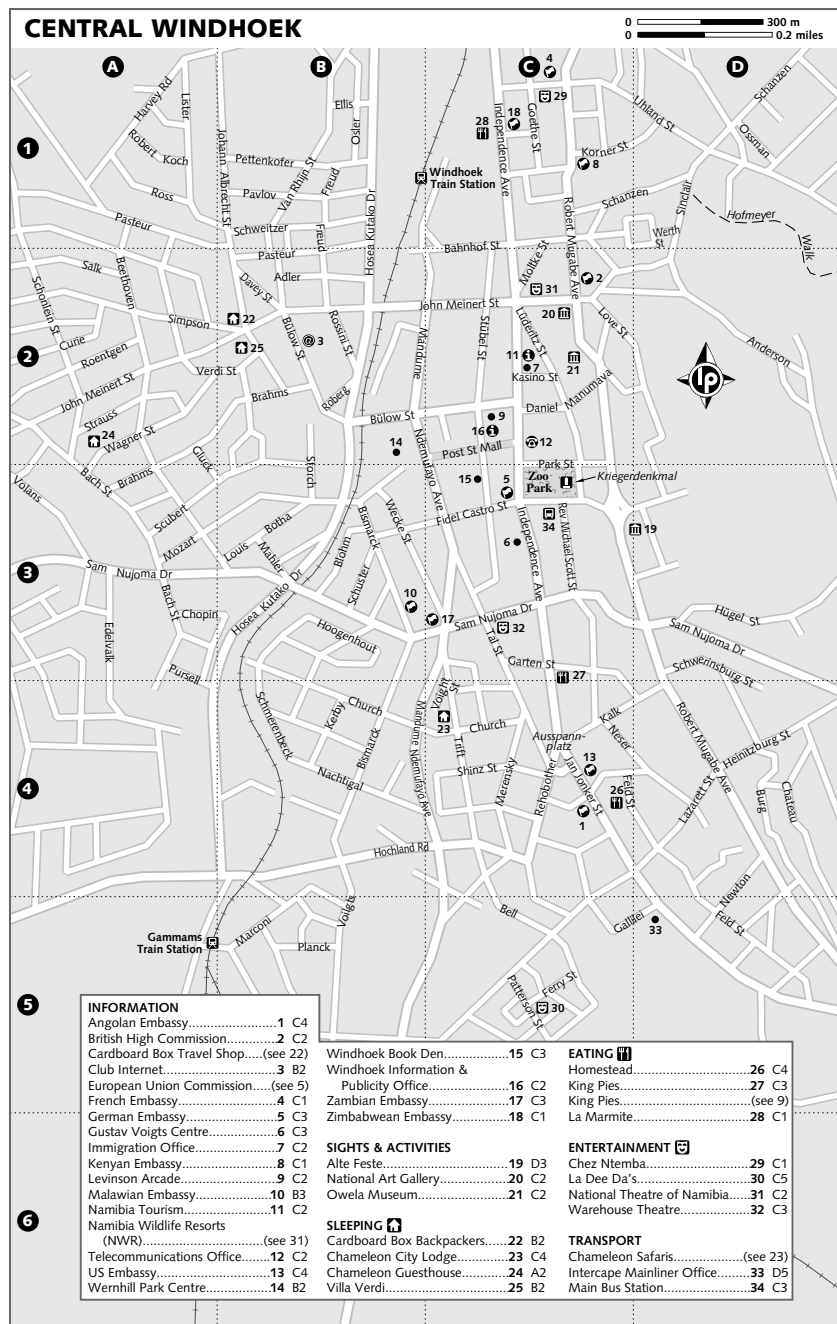
Windhoek Country Club Resort & Casino (☎ 205 5911; www.legacyhotels.co.za; s/d from US\$150/165; ☎) Constructed specifically for the 1995 Miss Universe pageant (Miss Namibia, Michelle McLean, who now has a street named after her, had won the pageant the previous year), this place offers a taste of Las Vegas in Windhoek.

EATING

King Pies (Map p962; ☎ 248978; Levinson Arcade; pies US\$1-2) If you're looking for a quick bite, this popular Namibian institution serves up a variety of meat and vegetable pies.

Joe's Beer House (Map p960; ☎ 232457; Green Market Sq, 160 Nelson Mandela Ave; mains US\$4-9; ☎ 5pm-late) Similar to Carnivore's in Nairobi, Joe's Beer House is a popular tourist spot where you can indulge in a game-meat-oriented evening meal – with prolonged drinking until early in the morning.

Luigi & the Fish (Map p960; ☎ 256399; 320 Sam Nujoma Dr; mains US\$4-10) This famous Windhoek restaurant specialises in reasonably priced seafood (fish, shellfish, seafood paella, calamari etc) as well as steaks, game, pasta, chicken, Cajun dishes and vegetarian cuisine.



La Marmite (Map p962; ☎ 248022; 383 Independence Ave; mains US\$7-10; ☎ 6pm-10pm) Here you can sample wonderful North and West African cuisine, from Algerian, Senegalese, Ivorian, Cameroonian and Nigerian dishes.

Homestead (Map p962; ☎ 221958; 53 Feld St; mains US\$8-15) Arguably Windhoek's best restaurant, it features a range of starters, salads, pastas and fresh vegetarian, fish, beef and chicken dishes. Also on the menu is oryx, crocodile, fondue and a hunters' grill featuring zebra.

ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

Chez Ntemba (Map p962; 154 Uhland St; cover charge Thu & Sun US\$1.25, Wed, Fri & Sat US\$3.50; ☎ 9pm-5am Wed-Sun) Music from all across the continent is played here – you'll hear Angolan, Zambian, Congolese and South African tunes all in the same night.

Funky Lab (Map p960; Gams Centre; ☎ 4pm-late Sun-Thu, 2pm-late Fri & Sat) This very popular (and very blue) club is one Windhoek's hottest nighttime dancing spots, especially if you're craving a little disco in your life.

La Dee Da's (Map p962; ☎ 081 243 4432; Ferry St near Patterson, Southern Industrial Area; admission before/after midnight US\$2.50/3.50; ☎ 10.30pm-4am Thu-Sat) Boasts Namibia's largest national flag; here you can dance to Angolan *kizomba*, hip-hop, rave, traditional African, rock and commercial pop.

Theatre

National Theatre of Namibia (Map p962; ☎ 237966; ntn@iafrica.com.na; 12 John Meinert St) The national theatre stages infrequent theatre presentations; for information see the Friday edition of the *Namibian*.

Warehouse Theatre (Map p962; ☎ 225059; Old South-West Brewery Bldg, 48 Tal St; admission US\$3.50) A delightfully integrated club staging live African and European music and theatre productions, though unfortunately it's only open when there's a scheduled event.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Chief Hosea Kutako International Airport (☎ 299 6602; www.airports.com.na), which is located 42km east of the city centre, serves most international flights into and out of Windhoek. Air Namibia operates flights daily between Cape Town and Johannesburg, as well as twice-weekly flights to/from London and Frankfurt. Several airlines also offer international serv-

ices to/from Maun, Botswana, and Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe.

Eros Airport (☎ 299 6500), immediately south of the city centre, serves most domestic flights into and out of Windhoek. **Air Namibia** (www.air.namibia.com.na) offers occasional flights to/from Katima Mulilo, Lüderitz, Ondangwa, Rundu, Swakopmund/Walvis Bay and Tsumeb.

Coming from Windhoek, make sure the taxi driver knows which airport you are going to (ie, in-town Eros versus the more distant international airport).

Bus & Minibus

From the **main bus station** (cnr Fidel Castro & Rev Michael Scott Sts) the Intercape Mainliner runs on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday to and from South Africa's Cape Town (US\$65, 20 hours) and Johannesburg (US\$83, 25 hours, with a change in Upington). There are also daily services to Namibia's Swakopmund (US\$14, 4¼ hours); and Monday and Friday departures to Zimbabwe's Victoria Falls (US\$52, 19¾ hours), via Okahandja, Otjiwarongo, Grootfontein, Rundu and Katima Mulilo.

Local minibuses leave when full from the Rhino Park petrol station and can get you to most urban centres in Namibia, including the following:

Destination	Fare (US\$)	Duration (hr)
Buitepos	7	5
Divundu	12	12
Gobabis	5	2½
Grootfontein	8	7
Katima Mulilo	14	15½
Keetmanshoop	8	6
Lüderitz	13	10
Mariental	6	3
Oshakati	9	11
Otjiwarongo	7	3
Outjo	7.50	4
Rehoboth	2.50	1½
Ruacana	15	15
Rundu	10.50	10
Swakopmund	7	4
Tsumeb	8	7
Walvis Bay	7.50	4½

Train

The train station has a **booking office** (☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri); note that on Monday to Thursday, fares are about 60% of those quoted here,

and that economy-class fares are around 10% lower. Overnight trains run daily except on Saturday between Windhoek and Keetmanshoop, leaving at 7.10pm/6.30pm southbound/northbound. Friday to Sunday business-class fares from Windhoek are: Rehoboth (US\$4.30, 2¼ hours), Mari-ental (US\$6, six hours) and Keetmanshoop (US\$7.50, 9½ hours). The Keetmanshoop run now offers sleepers on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

On Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday, the northern-sector line connects Windhoek with Tsumeb (US\$7, 16 hours) via Okahandja (US\$3, 2½ hours) and Otjiwarongo (US\$5.25, 10½ hours). Other lines connect Windhoek with Swakopmund (US\$8, 9½ hours) and Walvis Bay (US\$8, 11 hours) daily except Saturday; and Windhoek with Gobabis (US\$4.25, 7½ hours) on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday.

For train information, contact **Trans-Namib** (☎ 298 2032; www.transnamib.com.na).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Servicing the Chief Hosea Kutako International Airport, the **Elena Airport Shuttle** (☎ 244443, 0811 246286; elena@namibweb.com) provides 24-hour door-to-door airport transport for US\$17 per bus; it also meets international flights. Alternatively, you can try the **Marenko Shuttle** (☎ 226331) or **VIP Shuttle** (☎ 0812 563657), which charge US\$12 per person for the trip; coming from the airport, you'll be able to choose between several shuttle services. Airport taxis on the same trip cost a maximum of US\$27.

Taxi

City buses have been phased out in favour of inexpensive shared taxis and minibuses. Collective taxis from the main ranks at Wernhill Park Centre follow set routes to Khomasdal and Katutura, and if your destination is along the way, you'll pay less than US\$1. With taxis caught from the main bus stations or ordered by radio dispatch, fares are either metered or calculated on a per-kilometre basis, but you may be able to negotiate a set fare per journey. Plan to spend between US\$3 and US\$3.50 to anywhere around the city centre. Try **Crown Radio axis** (☎ 211115, 0811 299116), **Express Radio Taxis** (☎ 239739) or **Sunshine Radio Taxis** (☎ 221029).

AROUND WINDHOEK

DAAN VILJOEN GAME PARK

The beautiful **Daan Viljoen Game Park** (admission per person/vehicle US\$2.50/2.50; ☎ day visits sunrise-6pm) sits in the Khomas Hochland, 18km west of Windhoek. As there are no dangerous animals, hikers can wander freely through desertlike hills and valleys. You'll likely see gemsboks, kudus, mountain zebras, springboks, hartebeests, elands and up to 200 bird species.

Daan Viljoen Rest Camp (camping for up to 4 people US\$15, s/d bungalows US\$25/31, 4-bed self-catering apt US\$65) sits on the shores of Auegigas Dam; there's also a **restaurant** (☎ 7.30am-9am & noon-2pm & 7-10pm) further along the road. Prebook at NWR in Windhoek (p959).

There's no public transport to Daan Viljoen, but taxis charge around US\$17 each way and persistent hitchhikers will eventually get a lift. No motorcycles are permitted.

WESTERN NAMIBIA

Western Namibia is defined by the barren and desolate landscapes of the Namib Desert. The Nama word 'Namib', which inspired the name of the entire country, rather prosaically means 'Vast Dry Plain'. Although travellers to Namibia are often surprised by the lushness of the Kalahari, the soaring sand dunes of the Namib rarely disappoint.

SWAKOPMUND

☎ 064 / pop 25,000

Often described as being more German than Germany, Swakopmund is Namibia's most popular holiday destination, and it attracts surfers, anglers and beach-lovers from all over southern Africa. However, the seaside resort has recently reinvented itself as the adventure-sports capital of Namibia, and now also attracts adrenaline junkies jonesing for a quick fix. Whether you race through the sand sea in a quad bike, slide down the dunes on a greased-up snowboard, jump from a Cessna with a parachute strapped to your back or live out your *Lawrence of Arabia* fantasies on a camel safari, there's no shortage of gut-curdling activities to choose from.

Orientation

Be advised that the streets in Swakopmund were recently renamed, which means that

navigation can be extremely difficult if you're using an old street map. The map in this edition contains the new street names.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

CNA Bookshop (Roon St) Sells popular paperbacks.

Die Muschel Book & Art Shop (☎ 402874; 10

Roon St) More esoteric works on art and local history are available here.

Swakopmunder Büchhandlung (☎ 402613; Sam Nujoma Ave St) A wide selection of literature from various genres.

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 405731)

Fire brigade (☎ day 402411, after-hr pager 405544)

Police (☎ 10111)

INTERNET ACCESS

Swakopmund I-café (Woermann & Brock Centre, Moltke St; per hr US\$2; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun)

LAUNDRY

Swakopmund Laundrette (☎ 402135; 15 Swakop St; to wash/dry up to 6kg US\$1.30/0.80; ☎ 7.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun) Opposite the Hansa Brewery; doubles as a local bar and entertainment centre.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Bismarck Medical Centre (☎ 405000; Bismarck St)

For doctors' visits, see the recommended Drs Swiegers, Schikerling, Dantu and Biermann, all at this centre.

Cottage Private Hospital (☎ 412201; Nordring) Your best option for medical care is this hospital, 1km north of town, in Tamariskia.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Namibia i Information Centre (☎ /fax 40312;

swainfo@iafrica.com.na; Sam Nujoma St, PO Box 829;

☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 3.30-5.30pm Sat, 9.30am-noon & 3.30-5pm Sun) Helpful centre.

Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR; ☎ 402172; www.nwr.com.na; Woermannhaus; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Also useful is this office, which sells Namib-Naukluft Park and Skeleton Coast permits until 3.30pm.

Note that park permits are no longer available from petrol stations in Swakopmund and Walvis Bay – they must be purchased either from this NWR office or the one in Windhoek (p959).

Sights

Beer-lovers won't want to miss a tour of **Hansa Brewery** (☎ 405021; 9 Rhode Allee; ☎ 10am & 2pm Tue

& Thu, by appointment), brewers of Swakopmund's favourite beverage. The free tours allow ample opportunity to sample the product. Prebook at the office on Rhode Allee near the corner of Bismarck St.

The **National Marine Aquarium** (4 Strand St; adult/child US\$3.50/1.75; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) allows close-up views of rays and sharks. Don't miss the daily fish feeding at 3pm.

Rössing Uranium Mine (☎ 402046; admission US\$2.50), 55km east of Swakopmund, is the world's largest open-cast uranium mine and certainly merits a visit. The scale of operations is staggering and at full capacity the mine processes about one million tonnes of ore per week. It's open to the public on the first and third Friday of the month; three-hour mine tours can be booked the previous day at the Swakopmund Museum on Strand St. The tours leave from Cafe Anton (inside the Hotel Schweizerhaus at 1 Bismarck St). Transport is included in the cost.

Activities

After aspiring for years to become a dry version of Victoria Falls, Swakopmund is one of the top destinations in southern Africa for extreme-sports enthusiasts. Although filling your days with adrenaline-soaked activities is certainly not cheap, there are few places in the world where you can climb up, race down and soar over towering sand dunes.

Your one-stop booking agent for just about every breathtaking activity you'd like to pursue is the **Desert Explorers Adventure Centre** (☎ 406096; www.swakop.com/adv).

BALLOONING

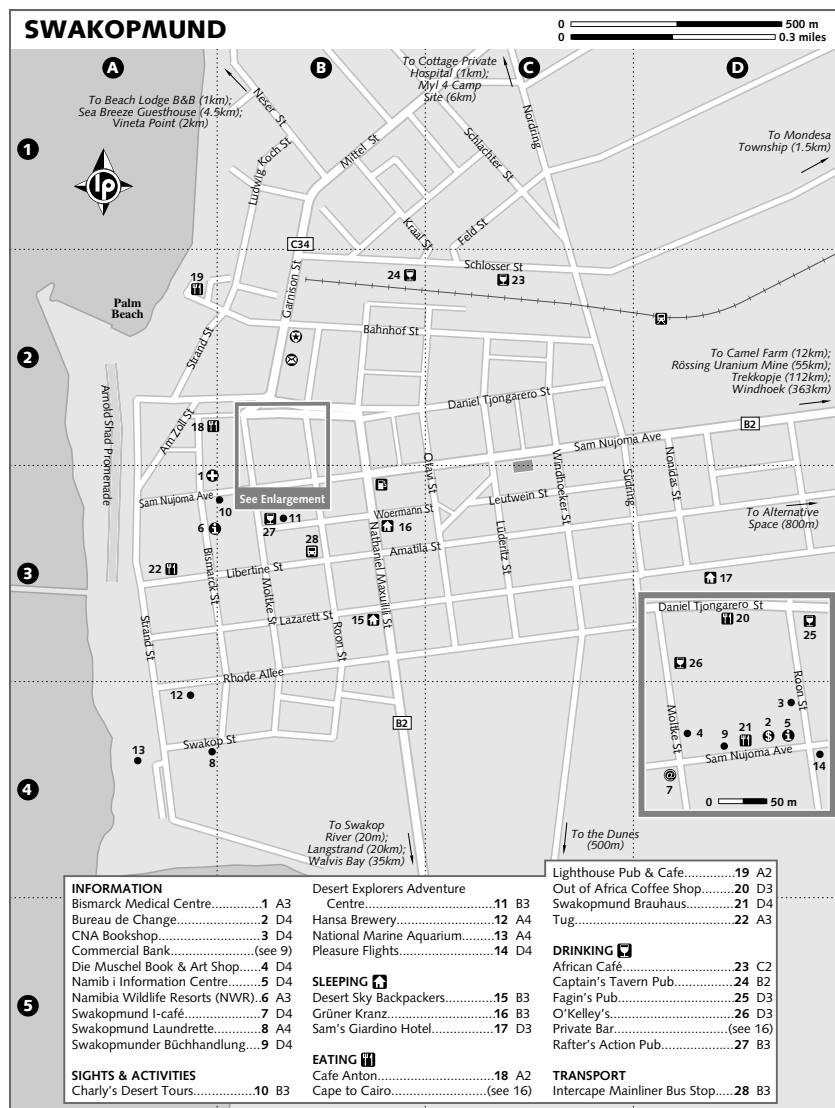
Whenever life gets you down, just hold onto the thought of hot-air balloon rides over the desert. **African Adventure Balloons** (☎ 403455; flylow@mweb.com.na) offers half-/full-hour flights for US\$140/190 per person, with a minimum of three people.

CAMEL RIDING

If you want to play Lawrence of Arabia in the Namib Desert, visit the **Camel Farm** (☎ 400363; ☎ 2-5pm), 12km east of Swakopmund on the D1901. Camel rides cost US\$15 for half an hour. To book or arrange transport from town, phone and ask for Ms Elke Elb.

HORSEBACK RIDING

Okakambe Trails (☎ 081 124 6626) runs 1½-hour horseback rides along the Swakop River to



the Moon Landscape for US\$45. It can also organise moonlight rides and rides along the beach and dunes.

ROCK CLIMBING

If you want to climb or abseil on a 15m climbing tower, contact **Walker's Rock & Rope Adventures** (☎ 403122; walker@iafrica.com.na). Walker's

was in the process of moving at the time of research, and will eventually wind up in the desert somewhere east of town.

SANDBOARDING

Sandboarding with **Alter Action** (☎ 402737; www.alter-action.com; lie-down/stand-up US\$20/30) is certain to increase your heart rate while going easy

on your wallet (it's by far the cheapest trip in town).

SCENIC FLIGHTS

Pleasure Flights (☎ 404500; www.pleasureflights.com.na; Sam Nujoma Ave) offers 'flightseeing' tours over the colourful salt works, Sandwich Harbour, Welwitschia Dr, the Brandberg, the dunes, the Skeleton Coast and beyond. Rates start at US\$80 per person for a one-hour circuit, though prices vary according to the length of the flight and the number of passengers.

SKYDIVING

Ground Rush Adventures (☎ 402841; www.skydiveswakop.com.na; tandem jump US\$160) provides the ultimate rush, and skydiving in Swakopmund is sweetened by the outstanding dune and ocean backdrop.

QUAD-BIKING

Outback Orange (☎ 400968; www.outback-orange.com; rides from US\$50) offers stomach-dropping tours on quad bikes (motorcycle-style 4WDs). In two hours, you'll travel over 60km, and race up and down countless dunes.

Tours

The most popular tour operators are listed following. They don't all have central offices, so it's best to make arrangements through your hostel or hotel:

Charly's Desert Tours (☎ 404341; charlydt@mweb.com.na; Sam Nujoma Av)

Namib Tours (☎ 404072)

Swakop Tour Company (☎ 404088; proverb@mweb.com.na)

Turnstone Tours (☎ 403123; www.turnstone-tours.com)

Hata-Angu Cultural Tours (☎ 081 251 5916; hata-angu@hotmail.com) operates tours to the outlying Mondesa township, where you'll visit a she-been, eat at a traditional restaurant and meet local people. Reactions to township tours are always mixed – some individuals walk away feeling as if they've made a strong connection, while others find the whole experience to be reminiscent of a human zoo. Your experience depends ultimately on your attitude and your expectations for the trip.

Sleeping

Desert Sky Backpackers (☎ 402339; dsbackpackers@swakop.com; 35 Lazarett St; camping per person US\$6, dm/d US\$8/24; ☎) This centrally located back-

packers' haunt is an excellent place to drop anchor in Swakopmund. The indoor lounge is simple and homey, while the outdoor picnic tables are a nice spot for a cold beer and hot conversation.

Alternative Space (☎ 402713; nam0352@mweb.com.na; 46 Dr Alfons Weber St; suggested donation incl breakfast d US\$25; ☎) Located on the desert fringe, this delightfully alternative budget choice is run by Frenus and Sybille Rorich. The main attractions are the castlelike architecture, the saturation artwork and an industrial-scrapping theme. The catch is that only 'friends of Frenus' are welcome, but he's a great guy and makes friends easily.

Grüner Kranz (☎ 402039; swakoplodge@yahoo.com; 7 Nathaniel Maxuilli St; dm/s/d US\$7/27/30; ☎) This budget hotel is the epicentre of the action in Swakopmund. The hotel is extremely popular with overland trucks, so it's a safe bet that the upstairs bar is bumping and grinding most nights of the week.

Sea Breeze Guesthouse (☎ 463348; www.seabreeze.com.na; 48 Turmalin St; s/d incl breakfast US\$35/65, self-catering apt US\$60; ☎) This reader-recommended guesthouse is right on the beach about 4.5km north of town – it's an excellent option if you're looking for a secluded retreat. The Italian owners have an incredible sense of design, which is evident the moment you enter.

Beach Lodge B&B (☎ 400933; www.beachlodge.com.na; 1 Stint St; s/d/tr/q US\$60/75/90/105) This boat-shaped place, which sits right on the beach sand, offers some of the most unusual architecture and the best sea views in town (through your own personal porthole!). If the beach is your bag, you can't beat it.

Sam's Giardino Hotel (☎ 403210; www.giardino.com.na; 89 Lazarett St; s/d from US\$90/105, ste US\$125; ☎) A slice of central Europe in the desert, Sam's Giardino Hotel mixes Swiss and Italian hospitality and architecture while emphasising fine wines, fine cigars and relaxing in the rose garden with a St Bernard called Mr Einstein.

Eating

Out of Africa Coffee Shop (☎ 404752; 13 Daniel Tjongarero St; snacks & meals US\$2-4) This place has the motto 'Life is too short to drink bad coffee', and it does something about it by welcoming you in the morning with Namibia's best coffee.

Cafe Anton (☎ 402419; Hotel Schweizerhaus, 1 Bismarck St; coffee & pastries US\$4-6) This somewhat pretentious spot serves up superb coffee, *apfelstrudel* (apple strudel), *kugelhopf* (cake with

nuts and raisins), *mohnkuchen* (poppy-seed cake), *linzertorte* (cake flavoured with almond meal, lemon and spices and spread with jam) and other European delights.

Swakopmund Brauhaus (☎ 402214; 22 Sam Nujoma St; mains US\$5-9) This excellent restaurant and boutique brewery offers one of Swakopmund's most sought-after commodities (traditional German-style beer) as well as excellently prepared beef and seafood.

Lighthouse Pub & Cafe (☎ 400894; Palm Beach; mains US\$6-10) With a view of the beach and crashing surf, the Lighthouse is an atmospheric choice that serves up good-value seafood including kabeljou, calamari, kingclip and lobster.

Cape to Cairo (☎ 463160; 7 Nathaniel Maxuillili St; mains US\$7-12) The most popular tourist restaurant in Swakopmund serves up a variety of gourmet dishes from across the continent. The game meats are exceptional, though vegetarians will have no problem feasting on hearty chapattis and other veggie treats.

Tug (☎ 402356; mains US\$7-12) Housed in the beached tugboat *Danie Hugo* near the jetty, the Tug is an atmospheric, upmarket choice for fresh fish and seafood. It's regarded by locals as the best restaurant in town.

Drinking

African Café (3B Schlosser St) Here you can choose between live music at the jazz bar or dancing the night away at the adjacent disco.

Captain's Tavern Pub (Swakopmund Hotel & Entertainment Centre, Bahnhof St) This upmarket tavern attracts highbrow clientele from the Swakopmund Hotel, and sometimes features live music.

Fagin's Pub (Roon St) This extremely popular, down-to-earth watering hole is reminiscent of a US truckies' stop, complete with jocular staff, a faithful clientele and evening videos of your day's adrenaline activities.

O'Kelley's (Moltke St) The emphasis at O'Kelley's is on local disco music, dancing and billiards – it's the place to go when you don't want to go home and you're too drunk to care.

Rafter's Action Pub (cnr Moltke & Woermann Sts) At Rafter's it's a safe bet that the music is always pounding, the strobes are always flashing and hot, young things are strutting their stuff on the dance floor, irregardless of the time of night.

Private Bar (Grüner Kranz, 7 Nathaniel Maxuillili St) Although it's certainly not private, the Private Bar, upstairs in the Grüner Kranz hotel, is

rapidly becoming the most popular tourist bar in Swakopmund.

Getting There & Away

From Roon St, the Intercap Mainliner bus travels to and from Walvis Bay (US\$8, ½ hour) and Windhoek (US\$14, 4¼ hours) on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, with connections to and from South Africa. The Friday Star Line bus between Khorixas (US\$8, 6½ hours) and Walvis Bay (US\$2, one hour) passes through Swakopmund, and returns on Sundays. There are occasional minibuses between Swakopmund and Windhoek (US\$7, four hours) and Swakopmund and Walvis Bay (US\$2, 45 minutes), which depart from the Engen petrol station.

Overnight trains connect Windhoek with Swakopmund (US\$8, 9½ hours) and Walvis Bay (US\$3.80, 1½ hours) daily except Saturday. The thrice-weekly trains between Walvis Bay and Tsumeb (US\$7, 17½ hours) also pass through Swakopmund.

For train or Star Line information, contact **Trans-Namib** (☎ 463538; www.transnamib.com.na).

NAMIB-NAUKLUFT PARK

☎ 063

This is the Namibia of the picture books and movies, and it does not disappoint. The park is best known for Sossusvlei, a huge ephemeral pan set amid infamous towering red dunes that leave you speechless at first glance. The dunes are part of the Namib Desert, which stretches more than 2000km along the coast from Oliphants River in South Africa all the way to southern Angola. The Naukluft portion of the park is not as well known, but the craggy peaks here are almost as impressive as the dunes themselves.

Camp sites must be prebooked at the NWR office in Windhoek (p959) or Swakopmund (p965). Permits for Sesriem-Sossusvlei and Naukluft hikes must be booked in the office in Windhoek.

There is no public transport to the area; you will either need to have your own vehicle or be part of an organised tour.

Sesriem & Sossusvlei

Despite being Namibia's No 1 attraction, Sossusvlei still manages to feel isolated. Hiking through the dunes, part of the 32,000-sq-km sand sea that covers much of western Namibia, is a sombre experience. The dunes,

which reach as high as 325m, are part of one of the oldest and driest ecosystems on earth. The landscape here is constantly changing. Colours shift with the light, and wind forever alters the dunes' shape. If you can, visit Sossusvlei at sunrise when the colours are particularly breathtaking.

Sesriem is the gateway to Sossusvlei. Here you can pick up your park permit (which is needed to get to Sossusvlei). There is also a small food shop, a camp site and the Sossusvlei Lodge. If you want to view the dunes at sunrise, you must stay at either the camp site or the lodge, and drive the 65km from Sesriem to Sossusvlei (on a sealed road). The park gate opens at sunrise and closes at sunset.

On the way from Sesriem, you'll pass Dune 45, the most accessible of the red dunes along the Sossusvlei road. It's a good place to take a photo (or use up a couple of films). It is marked with a sign on the left side of the road driving towards Sossusvlei.

You will have to park at the 2WD car park before you reach Sossusvlei. At the car park either hike the last 4km into the pan or take one of the shuttles (US\$10). Unless you have plenty of water and good walking shoes, the shuttle service is worth the hefty fee; the driver will stay with you and take you on guided hikes. Ask to be taken to Dead Vlei. The walk is stupendous and you will feel as if you have reached the ends of the earth.

The **Sesriem Camp Site** (camp sites for 4 people US\$20) must be booked in Windhoek or Swakopmund through the NWR, but arrive before sunset or they'll reassign your site on a standby basis; those who were unable to book a site in Windhoek may get in on this nightly lottery. A small shop at the office sells snacks and cold drinks, and the camp-site bar has music at night.

Right at the Sesriem Camp Site fence, **Sossusvlei Lodge** (☎ 293223; www.sossusvleilodge.com; s/d US\$265/365; 📍) is a curious place that bears a strong resemblance to what happens when squabbling children topple a stack of coloured blocks. People either love it or hate it, but it does make a statement. Pre-dawn transfer to Sossusvlei is possible as the lodge is located within the park gate.

Naukluft Mountains

The Naukluft Massif, which rises steeply from the gravel plains of the central Namib, is mainly a high-plateau area cut around the edges by a complex of steep gorges. It is an

ideal habitat for mountain zebras, kudus, leopards, springboks and klipspringers.

Most visitors to the Naukluft come to hike one of the area's two day hikes, the Waterkloof Trail or the Olive Trail. These day hikes need not be booked, but the amazing four-day and eight-day loops have more restrictions attached. Thanks to stifling summer temperatures and potentially heavy rains, the multiday hikes are only open from 1 March to the third Friday in October on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday of the first three weeks of each month. The base price (US\$12 per person) includes accommodation at the Hikers Haven Hut on the night before and after the hike, as well as camping at trailside shelters and the Ububis Canyon Hut. In addition, you'll have to pay US\$3.50 per person per day and another US\$2.50 per day for each vehicle you leave parked. Groups must consist of three to 12 people.

Due to the typically hot, dry conditions and lack of reliable natural water sources, you must carry at least 3L to 4L of water per person per day – and use it sparingly.

The **Naukluft (Kooedoesrus) Camp Site** (camp sites for 4 people US\$12) must be booked at the NWR office in Windhoek or Swakopmund. It is pleasantly situated in a deep valley 2km past the entrance gate to the Naukluft portion of the Namib-Naukluft Park. It has running water and ablutions blocks, and the maximum stay is three nights. The camp site is also the starting point for the Waterkloof and Olive Trails.

Solitaire

Solitaire is a lonely and aptly named settlement of just a few buildings about 80km north of Sesriem. Although the town is nothing more than an open spot in the desert, the area is home to several guest farms and lodges, which serve as an alternative base for exploring Sossusvlei.

The swish **Solitaire Country Lodge** (☎ 061-256598; www.namibialodges.com; camping US\$8.50, s/d incl breakfast US\$60/85; 📍), located next to the petrol station, offers 23 country-inspired rooms that surround a grassy courtyard with a spotless swimming pool.

The **Solitaire Guest Farm** (☎ 062-572024; www.solitaireguestfarm.com; camping US\$8.50, r per person incl breakfast US\$50; 📍), located 6km east of Solitaire on the C14, is a peaceful oasis situated between the Namib plains and the Naukluft Massif.

NORTHWESTERN NAMIBIA

For 4WD explorers, Namibia is synonymous with the Skeleton Coast, a formidable desert coastline engulfed by icy breakers. Here, seemingly endless stretches of foggy beach are punctuated by rusting shipwrecks and flanked by wandering dunes. As you move inland, the sinister fogs give way to the wondrous desert wildernesses of Damaraland and the Kaokoveld. The former is sparsely populated by the Damara people, and is known for its unique geological features; the latter is known as one of the last great wildernesses in southern Africa, as well as the home of the oft-photographed Himba people.

SKELETON COAST

The term 'Skeleton Coast' is derived from the treacherous nature of the coast – a foggy region with rocky and sandy coastal shallows – which has long been a graveyard for unwary ships and their crews. Early Portuguese sailors called it *As Areias do Inferno* (Sands of Hell) as once a ship washed ashore, the fate of the crew was sealed.

Although it has been extrapolated to take in the entire Namib Desert coastline, the Skeleton Coast actually refers to the coastal stretch between the mouths of the Swakop and Kunene Rivers. For our purposes, it covers the National West Coast Recreation Area and the Skeleton Coast Park (including the Skeleton Coast Wilderness). These protected areas stretch from just north of Swakopmund to the Kunene River, taking in nearly two million hectares of dunes and gravel plains to form one of the world's most inhospitable waterless areas.

National West Coast Recreation Area

This 200km-long and 25km-wide strip from Swakopmund to the Ugab River makes up the southern end of the Skeleton Coast. No permits are required to visit and the road is accessible to 2WD vehicles. The popular **Cape Cross Seal Reserve** (admission per person/vehicle US\$2.50/2.50; 🚗📶📶 10am-5pm) is a breeding reserve for thousands of Cape fur seals. Be forewarned: the smell is putrid and will make even the tough nauseous.

Along the salt road up the coast from Swakopmund you'll find several bleak beach

camp sites set up mainly for sea anglers. Sites at Myl 14, Jakkalsputz, Myl 72 and Myl 108 cost US\$14 for up to four people. (Myl means 'mile' – the distance from Swakop.)

Skeleton Coast Park

At Ugabmund, 110km north of Cape Cross, the road passes into the **Skeleton Coast Park** (admission per person/vehicle US\$2.50/2.50). UK journalist Nigel Tisdell once wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*, 'If hell has a coat of arms, it probably looks like the entrance to Namibia's Skeleton Coast Park', and the description is fitting.

Accommodation is available at **Torra Bay** (camp sites for 4 people US\$12) and **Terrace Bay** (s/d full board US\$59/84), but the former is open only in December and January. Both resorts must be prebooked at the NWR office in Windhoek (p959) or Swakopmund (p965). If you are staying at either resort you must pass through the Ugabmund gate before 3pm or the Springbokwater gate before 5pm.

Day visits are not allowed, but transit permits (US\$2.50/2.50 per person/vehicle) for the road between Ugabmund and Springbokwater gates are available at the Ugabmund and Springbokwater checkpoints. If transiting, you must enter through one gate before 1pm and exit through the other before 3pm the same day.

Skeleton Coast Wilderness

The Skeleton Coast Wilderness makes up the northern half of the Skeleton Coast Park. Here, seemingly endless stretches of foggy beach are punctuated by rusting shipwrecks and the cries of gulls and gannets.

Concessions to the Skeleton Coast Wilderness are owned by the **Skeleton Coast Wilderness Camp** (📞 061-274500; www.wilderness-safaris.com; s/d for 4 days US\$2586/4372, for 5 days US\$2966/4932), an exclusive luxury resort located near Sarusas Springs. Activities include viewing desert elephants along the Hoarusib, ocean fishing, dune climbing, hiking through the Clay Castles and appreciating the sparse local vegetation. Rates include accommodation, air transfers from Windhoek, meals, drinks and two activities per day. Prebooking is mandatory.

DAMARALAND

The territory between the Skeleton Coast and Namibia's Central Plateau has traditionally been known as Damaraland, after the people who make up much of its population. Al-

though it's not an officially protected area, its wild open spaces are home to many desert-adapted species, including giraffes, zebras, lions, elephants and rhinos. In addition to its sense of freedom, the region is rich in both natural and cultural attractions, including Brandberg, Namibia's highest massif, and the rock engravings of Twyfelfontein.

Spitzkoppe

📞 064

The 1728m **Spitzkoppe** (D3716, Groot Spitzkoppe village; admission per person/vehicle US\$1.80/1; 🌅🌄 sunrise-sunset), one of Namibia's most recognisable landmarks, rises miragelike above the dusty pro-Namib plains of southern Damaraland. Its dramatic shape has inspired its nickname, the Matterhorn of Africa, but similarities between this granite inselberg and the glaciated Swiss alp begin and end with its sharp peak. Beside the Spitzkoppe rise the equally impressive Pondoks, another inselberg formation that's comprised of enormous granite domes.

Around the massif are dotted a number of beautiful wild **camp sites** (📞 530879; camping per person US\$4; 📍), which are maintained by the local community. Near the entrance, a small shop sells staple items and a range of local rocks and minerals. Water (US\$0.05 per litre) is scarce; it's wise to bring all you'll need.

There's no public transport here, and although Swakopmund agencies offer day tours, you'd probably regret not allowing more time to explore this incredible place.

Brandberg

📞 064

The Brandberg (Fire Mountain) is named for the effect created by the setting sun on its western face, which causes the granite massif to resemble a burning slag heap. Its summit, Königstein, is Namibia's highest peak at 2573m. Its best-known attraction, the gallery of rock art in **Tsisab Ravine**, features the famous *White Lady of the Brandberg*. The figure, which isn't necessarily a lady, stands about 40cm high, and is part of a larger painting that depicts a bizarre hunting procession. In one hand, the figure is carrying what appears to be a flower or possibly a feather. In the other, the figure is carrying a bow and arrows. However, the painting is distinct because 'her' hair is straight and light-coloured – distinctly un-African – and the body is painted white from the chest down.

The locally run **Ugab Wilderness Camp** (www.nacobta.com.na; camping per person/vehicle US\$4/2.50, s/d tents US\$18/26; 📍) is a member of Nacobta, a collective of various organisations that aims to foster increased community-based tourism. The turnoff is signposted from the D2359.

Petrified Forest

This site, 40km west of Khorixas, is scattered with dozens of petrified tree trunks that date back 260 million years. Admission is free, but the compulsory guides live only from tips; plan on US\$1 per person for the 500m walking tour. Note that it's forbidden to take even the smallest scrap of petrified wood.

Twyfelfontein

At the head of a grassy valley, **Twyfelfontein** (admission per person/vehicle US\$1/1) is one of the most extensive galleries of rock art in Africa. The original name of this water source in the Aba-Huab Valley was /Ui-//Ais (Surrounded by Rocks), but in 1947 it was renamed Twyfelfontein, or 'doubtful spring', by European settler D Levin, who deemed its daily output of 1 cu metre of water insufficient for life in the harsh environment. The 6000-year-old petroglyphs here were executed by cutting through the hard patina covering the local sandstone. Guides are available (plan on US\$1 as a tip), but the route is easy and you can usually walk alone.

The **Aba Huab Camp** (📞 697981; www.nacobta.com.na; camping per person US\$4, deluxe camp sites per person US\$6, d tents US\$7, s/d A-frame US\$27/42; 📍) is an attractively perched camp site beside the Aba Huab riverbed, immediately north of the Twyfelfontein turn-off. Pricier sites have electricity. The camp is a member of Nacobta, a collective of various organisations that aims to foster increased community-based tourism.

Over the hill from Twyfelfontein, the **Twyfelfontein Country Lodge** (📞 374750; www.namibialodges.com; r per person incl breakfast US\$115; 📍📶📶) is an architectural wonder that is embedded in the red rock. The lodge boasts stylish rooms, an immense and airy elevated dining room, and a good variety of excursions throughout Damaraland.

KAOKOLAND

📞 065

The northwest corner of the country represents Namibia at its most primeval. The Kaokoveld is a vast repository of desert mountains

that is crossed only by sandy tracks laid down by the South African Defence Force (SADF). It is one of the least developed regions of the country, and is often described as one of the last true wildernesses in southern Africa. It is also home to the Himba, a group of nomadic pastoralists native to the Kaokoveld, who are famous for covering their skin with a traditional mixture of ochre butter and herbs to protect themselves from the sun.

There's no public transport anywhere in the region and hitching is practically impossible, so the best way to explore Kaokoveld is with a well-outfitted 4WD vehicle or an organised camping safari. In the dry season, the routes from Opuwo to Epupa Falls, Ruacana to Okongwati (via Swartbooi's Drift) and Sesfontein to Purros may be passable to high-clearance 2WD vehicles, but otherwise, you'll need a 4WD.

Opuwo

☎ 065

Although it's the regional 'capital', Opuwo is little more than a dusty collection of commercial buildings ringed by traditional rondavels. You'll see lots of Himba and Herero people here; the going rate for a 'people photo' is about US\$1, but many people will ask for US\$2. Please either respect local wishes or put the camera away. To meet local artisans and purchase arts and crafts, check out the **Kunene Crafts Centre** (☎ 273209; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat).

The **Opuwo (Power Safe) Guesthouse** (☎ 273036; camping per person US\$4, dm US\$9; (P)) offers camping on the green lawn, pleasantly cool dorms and kitchen facilities. Coming from the south, turn left at the BP petrol station then take the next right; turn left after the hospital and it's several houses down on the right (look for the large reeds and fence).

The **Kunene Village Rest Camp** (☎ 273043; camping per person US\$5, s/d huts US\$16/20; (P)) is an amenable rest camp that has well-groomed camp sites with adequate facilities as well as basic thatched huts with shared bathrooms. Follow the signposted turn-off from the government housing project at the edge of town, en route to Sesfontein.

Epupa Falls

☎ 065

At this dynamic spot, whose name means 'falling waters' in Herero, the Kunene River fans out and is ushered through a 500m-wide

series of parallel channels, dropping a total of 60m over 1.5km. The greatest single drop – 37m – is commonly identified as *the* Epupa Falls, where the river tumbles into a dark, narrow cleft. During periods of low water, the pools above the falls make fabulous natural Jacuzzis. You're safe from crocs in the eddies and rapids, but hang onto the rocks and keep away from the lip of the falls, where there's a real risk of being swept over; swimming here isn't suitable for young children.

Epupa Falls public camping ground (camping per person US\$4; (P)) is an enclosed camp located right at the falls. Although it can get very crowded, it has hot showers and flush toilets that are maintained by the local community. There's a less-crowded overflow section east of the neighbouring Omarunga Camp.

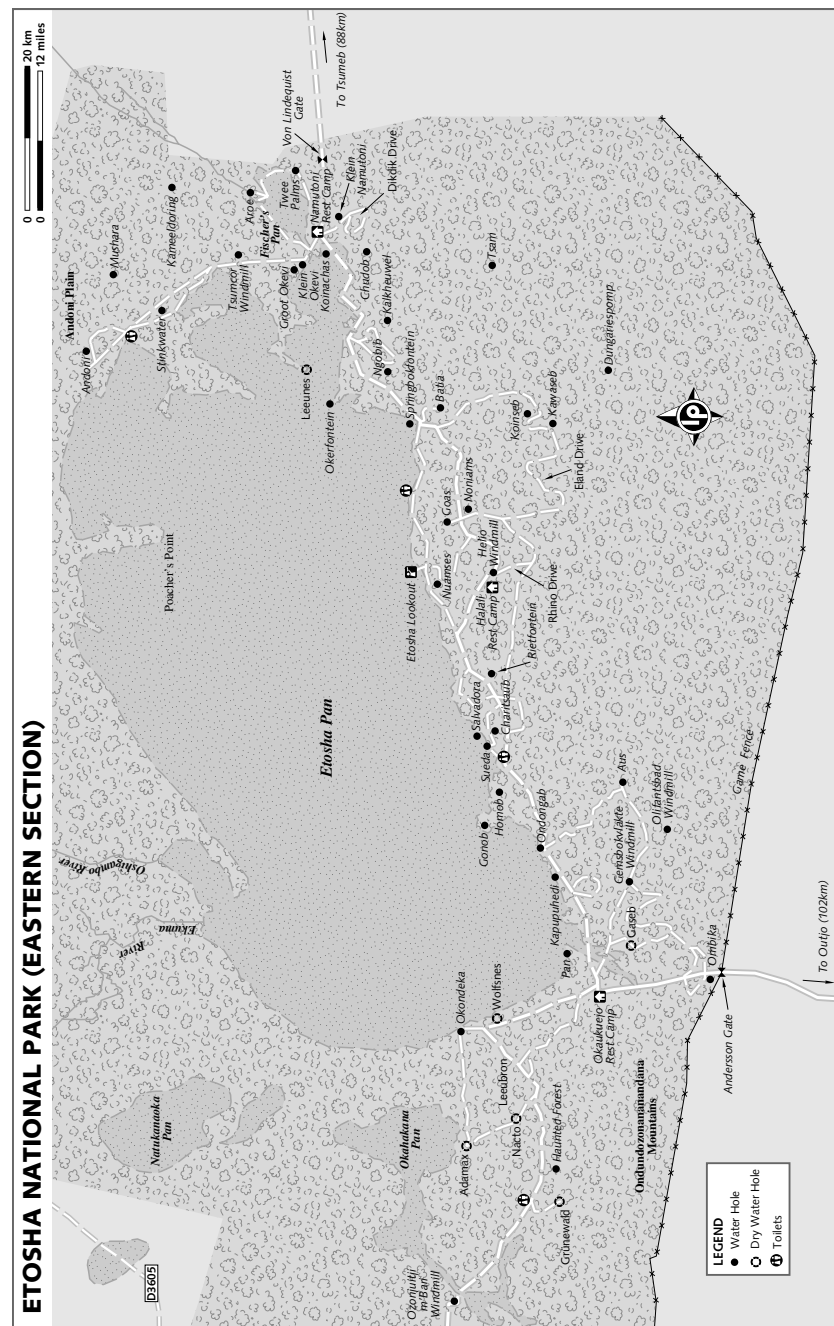
The **Epupa Camp** (☎ 695102, reservations 061-232740; epupa@mweb.com.na; PO Box 26078, Windhoek; s/d US\$135/205), 800m upstream from the falls, was originally used as an engineering camp for a now-shelved hydro project. It has since been converted into a beautifully situated camp where rates include tented accommodation with meals, drinks and activities such as Himba visits, bird-watching walks, sundowner hikes and trips to rock-art sites.

From Opuwo or Swartbooi's Drift, it's possible to drive to Epupa Falls via Okongwati in a high-clearance 2WD, but the route remains very rough. Via the Kunene River road, it's 93km to Epupa Falls from Swartbooi's Drift. Even with a 4WD vehicle it takes at least 12 hours, but this lovely stretch – known as the Namibian Riviera – serves as an increasingly popular hiking route.

ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK

Etosha National Park, the 'Great White Place of Dry Water', takes in approximately 20,000 sq km surrounding its namesake, the vast white and greenish-coloured Etosha Pan. This vast park protects 114 mammal species, as well as 340 bird species, 16 reptiles and amphibians, one fish species and countless insects.

The first Europeans in Etosha were traders and explorers John Andersson and Francis Galton, who arrived by wagon at Namutoni in 1851, but Etosha didn't attract the interest of tourists or conservationists until after the turn of the 20th century, when the governor of German South-West Africa, Dr F von Lindequist, became concerned over diminishing



animal numbers and founded a 99,526-sq-km reserve. In subsequent years, the park boundaries were altered several times, and by 1970 Etosha had been pared down to its present 23,175 sq km.

Only the eastern two-thirds of Etosha is open to the general public; the western third is reserved exclusively for tour operators. All roads in the eastern section are passable to 2WD vehicles and it's in this area that you'll find the rest camps. Each of the three rest camps has an information centre, and the staff and shops at either of the main gates sell maps and provide basic information.

Visitors must check in at Von Lindequist or Andersson and purchase a daily permit, which costs US\$3.50/0.30 per adult/child and US\$2.50 per vehicle. The permits must then be presented at your reserved rest camp, where you pay any outstanding camping or accommodation fees, which must be pre-booked through a travel agency or the NWR in Windhoek (p959).

Book well in advance for visits during Namibian or South African school holidays (normally mid-December to mid-January, around Easter, late July to early August, and for two weeks in mid-October). During this period you may be limited to three nights in each of the three camps, although exceptions can sometimes be made.

Note that pets and firearms are prohibited in the park. Those booked into the rest camps must arrive before sunset and can only leave after sunrise; the daily times are posted on the gates.

Sleeping & Eating

Etosha is open to day visitors, but it's impossible to see much of the park in less than two or three days. Most visitors spend a couple of nights at one of its three rest camps, Namutoni, Halali and Okaukuejo, which are spaced at 70km intervals. Each has its own character, so it's worth visiting more than one if you have the time.

Each camp is open year-round and has a restaurant (open 7am to 9am, noon to 2pm, and 6pm to 10pm daily), as well as a bar, a shop, a swimming pool, picnic sites, a petrol station and a kiosk. The restaurants serve meals from 7am to 8.30am, noon to 1.30pm and 6pm to 8.30pm; at other times, the kiosks are open. If you're self-catering it's considerably cheaper if you stock up on groceries prior to entering the park.

Okaukuejo Rest Camp (camping for 4 people US\$20, economy r or bungalows US\$33, 2-bed r US\$41, 3-bed bungalows US\$41, 4-bed chalets US\$50, 4-bed luxury bungalows US\$58, 4-bed self-catering bungalows US\$95; (P) (E)) Okaukuejo's camping ground is a bit of a dust hole, but the self-catering accommodation may be the nicest in the park. The bungalows and chalets all have a kitchen and a *braai* (barbecue) pit, and bathroom and toilet facilities. The floodlit water hole is probably Etosha's best rhino-viewing venue, particularly between 8pm and 10pm.

Halali Rest Camp (camping for 4 people US\$20, 2-bed r US\$37, 4-bed economy bungalow US\$42, 4-bed self-catering bungalows US\$48-81) Etosha's middle camp, Halali nestles between several incongruous dolomite outcrops. The name is derived from a German term for the ritual horn-blowing to signal the end of a hunt, and a horn now serves as Halali's motif. A floodlit water hole extends wildlife-viewing into the night and allows observation of nocturnal creatures – it's arguably the best wildlife-viewing venue in the park.

Namutoni Rest Camp (camping for 4 people US\$20, 2-bed r with/without bathroom US\$41/18, 2-bed economy apt inside/outside the fort US\$38/27, 4-bed chalets US\$45, 4-bed apt US\$42/50, 4-bed luxury ste US\$87) The most popular and best kept of the camps is Namutoni, with its landmark whitewashed German fort. It originally served as an outpost for German troops, and in 1899 the German cavalry built a fort from which to control Owambo uprisings.

Getting There & Away

Etosha's three main entry gates are Von Lindequist (Namutoni), west of Tsumeb; King Nehale, southeast of Ondangwa; and Andersson (Okaukuejo), north of Outjo. There's no public transport into the park, but Tsumeb, the nearest bus and rail terminal, 110km away, has several car-hire agencies. Otherwise, plenty of safari companies run Etosha tours (see p985).

OUTJO

(E) 067

Bougainvillea-decked Outjo, settled in 1880, was never a mission station, but in the mid-1890s it did a short, uneventful stint as a German garrison town. For visitors, it best serves as a staging point for trips to Okaukuejo, in Etosha National Park. The 1899 military residence, the Franke House, now houses

the **Outjo Museum** (admission US\$0.60; (E) 10am-12.30pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri).

Located behind the African Curios Shop, **Outjo Backpackers** ((E) 313470; camping US\$4, dm US\$7, d with shared bathrooms US\$15; (P)) is centrally located and has basic but clean rooms and a well-stocked communal kitchen.

The Austrian-run **Etosha Garden Hotel** ((E) 313130; www.etosha-garden-hotel.com; s/d US\$30/50; (P) (E) (E)) is just a short walk from the town centre and features well-furnished rooms that surround a manicured garden and spotless swimming pool.

Minibuses connect Outjo with Otjiwarongo (US\$2.50, one hour) from the bakery and the OK supermarket, but there's currently no public transport to Etosha or Khorixas.

TSUMEB

(E) 067

Although mineral-collectors rank Tsumeb among the world's greatest natural wonders, travellers use it as another jumping-off point for Etosha. If geology is your passion, however, you'll be happy to know that of the 184 minerals discovered here, 10 are found nowhere else. The geological history is recounted in the **Tsumeb Museum** ((E) 220447; admission US\$1; (E) 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), located in the 1915 Old German Private School on the corner of Main St and 8th Rd.

Travel North Namibia ((E) 220728; travelnn@tsu.namib.com; 1551 Omeg Alee) provides nationwide tourist information, accommodation and transport bookings, as well as car hire anywhere in northern Namibia (with special rates for Etosha trips).

Tsumeb's friendliest and most economical accommodation, **Mousebird Backpackers & Safaris** ((E) 221777; www.mousebird.com; 533 4th St; camping per person US\$4, dm/d US\$8/16; (P)) offers comfortable rooms, excellent kitchen facilities and a nice little bar. If you don't have a car, it also runs affordable safaris to Etosha (US\$160 for three days) and the Otjozondjupa region (US\$125 for two days).

Adjacent to the tourist office, **Travel North Backpackers** ((E) 220728; travelnn@tsu.namib.com; Omeg Alee; camping per person US\$4, dm US\$7, s/d from US\$14/25; (P)) is a no-frills lodge. It lacks the personality of Mousebird, but it's still a cheap and comfortable option if you're counting your Nam dollars.

Located in the town centre, **Makalani Hotel** ((E) 221051; www.makalanihotel.com; 3rd St; s/d incl breakfast

US\$60/85; (P) (E) (E)) is the most established and upmarket hotel in Tsumeb. Modern rooms feature satellite TV and air-con, and surround a sparkling swimming pool and a shady *lapa* (large, thatched common area).

The Intercap Mainliner between Windhoek and Victoria Falls calls in at the Travel North Namibia office. Minibuses travel frequently from the Bahnhof St terminus in Tsumeb to Grootfontein, Oshakati and Windhoek.

Trains run three times weekly to and from Windhoek and Walvis Bay. For train information, contact **Trans-Namib** ((E) 220358; www.transnamib.com.na).

WATERBERG PLATEAU PARK

Waterberg Plateau Park (admission per person/vehicle US\$2.50/2.50; (E) 8am-1pm & 2pm-sunset year-round) is comprised of a 50km-long and 16km-wide Etjo sandstone plateau, which looms 150m above the plain. Scattered around this sheer-sided 'Lost World' are numerous freshwater springs, which support a lush mosaic of trees and an abundance of wildlife. The park is also well known as a repository for rare and threatened species, including sables, roans and white rhinos.

Visitors may not explore the plateau in their own vehicles, but twice daily the NWR conducts three-hour wildlife drives (US\$12/5 per adult/child).

There are nine short walking tracks around Bernabé de la Bat Rest Camp, including one up to the plateau rim at Mountain View. A four-day, 42km unguided hike around a figure-eight track (US\$12 per person) starts at 9am every Wednesday from April to November. Groups are limited to between three and 10 people. Hikers stay in basic shelters and don't need a tent, but must otherwise be self-sufficient.

The **Bernabé de la Bat Rest Camp** (camping for up to 4 people US\$12, d/tr bungalows US\$40/50, 5-bed bungalows/ste US\$50/65; (P)) offers a range of accommodation with fans, *braais* and outdoor seating areas. The camp restaurant serves meals during limited hours and a shop sells staple foods in the morning and afternoon.

There's no public transportation, but taxis from Otjiwarongo will get you to the park for around US\$25 each way and quite a few budget safaris include it in their itineraries. Note that bicycles and motorcycles aren't permitted.

NORTHEASTERN NAMIBIA

This region, which includes the formerly dangerous Caprivi Strip, forms a stark contrast to the aridity of much of the rest of the country. Here water flows year-round. This is a tranquil area of stunning sunsets and lazy days. Spend some time relaxing on the banks of the mighty Okavango River, doing nothing more than listening to the hippos call. Although once an area whose name was synonymous with danger due to the intermittent civil wars in Angola, today the Caprivi Strip is perfectly safe. Angola signed a peace accord in April 2002 and problems in the area ceased.

RUNDU

☎ 066

Rundu, a sultry tropical outpost on the bluffs above the Okavango River, has little of specific interest for tourists, but it's great to laze at one of the lodges alongside the river, especially if you want to break up the long drive to or from the Caprivi Strip. It's also a centre of activity for Namibia's growing Angolan community. Every May at Rundu Beach, locals put on the *Anything that Floats* regatta, accompanied by the usual drinking, dining and socialising.

The **tourism centre** (☎ 256140; ngandu@mweb.com; Kakakuru St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat), run by the same folks as Ngandu Safari Lodge, can provide basic tourist information.

The well-stocked **Okavango Pharmacy** (Siwaronga St) is probably the best in northern Namibia.

If you're shopping for crafts, be sure to visit the **Khemo Open Market**, which has a good selection of Kavango woodcarvings.

Sleeping & Eating

Ngandu Safari Lodge (☎ 256723; ngandu@mweb.com.na; Sarasungu Rd; camping per person US\$4, s/d from US\$30/40; (P) 🚽) With a wide range of accommodation to suit travellers of all budgets, this long-standing Rundu lodge draws a diverse mix of guests. Ngandu is conveniently situated near the centre of town, though it's about 1km from the riverfront.

Sarasungu River Lodge (☎ 255161; sarasungu@mweb.com.na; camping per person US\$4, s/d US\$30/40; (P) 🚽) This brand-new lodge is situated in a secluded riverine clearing 4km from the town centre,

and features a number of attractive thatched chalets that surround a landscaped pool.

Tambuti Lodge (☎ 255711; tambuti@namibnet.com; s/d with breakfast US\$35/40, honeymoon ste US\$80; (P) 🚽) This small Swiss-run lodge is located at Rundu Beach, and combines the convenience of being in town with the beauty of a riverside setting. Highlights are the on-site restaurant, which features a host of traditional Swiss dishes, and the honeymoon suite, which has one of the most bizarre Jacuzzis you've ever seen.

N'kwazi Lodge (☎ 255467; nkawasi@iafrica.com.na; camping per person US\$4, African huts with bathroom US\$25, d incl breakfast US\$55) The N'kwazi makes a great riverside retreat with family-style meals and hospitality. In the evening you can take a sunset cruise on the Okavango; the lodge also organises cultural evenings with residents of adjacent Mayana village, and visits to Mayana School, which is supported by the lodge. Transfers from town cost US\$29 per group.

Hakusembe Lodge (☎ 257010; www.natron.net/hakusembe; camping per person US\$4, s/d with half-board US\$140/215; (P) 🚽) This secluded hideaway sits amid lush riverside gardens and features eight luxury chalets (one of which is floating) decked out in safari prints and locally crafted furniture. It lies 17km down the Nkurenkuru road, then 2km north to the riverbank.

Antja's (☎ 256973; Main St; breakfast US\$2, meals US\$2-4) A good option for breakfast, burgers, toasted sandwiches, pies, sweets and coffee (including espresso and cappuccino).

Ozzy's Beer House (☎ 256723; meals US\$3-5) This popular restaurant serves up greasy local fare, though it's cheap and has a good number of vegetarian options as well.

Getting There & Away

Intercape Mainliner's weekly buses between Windhoek (US\$38, 9 hours) and Victoria Falls (US\$36, 11 hours) pass Rundu's Shell petrol station at 5.15am Saturday northbound and 7.15pm Sunday southbound.

Star Line's twice-weekly services between Windhoek (US\$15, 11 hours) and Katima Mulilo (US\$12, seven hours) also call in at Rundu. Star Line runs a bus from Rundu to Tsumeb (US\$9, four hours), via Grootfontein, at 8pm on Wednesday and Sunday. The bus from Grootfontein to Rundu (US\$8, three hours) leaves at 7.30pm on Tuesday and Friday.

A car ferry and border crossing are expected soon between Rundu and Calai, across the river in Angola.

KHAUDOM GAME RESERVE

If you're looking for a truly wild and untouristed wildlife venue in Namibia, head for the undeveloped **Khaudom Game Reserve** (admission per person/vehicle US\$2.50/2.50), which takes in 384,000 hectares. Along its meandering sand tracks you'll see roan antelopes, wild dogs, elephants, zebras and most other species you'd encounter at Etosha National Park, but in a much lonelier context.

The NWR asks visitors to travel in a two-vehicle convoy and be self-sufficient in food, water and spares. Caravans, trailers and motorcycles are prohibited. The two camp sites **Khaudom** (camping for 4 people US\$12, 4-bed huts US\$14) and **Sikereti** (camping for 4 people US\$12, 4-bed huts US\$14) won't disappoint. All visitors must prebook through the NWR office in Windhoek (p959).

BWABWATA NATIONAL PARK

☎ 066

Bwabwata National Park includes five main zones: the 20,500-hectare West Caprivi Triangle around Kongola (also known as the Kwando Core Area), the Mahango Game Reserve, Popa Falls, the Buffalo Core Area near Divundu and the now-defunct West Caprivi Game Reserve. Bwabwata aims to rehabilitate wildlife populations that were virtually destroyed by poaching.

Prior to the 2002 Angolan cease-fire, this area saw almost no visitors. Now that peace has returned, however, tourism is slowly starting to pick up again. If you're looking to get off the beaten path, this is a great area to explore while it's still relatively undiscovered.

The 25,400-hectare **Mahango Game Reserve** (admission per person/vehicle US\$3.50/3.50) occupies a broad flood plain that's best known for its dry-season concentrations of thirsty elephants. This is the only national park unit in Namibia where visitors are permitted to walk at will; winter is the best time for observing the area's ample wildlife. The nearest NWR camp is Popa Falls, 15km north of Mahango.

Near Bagani, the Okavango River tumbles down a broad series of cascades known as **Popa Falls** (admission per person/vehicle US\$2.50/2.50). They're nothing to get steamed up about, but low water does expose a 4m drop. A kiosk sells the basics: tinned food, beer, candles and mosquito coils.

Sleeping WESTERN SECTION

Following are the accommodation options in the western section of the park.

N/goabaca Camp (www.nacobta.com.na; camping per person US\$4; (P)) This locally run camp site is a member of Nacobta, a collective of organisations that aims to foster increased community-based tourism. The camp sits beside the Okavango River opposite the Popa Falls Rest Camp and has similar facilities.

Ngepi Camp (☎ 259903; www.ngepicamp.com; camping per person US\$5, huts US\$22; (P)) Ngepi is Mbukushu for 'How are you?', and folks who stay here are normally just fine. Travellers rave about this place, and we agree: it's probably one of the best backpacker lodges in Namibia. Entire days can be spent sunbathing and reading on the green lawns or swimming in the Okavango River 'cage' (it keeps you and the crocs at a safe distance from one another). Entire nights can be spent boozing it up in the inviting bush bar. Crash for the night in a reed hut or pitch a tent by the river, and let the sounds of hippos splashing ease you into a restful sleep. The camp is located 4km off the main road, though the sandy access can prove difficult without a 4WD. Phone the lodge if you need a lift from Divundu.

Popa Falls Rest Camp (camping for 4 people US\$12, each additional person US\$2, standard/luxury 4-bed huts US\$26/28; (P)) Although it's getting a bit shabby, this NWR-run camp site does afford great views of the cascades. A small on-site shop sells the essentials while a field kitchen is available for self-catering. Facilities include cold showers, sit-down flush toilets and *braai* pits.

EASTERN SECTION

At the eastern end of the park are several accommodation options.

Nambwa Camp Site (camping per person US\$5) Nambwa, 14km south of Kongola, lacks facilities, but it's the only official camp in the eastern part of the park. Book and pick up a permit at the Susuwe ranger station, about 4km north of Kongola (4WD access only) on the west bank of the river. To reach the camp, follow the 4WD track south along the western bank of the Kwando River.

Susuwe Island Lodge (☎ in South Africa 11-706 7207; www.islandsinafrica.com; per person low/high season US\$305/465) This chic safari lodge is located on a remote island in the Kwando River, surrounded by a wildlife-rich habitat of

savannah, woodland and wetland. Accommodation is in six stylish brick-and-thatch chalets adorned in soft earthy hues. Susuwe is accessible only by charter flight or 4WD. Prebooking is mandatory.

Getting There & Away

All buses and minibuses between Katima Mulilo and Rundu pass through Divundu. The gravel road between Divundu and Mohebo (on the Botswana border) is accessible by 2WD, and there's lots of traffic but no public transport; drivers may transit the park without charge, but incur national park entry fees to use the loop drive through the park.

KATIMA MULILO

📞 066

Out on a limb at the eastern end of the Caprivi Strip lies remote Katima Mulilo, which is as far from Windhoek as you can get in Namibia. This very African town features lush vegetation and enormous trees, and was once known for the elephants that marched through. Nowadays little wildlife remains, but the ambience is still pleasant.

Although it advertises itself as a 'backpackers lodge', the **Caprivi Traveller Guest House** (📞 252788; dm/s/d US\$5/14/16; 📍) is actually more of a budget hotel, but it's a cheap and clean option if you're just looking to crash for the night. To get there, follow the Rundu road 1km from the centre, turn left onto the nameless gravel road and continue on for 400m; the guesthouse is on the left.

The stunning **Zambezi Lodge** (📞 253149; www.namibsunhotels.com.na; camping per person US\$4, s/d incl breakfast US\$65/95; 📍) is perched on the banks of the Zambezi, and features a floating bar where you can watch the crocs and hippos below. The lodge is located 2km from town along the Ngoma Rd.

The reader-recommended **Caprivi River Lodge** (📞 253300; www.capriviriverlodge.net; camping per person US\$4, budget room s/d US\$45/80, chalet incl breakfast US\$90/110; 📍) offers rustic chalets and modest wooden cabins with shared bathrooms, as well as a grassy camp site to suit travellers of all budgets. The lodge is located 5km from town along the Ngoma Rd.

The Intercap Mainliner passes Katima Mulilo en route between Windhoek and Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe). Minibuses run when full to and from Windhoek (US\$15, 15½ hours) and points in between.

Drivers of foreign-registered vehicles leaving Namibia at Ngoma Bridge or Wenela need a US\$10 road tax certificate; if you didn't receive one on entry, purchase one at the road tax office in town.

SOUTHERN NAMIBIA

Southern Namibia takes in everything from Rehoboth in the north to the Orange River along the South African border, and westward from the Botswana border to the Diamond Coast. The Central Plateau is characterised by wide open country, and the area's widely spaced and largely uninspiring towns function mainly as commercial and market centres. Further south, however, the landscape opens up into seemingly endless desert plains, ranges and far horizons – and the surprising Fish River Canyon forms a spectacular gash across the landscape.

FISH RIVER CANYON NATIONAL PARK

📞 063

Nowhere else in Africa will you find anything quite like Fish River Canyon. Fish River, which joins the Orange River 70km south of the canyon, has been gouging out this gorge for aeons. The canyon measures 160km in length and up to 27km in width, and the dramatic inner canyon reaches a depth of 550m. Although these figures by themselves are impressive, it's difficult to get a sense of perspective without actually witnessing the enormous scope of the canyon.

Information

The main access points for Fish River Canyon are at Hobas, near the northern end of the park, and Ai-Ais, near the southern end. Both are administered by the NWR, and all accommodations must be booked in advance through the Windhoek office (p959). Daily park permits, which cost US\$3 per person and US\$3 per vehicle, are valid for both Hobas and Ai-Ais. The **Hobas Information Centre** (📞 7.30am–noon & 2–5pm) at the northern end of the park is also the check-in point for the five-day canyon hike. Packaged snacks and cool drinks are available here, but little else.

Activities

The five-day hike (US\$11 per person) from Hobas to Ai-Ais is Namibia's most popular

long-distance walk – and with good reason. The magical 85km route, which follows the sandy riverbed past a series of ephemeral pools (in May and June the river actually does flow), begins at Hikers' Viewpoint, and ends at the hot-spring resort of Ai-Ais.

Due to flash flooding and heat in the summer months, the route is open only from 1 May to 30 September. Groups of three to 40 people may begin the hike every day of the season, though you will have to book in advance as the trail is extremely popular. Reservations can be made through the NWR office in Windhoek.

Officials sometimes require a doctors' certificate of fitness, issued less than 40-days before your hike, though if you look young and fit, they might not ask. Hikers must arrange their own transport to and from the start and finish as well as accommodation in Hobas and Ai-Ais.

Thanks to the typically warm, clear weather, you probably won't need a tent, but you must carry a sleeping bag and food. In Hobas, check on water availability in the canyon. In August and September, the last 15km of the walk can be completely dry and hikers will need several 2L water bottles to manage this hot, sandy stretch. Large plastic soft-drink bottles normally work just fine.

Sleeping & Eating

Hobas Camp Site (camping for 4 people US\$15; 📍) This pleasant and well-shaded camping ground near the park's northern end is situated about 10km from the main viewpoints. Facilities are clean, and there's also a kiosk and swimming pool, but no restaurant or petrol station.

Ai-Ais Hot Springs Resort (camping for 4 people US\$15, 4-bed bungalows US\$30, 2/4-bed apt US\$35/35; 📍) Amenities include washing blocks, *braai* pits and use of the resort facilities. All apartments have bathrooms and basic self-catering facilities. There is also an on-site restaurant and small grocery store.

Getting There & Away

There's no public transport to either Hobas or Ai-Ais, but hitching is fairly easy during the hiking season from mid-March to 31 October. Thanks to South African holiday traffic, the best-travelled route is to Ai-Ais via two turnings, one 36km north of Noordoewer and the other 30km south of Grünau. Once in Ai-Ais,

plenty of holiday-makers head for the viewpoints around Hobas, thus facilitating hitching between Ai-Ais, Hobas and the beginning of the Hikers' Viewpoint trailhead.

KEETMANSHOOP

📞 063

Keetmanshoop (*kayt-mahns-hoo-up*) sits at the main crossroads of southern Namibia and has more petrol stations per capita than any other town in the country, which may hint at its main function for travellers. However, if you're looking to break up a long drive, there are some noteworthy accommodation options in the area, especially if you've yet to photograph Namibia's most famous tree, the *kokerboom* (quiver tree).

Located 25km north of town, **Garas Park** (📞 223217; morkel@namibnet.com; admission per person/vehicle US\$1/1) offers stands of *kokerbooms* and lots of hiking tracks and drives through a fantasy landscape of stacked boulders. It's enhanced by a series of sculptures made from spare junk. Camping is available for US\$3 per person, plus US\$1 per vehicle.

On Garaganus Farm, 14km east of town, **Quivertree Rest Camp** (📞 222835; quiver@iafrica.com.na; admission per person/vehicle US\$2/2) boasts Namibia's largest stand of *kokerbooms*. Rates include use of the picnic facilities and entry to the Giant's Playground, a bizarre natural rock garden 5km away. Camping is available for US\$4 per person, or you can hire single/double 'igloo' bungalows for US\$20/30.

Intercap Mainliner buses between Windhoek (US\$24, 5½ hours) and Cape Town (US\$32, 13¼ hours) stop at the Du Toit BP petrol station four times weekly in either direction; they also leave for Jo'burg (US\$46, 17 hours) via Upington. The Engen station, opposite, serves as the bus terminal for minibuses to and from Windhoek, Lüderitz and Noordoewer. **Star Line** (📞 292202) buses to Lüderitz (US\$9, five hours) depart from the train station at 7.30am Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Overnight trains run Sunday to Friday between Windhoek (US\$9, 11 hours) and Keetmanshoop. On Wednesday and Saturday mornings at 9am, trains continue to Upington (US\$7.50, 12½ hours) in South Africa; from Upington, they run on Sunday and Thursday. For train or Star Line information, contact **Trans-Namib** (📞 292202; www.transnamib.com.na).

LÜDERITZ

☎ 063

Lüderitz is a surreal colonial relic sandwiched between the barren Namib Desert coast and the windswept South Atlantic. Scarcely touched by the 21st century, this remote town might recall a Bavarian *dorfchen* (small village), with its churches, bakeries, cafés and Jugendstil (Art Nouveau) architecture. The local community is fiercely proud of their town's unique heritage, and travellers often find that they're greeted in Lüderitz with a warm smile and a cold pint.

Information

Several banks on Bismarck St change cash and travellers cheques.

Extreme Communications I-café (☎ 204256; Waterfront Complex; per hr US\$3.50; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Email and internet access.

Lüderitzbucht Tours & Safaris (☎ 202719; ludsaf@ldz.namib.com; Bismarck St; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat, 8.30-10am Sun) Provides reliable tourist information, organises visitor permits for the Sperrgebiet, and sells curios, books, stamps and phonecards.

Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR); ☎ 202752; Schinz St; ☎ 7.30am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri) Provides helpful national park information.

Sights

Just about every view in Lüderitz reveals its German Imperial and Art Nouveau architectural heritage. Prominent buildings include the **colonial train station** (cnr Bahnhof & Bismarck St) and the **Goerke Haus** (Diamantberg St; admission US\$1.30; ☎ 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 4-5pm Sat & Sun).

The prominent 1912 Evangelical Lutheran church, **Felsenkirche** (☎ summer 5.30-7pm Mon-Sat, winter 4.30-6pm Mon-Sat), dominates Lüderitz from Diamond Hill. Designed by Albert Bause, who implemented the Victorian influences he'd seen in the Cape, the stained-glass panel over the altar was donated by Kaiser Wilhelm II. Go to see the late-afternoon sun shining through the extraordinary stained-glass work.

The **Lüderitz Museum** (☎ 202582; Diaz St; admission US\$1.30; ☎ 3.30-5pm Mon-Fri) details Lüderitz' diamond-mining heritage and other aspects of its natural and cultural history.

Tours

Atlantic Adventure Tours (☎ 204030; sedina@iafrica.com.na) Weather permitting, the schooner *Sedina* sails daily past the Cape fur-seal sanctuary at Diaz Point and the penguin colony on Halifax Island. The two- to three-hour trips cost US\$25; book at Lüderitzbucht Tours & Safaris.

Coastway Tours Lüderitz (☎ 202002; lewiswt@iway.na) Runs day tours (US\$80) to the 55m Bogenfels sea arch, Maerenthal Valley and the ghost town of Pomona in the Sperrgebiet. This tour requires at least four participants and must be booked at least one week in advance.

Ghost Town Tours (☎ 204033; kolmans@iafrica.com.na) This company operates day trips to Elizabeth Bay (US\$30), deep in the Sperrgebiet, and a full day taking in Kolmanskop, Elizabeth Bay and the Lüderitz Peninsula (US\$55). These trips run with a minimum of four people and permits must be issued at least a week in advance.

Sleeping

Shark Island Camp Site (camping for 4 people US\$12, 5-bed bungalows US\$70; (P)) This is a beautifully situated but aggravatingly windy locale. It's connected to the town by a causeway, but is no longer an island thanks to the recent harbour reclamation project that attached it to the mainland. Book through the NWR in Windhoek (p959) – if space is available, camp sites and bungalows can also be booked at the entrance.

Lüderitz Backpackers (☎ 202000; luederitzbackpackers@hotmail.com; 7 Schinz St; dm/d US\$10/25; (P)) In a historic colonial mansion, this friendly spot is the only true backpackers in town. The vibe is congenial and low-key, and friendly management will help sort out your onward travels.

Hansa Haus Guesthouse (☎ 203581; mcloud@afrikaonline.com.na; Klippenweg St; s/d with shared bathroom US\$30/35; (P)) This hilltop home boasts sea views and quiet surroundings. Rooms feature high ceilings and picture windows. Amenities include a TV lounge and communal kitchen.

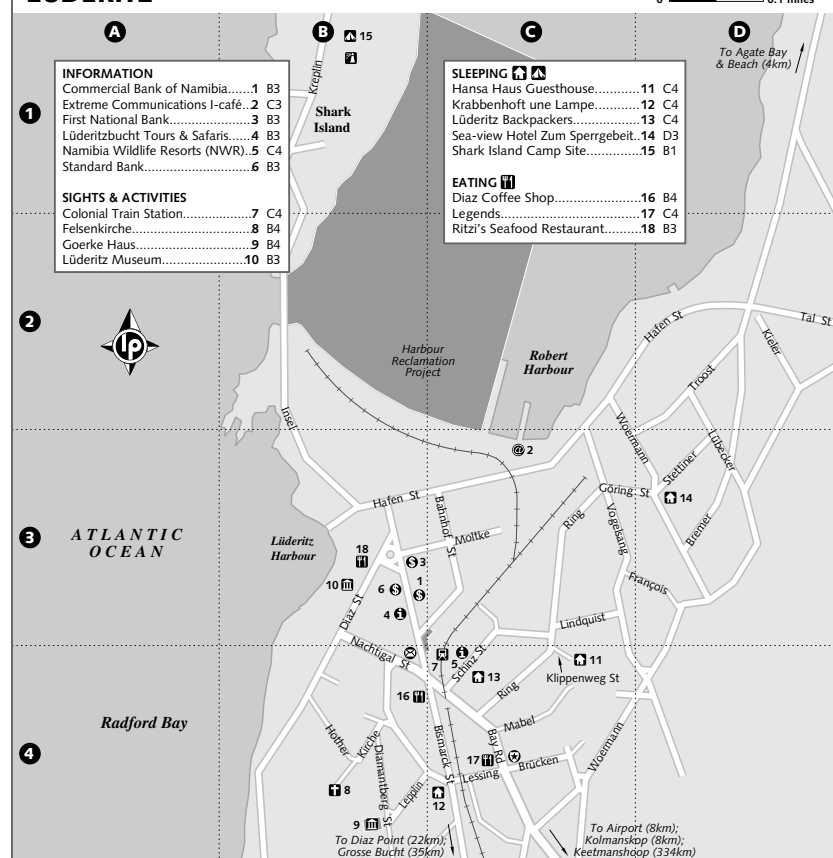
Krabbenhof une Lampe (☎ 202674; taurus@ldz.namib.com; 25 Bismarck St; s/d with shared bathroom US\$30/40, apt from US\$55; (P)) One of the more unusual accommodation options in town, the Krabbenhof is a converted carpet factory that now offers a number of basic rooms and self-catering apartments upstairs from a weaver.

Sea-view Hotel Zum Sperrgebiet (☎ 203411; michael@ldz.namib.com; cnr Woermann & Stettiner Sts; s/d/f US\$85/135/225; (P) (B) (E)) This modern hotel boasts a glassed-in indoor swimming pool, a sauna, sweeping terraces, harbour views and even an indoor banana tree – it's a natural favourite with German visitors.

Eating & Drinking

Diaz Coffee Shop (☎ 203147; cnr Bismarck & Nachtigal Sts; snacks & meals US\$1-4) This quaint and cosy coffee shop serves excellent toasties, light meals, coffee and cakes – its Sunday continental breakfast is popular amongst locals.

LÜDERITZ



Legends (☎ 203110; Bay Rd; mains US\$5-10) This understated restaurant has a relaxed atmosphere and serves up a healthy mix of seafood, grilled meats, pizzas and burgers as well as the odd vegetarian option or two.

Ritzi's Seafood Restaurant (☎ 202818; Diaz St; mains US\$6-12) This long-standing waterfront institution is the top spot in town for seafood. Not surprisingly, it's always fully booked, so reservations are essential. Imaginative dishes are concocted from fish, lobster, oysters, game meats and beef, but there's usually a few vegetarian options on the menu.

Getting There & Away

Air Namibia travels four times a week between Windhoek and Lüderitz, once weekly

to and from Swakopmund and twice weekly to and from Walvis Bay.

StarLine (☎ 312875) buses to Keetmanshoop (US\$9, five hours) leave from the historic train station at 12.30pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

NAMIBIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Namibia is well equipped for travellers of all price ranges – you can find backpacker accommodation in most places, camping areas throughout the country, midrange hotels and a healthy smattering of posh safari lodges. Quality is extremely high, and even budget

PRACTICALITIES

- Weights, measures and road distances use the metric system.
- Electricity is 220-240V AC, 50Hz and uses South African-style two- or three-round-pin plugs.
- For English-language news see www.namibianews.com.
- The Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) operates nine radio stations broadcasting on different wavebands in 12 languages.

lodges provide internet access, a pool, a bar and laundry facilities. Many hotels also serve meals and run travel centres.

ACTIVITIES

Namibia is an outdoor enthusiast's dream. There are endless opportunities for hiking and camping. Swakopmund (p964) is the adrenalin capital of the country with everything from skydiving to sandboarding.

BUSINESS HOURS

Normal business hours are from 8am to 1pm and 2.30pm to 5pm weekdays. In the winter, when it gets dark early, some shops open at 7.30am and close at around 4pm. Lunchtime closing is almost universal. On Saturday, most city and town shops open from 8am to 1pm.

Restaurant opening hours vary according to the type of establishment – as a rule cafés and cheap eats will be open all day long, closing in the early evening. More expensive restaurants will be open from around 10.30am to 11pm Monday to Saturday, usually with a break between lunch and dinner.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Theft isn't particularly rife, but take care walking alone at night, conceal your valuables in Windhoek or towns around the country, and don't leave anything in sight inside a vehicle. Take the same precautions at camp sites in towns – although there's no problem at camp sites in national parks (not from humans anyway; just watch out for the monkeys).

East of Lüderitz, do not enter the prohibited diamond area, mainly south of the road to Keetmanshoop; well-armed patrols can be overly zealous.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES**Namibian Embassies & Consulates**

Namibia has diplomatic representation in the following countries, among others:

- Angola** (☎ 39 54 83; Rua dos Coqueiros No 37, Luanda)
Botswana (☎ 397 2685; BCC Bldg, 1278 Lobatse Rd, PO Box 1586, Gaborone)
Canada (☎ 519-578-5932; 122 Avondale Av South, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 2C3)
France (☎ 01 44 17 3265; 80 Ave Foch; Square de l'Avenue Foch, Paris 75016)
Germany (☎ 49-30 254 0950; namibiaberlin@aol.com; Wichmannstrasse 5, Berlin 10787)
South Africa (☎ 012-481 9100; secretary@namibia.org.za; 197 Blackwood St, Arcadia, Pretoria)
UK (☎ 020-7636 6244; http://namibia.embassyhome.page.com; 6 Chandos St, London W1M 0LQ)
USA (☎ 202-986-0540; www.namibianembassyusa.org; 1605 New Hampshire Ave NW, Washington, DC 20009)
Zambia (☎ 260407/8; fax 263858; 30B Mutende Rd, Woodlands)
Zimbabwe (☎ 885841; 69 Borrowdale Rd, Harare)

Embassies & Consulates in Namibia

Countries with diplomatic representation in Windhoek include the following:

- Angola** (Map p962; ☎ 227535; fax 221498; Angola House, 3 Ausspann St, Ausspannplatz, Private Bag 12020; ☎ 9am-1pm)
Botswana (Map p960; ☎ 221941; fax 236034; 101 Nelson Mandela Dr, PO Box 20359; ☎ 8am-12.30pm)
European Union (Map p962; ☎ 220099; 4th fl, Sanlam Centre, 154 Independence Ave, PO Box 231; ☎ 9am-12.30pm)
France (Map p962; ☎ 229022; fax 231436; 1 Goethe St, PO Box 20484; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm)
Germany (Map p962; ☎ 223100; fax 222981; 6th fl, Sanlam Centre, 154 Independence Ave, PO Box 231; ☎ 9am-12.30pm)
Kenya (Map p962; ☎ 226836; fax 221409; Kenya House, Robert Mugabe Ave, PO Box 2889; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-5pm)
Malawi (☎ 221391; fax 227056; 56 Bismarck St, Windhoek West, PO Box 23547; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm)
South Africa (Map p960; ☎ 205 7111; fax 224140; RSA House, cnr Jan Jonker St & Nelson Mandela Dr, Klein Windhoek, PO Box 23100; ☎ 8.15am-12.15pm)
UK (Map p962; ☎ 223022; fax 228895; bhc@mweb.com.na; 116A Robert Mugabe Ave, PO Box 22202; ☎ 9am-noon)
USA (Map p962; ☎ 221601; fax 229792; www.usembassy.namibnet.com; 14 Lossen St, Ausspannplatz, Private Bag 12029; ☎ 8am-noon Mon, Wed & Fri)
Zambia (Map p962; ☎ 237610; fax 228162; cnr Sam Nujoma Dr & Mandume Ndemufayo Ave, PO Box 22882; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-4pm)

Zimbabwe (Map p962; ☎ 228134; fax 226859; Gamsberg Bldg, cnr Independence Ave & Grimm St, PO Box 23056; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-3pm)

HOLIDAYS

Resort areas are busiest over both Namibian and South African school holidays, which normally occur from mid-December to mid-January, around Easter, from late July to early August, and for two weeks in mid-October.

New Year's Day 1 January

Good Friday March or April

Easter Sunday March or April

Easter Monday March or April

Independence Day 21 March

Ascension Day April or May (40 days after Easter)

Workers' Day 1 May

Cassinga Day 4 May

Africa Day 25 May

Heroes' Day 26 August

Human Rights Day 10 December

Christmas Day 25 December

Family/Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET ACCESS

Both email and internet access are available at backpackers hostels, internet cafés and hotels in larger towns, and also at several tourist offices and remote lodges.

MAPS

The *Shell Roadmap – Namibia* is the best reference for remote routes and has an excellent Windhoek map. Shell also publishes the *Kaokoland-Kunene Region Tourist Map* (US\$3), depicting all routes and tracks in this area. It's available at bookshops and tourist offices.

MONEY

The Namibian dollar (N\$) equals 100 cents, and in Namibia it's pegged to the South African rand, which is also legal tender in Namibia, at a rate of 1:1. This can be confusing, given that there are three sets of coins and notes in use, all with different sizes: old South African, new South African and Namibian. Namibian dollar notes come in denominations of N\$10, N\$20, N\$50, N\$100 and N\$200, and coins in values of 5, 10, 20 and 50 cents, and N\$1 and N\$5.

POST

Overseas airmail post is normally faster than domestic post, and is limited only by the time it takes an article to reach Windhoek (which can be slow in the outer areas).

TELEPHONE

Namibian area dialling codes all have three digits that begin with '06'. When phoning from abroad, first dial the country code (☎ 264), followed by the area code without the leading zero.

Phonecards are sold at post offices and retail shops.

VISAS

No visas are required for visitors from Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Canada or the USA. Travellers receive entry for an initial 90 days (free).

Visa Extensions

Extensions on the initial 90-day visa are available from the **immigration office** (☎ 292 2111; mlusepani@mha.gov.na; cnr Kasino St & Independence Ave; ☎ 8am-1pm Mon-Fri) in Windhoek. It's usually free to extend your visa; however, you are at the mercy of the immigration official. Another way of extending your visa is to simply leave the country for a few days and then return.

Visas for Onward Travel

Visas for the following neighbouring countries can be obtained in Windhoek. See opposite for embassy and consulate information.

Angola Travellers must apply for a visa in their home country (usually limited to fly-in visas for arrival in Luanda) or attempt to secure an overland visa from the Angolan consulate in Oshakati, northern Namibia. Visas cost US\$75 for 30 days.

Botswana No visa is required by citizens of most Commonwealth countries (including Australia and the UK), EU countries (except Spain and Portugal), Israel, Norway, South Africa, Switzerland and the USA. On arrival you'll get a 30-day entrance stamp.

South Africa No visa is required by citizens of most Commonwealth countries (including Australia and the UK), most Western European countries, Japan and the USA; they'll be issued with a free entry permit on arrival, valid for a stay of up to 90 days. If you aren't entitled to an entry permit, you'll need to get a visa (also free) before you arrive.

Zambia Visas take one day to process and cost US\$60/95 for a single/double-entry visa, and US\$188 for a multiple-entry visa. Note that they're available at the border for considerably less (normally US\$25 for US citizens and UK£45 for British subjects).

Zimbabwe With a few exceptions, visas are required by nationals of all countries. They can be obtained at your point of entry and cost US\$30/45 for single-entry/double-entry visas. Multiple-entry visas (valid for six months) cost US\$55, but are only issued at Zimbabwean diplomatic missions.

TRANSPORT IN NAMIBIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air
Most international flights into Namibia land at Windhoek's **Chief Hosea Kutako International Airport** (☎ 061-299 6602; www.airports.com.na), 42km east of the capital city. Shorter-haul international flights may also use Windhoek's in-town **Eros Airport** (☎ 061-299 6500), although this airport mainly serves internal flights and light aircraft.

The main carrier is **Air Namibia** (www.airnamibia.com.na), which flies routes within southern Africa as well as some international flights to London and Frankfurt.

Land

To bring a foreign-registered vehicle into Namibia you must purchase a US\$10 road-use tax certificate at the border.

ANGOLA

There are three border crossings between Namibia and Angola, at Ruacana–Calueque (open 6pm to 10pm), Oshikango–Namacunda (8am to 6pm) and Nkurenkuru–Cuangar (the crossing at Rundu; open 7am to 5pm), but travellers need an Angolan visa permitting overland entry. These are best obtained at the Angolan consulate in Oshakati, as the embassy in Windhoek tends to only give visas for air travel into Luanda. At Ruacana Falls, you can briefly enter the border area without a visa; just sign in at the border post.

BOTSWANA

The Trans-Kalahari Hwy to Botswana crosses the border at Buitepos–Mamuno (open 8am to 1am). In the Caprivi Strip, you can cross the border into Botswana at Ngoma Bridge (8am to 6pm) or between Mahango and Mohebo (6am to 6pm). The border crossing between Mpalila Island and Kasane (7am to 12.30pm and 1.45pm to 4pm) exists mainly for guests of safari lodges on the island.

SOUTH AFRICA

The **Intercape Mainliner** (☎ 0861 287 287; www.intercape.co.za) service from Windhoek to Cape Town runs four times weekly. Travelling between Jo'burg and Windhoek involves a connection in Upington.

If you're driving, there are border crossings at Noordoewer, Vellorsdrif, Ariamsvlei and Klein Menasse–Aroab.

ZAMBIA

The only crossing between Namibia and Zambia is at Wenela, about 5km north of Katima Mulilo. On the Zambian side you can continue along the west bank of the Zambezi towards Mongu, or cross the Zambezi on the pontoon ferry (US\$10 per car, pedestrians ride free) and head east to Sesheke.

ZIMBABWE

There's no direct overland connection between Namibia and Zimbabwe. The most straightforward route is between Victoria Falls and the Caprivi Strip (via Botswana), which entails driving or hitching from the Namibian border at Ngoma Bridge through Chobe National Park (you won't be subject to Botswana national park fees unless you turn off onto the tourist route) and then to Kasane.

GETTING AROUND

Air
Air Namibia (www.airnamibia.com.na) has an extensive network of local flights operating out of **Eros Airport** (☎ 061-299 6500) in Windhoek. There are regular flights to Tsumeb, Rundu, Katima Mulilo, Lüderitz, Swakopmund and Oshakati/Ondangwa.

Car & Motorcycle

The easiest way to get around Namibia is by road, and an excellent system of sealed roads runs the length of the country from the South African border at Noordoewer to Ngoma Bridge on the Botswana border and Ruacana on the Angola border in the northwest. Similarly, sealed spur roads connect the main north–south routes to Buitepos, Lüderitz, Swakopmund and Walvis Bay. Elsewhere, towns and most sites of interest are accessible on good gravel roads. C-numbered highways are well maintained and passable to all vehicles, and D-numbered roads, although a bit rougher, are mostly (but not always) passable to 2WD vehicles. In the Kaokoveld, however, most D-numbered roads can only be negotiated with a 4WD.

For a compact car, the least-expensive hire companies charge US\$40 to US\$60 per day (the longer the hire period, the lower the daily rate) with unlimited kilometres. Hiring a 4WD vehicle opens up remote parts of the country,

but it can get expensive at an average of US\$80 per day. Most companies include insurance and unlimited kilometres in their standard rates, but some require a minimum rental period before they allow unlimited kilometres.

It's cheaper to hire a car in South Africa and drive it into Namibia, but you need permission from the rental agency and paperwork to cross the borders. Drivers entering Namibia in a foreign-registered vehicle must pay a N\$70 (US\$10) road tax at the border.

It's probably best to deal with one of the major car-rental companies following:

Avis (www.avis.com) Offices in Windhoek, Swakopmund, Tsumeb and Walvis Bay as well as Hosea Kutako airport.

Budget (www.budget.co.za) Another big agency with offices in Windhoek and Walvis Bay as well as Hosea Kutako airport.

Imperial (www.imperialcarrental.co.za) Offices in Windhoek, Swakopmund, Tsumeb, Lüderitz, Walvis Bay and at both Hosea Kutako and Eros airports.

Triple Three Car Hire (www.iiiml.com.na/333) A competitive local car-hire firm with offices in Swakopmund and Walvis Bay.

Hitching

Hitching is possible in Namibia, but it's illegal in national parks, and main highways see relatively little traffic. It's reasonably safe and fairly common, though it's still always a risk (see p1126). Truck drivers generally expect to be paid around US\$1.50 per 100km, so agree on a price before climbing in. Your best options for lifts are Windhoek backpackers lodges, where you can post notices about rides.

Local Transport

From Windhoek, **Intercape Mainliner** (Map p962; ☎ 061-227847; www.intercape.co.za) serves Swakopmund, Walvis Bay, Grootfontein, Rundu and Katima Mulilo, and also has international services. See p963 for fares.

Trans-Namib's **Star Line** (☎ 061-298 2030; www.transnamib.com.na) buses travel to Bethanie, Buitepos, Gobabis, Gochas, Grootfontein, Helmeringhausen, Henties Bay, Kamanjab, Khorixas, Lüderitz, Mariental, Opuwo, Oshakati, Outjo, Rundu, Walvis Bay and other destinations.

Fares on long-distance private minibuses, which depart when full, work out to US\$0.03 per kilometre (but they also may charge US\$1.80 per piece of luggage). Fares on minibuses generally work out to be cheaper than on buses, but minibuses are not nearly as comfortable.

Tours

Cardboard Box Travel Shop (☎ 061-256580; www.namibian.org; PO Box 5142, Windhoek) This friendly agency offers bookings (including last-minute options) for all budget safaris; lodge, safari, car hire and transport bookings; national parks bookings; good advice; and other travel services.

Chameleon Safaris (Map p962; ☎ /fax 061-247668; www.chameleonsafaris.com; 5-7 Voight St, PO Box 6017, Windhoek) This budget safari company is geared to backpackers and does a range of good-value safaris: six-day Damaraland/Skeleton Coast (US\$400); three-day Sossusvlei (US\$150); 18-day 4WD tour (US\$950); 14-day northern and southern highlights (US\$600); and seven-day northern or southern highlights (US\$350 each).

Crazy Kudu Safaris (☎ 061-257642; www.wilddog-safaris.com; PO Box 26188, Windhoek) One of Namibia's friendliest and most economical safari companies, Crazy Kudu does 10-day all-inclusive Namibia Explorer adventures through northern and central highlights (US\$440); a six-day northern highlights tour (US\$275); and a three-day Sossusvlei Express tour (US\$130), which may also be joined in Swakopmund. All departures are guaranteed. Crazy Kudu will also organise custom safaris, an Okavango Delta and Victoria Falls excursion, and Fish River Canyon or Kaokoveld extensions for the best possible price. Bookings for Crazy Kudu are typically made through your accommodation.

Muramba Bushman Trails (☎ 067-220659; bushman@natron.net; PO Box 689, Tsumeb) Owned by Reinhard Friedrich, this company provides a unique introduction to the Heikum San people.

Namib Sky (☎ 061-293233; fax 061-293241; namibsky@mweb.com.na; PO Box 5197, Windhoek) For those who dream of looming over the dunes in a balloon, this company offers Namib Desert balloon flights for US\$246 per person. The early-morning flight departs before sunrise, when not a breath of wind is stirring.

Wild Dog Safaris (☎ 061-257642; www.wilddog-safaris.com; PO Box 26188, Windhoek) This friendly operation runs seven-day northern or southern Namibia adventures (US\$340 each) and three-day Etosha or Sossusvlei circuits (US\$160 each, or US\$350 for both), as well as longer participation safaris and accommodated excursions. Bookings for Wild Dog Safaris are typically made through your accommodation.

Train

Trans-Namib Railways (☎ 061-298 2032; www.transnamib.com.na) connects most of the major towns, but trains are extremely slow – as one reader remarked, moving 'at the pace of an energetic donkey cart'. In addition, passenger and freight cars are mixed on the same train, and trains tend to stop at every post. As a result, rail travel isn't popular and services are rarely fully booked.

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