

Namibia

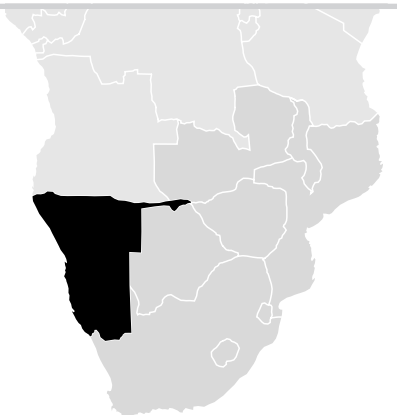
Wedged between the Kalahari and the South Atlantic, Namibia enjoys both vast potential and promise as one of the youngest countries in Africa. In addition to a striking diversity of cultures and national origins, Namibia is also a photographer's dream – it boasts wild seascapes, rugged mountains, lonely 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.

The Namib is one of the oldest and driest deserts in the world, and is the result of the Benguela Current sweeping north from Antarctica, which captures and condenses humid air that would otherwise be blown ashore. Its western strip is a sea of sand comprised mainly of apricot-coloured dunes interspersed with dry pans. However, the barren and inhospitable landscapes of the Namib are markedly different from those present in the Kalahari. Unlike the Namib, the Sahara and other 'true' deserts, the Kalahari is a semi-arid landscape that is covered with trees and crisscrossed by ephemeral rivers and fossil watercourses. It is one of the continent's most prominent geographical features, and stretches across parts of Congo, Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

FAST FACTS

- **Area:** 825,000 sq km
- **Capital:** Windhoek
- **Country code:** ☎ 264
- **Famous for:** Namib Desert, Kalahari, Etosha Pan
- **Languages:** English, Afrikaans, German, Oshivambo, Herero, Nama
- **Money:** Namibian dollar (N\$)
- **Phrase:** Howzit? (How are you?)
- **Population:** 1.83 million



HOW MUCH?

- **Dune surfing** US\$25
- **Foreign newspaper** US\$1.70
- **Night in a budget hotel** US\$12.50
- **Package of kudu biltong** US\$1
- **Traditional German dinner** US\$6

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** US\$0.75
- **1L of bottled water** US\$0.50-1
- **Bottle of beer** US\$1
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$5-10
- **Snack** US\$1-2

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Sossusvlei** (p371) Watch the sun rise from the tops of flaming red dunes on the edge of ephemeral salt pans.
- **Etosha National Park** (p332) Go on a self-drive safari in one of the continent's premier wildlife venues.
- **Swakopmund** (p355) Get your adrenaline fix at this popular extreme-sports capital of Namibia.
- **Fish River Canyon** (p385) Test your endurance on the five-day hike through one of the world's largest canyons.
- **Off the beaten track** (p354) Leave the sealed road along the Skeleton Coast, a desolate strip of fog-covered coastline.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Namibia's tourist highlight is the expansive sand sea of the **Namib** (see p373), and if you have only a few days to visit, this is where you'll want to focus. From **Sesriem** (p371), spend a day hiking through the dunes, or arrange for a scenic flyover from the beach town of **Swakopmund** (p355).
- **One Week** Combine a visit to the Namib with a safari through **Etosha National Park** (p332), one of the continent's most distinctive 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: take a tour of the **Namib** (p373), splurge on some

extreme sports in **Swakopmund** (p360), take a safari through **Etosha** (p332), hike the **Fish River Canyon** (p385) and go on an expedition through the northwest and along the **Skeleton Coast** (p354).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Namibia's climatic variations correspond roughly to its geographical subdivisions. In the arid Central Namib, 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 along the Okavango River, rainfall reaches over 600mm annually. The northern and interior regions experience the 'little rains' between October and December, while the main stormy period occurs from January to April.

Note that accommodation is frequently booked out in national parks and other tourist areas, especially during public holidays. The busiest times are consistently during the Namibian, South African (see p585) and European school holidays. See p742 for more on the climate in Southern Africa.

HISTORY

For information on the general history of Southern Africa, see p37.

The Scramble for Africa

The Germans, under chancellor Otto von Bismarck, were late entering the European scramble for Africa. Bismarck had always been against colonies; he considered them an expensive illusion, famously stating, 'My map of Africa is here in Europe. Here is Russia and here is France and here we are in the middle. That is my map of Africa.' But he was to be pushed into an ill-starred colonial venture by the actions of a Bremen merchant called Adolf Lüderitz.

Having already set up a trading station in Lagos in 1881, Lüderitz convinced the Nama chief, Joseph Fredericks, to sell Angra Pequena, where Lüderitz established his second station trading in the stinking guano of thousands of cormorants who nest along the coast. He then petitioned the German chancellor for protection. Bismarck, still trying to stay out of Africa, politely requested the British at Walvis Bay to say whether they had any interest in the matter but they never bothered to reply and in 1884 the newly named Lüderitz was officially declared part of the German Empire.

WHAT'S YOUR BUDGET?

If you're camping or staying in backpackers' hostels, cooking your own meals and hitching or using local minibuses, you'll get by on as little as US\$15 per day. A plausible midrange budget, which would include B&B or doubles in backpackers' accommodation, public transport and at least one restaurant meal daily, would be around US\$50 to US\$80 per person (if accommodation costs are shared between two people). In the upper range, accommodation at hotels, meals in restaurants and escorted tours will cost upwards of US\$300 per person per day.

To reach Namibia's most popular tourist sites, you'll have to take an organised tour or hire a vehicle (see p395). Car hire may be expensive for budget travellers, but if you can muster a group of four people and share costs, you can squeak by on an additional US\$20/50 per day for a 2WD/4WD vehicle, including petrol, tax, insurance and 200 free kilometres per day.

Initially, German interests were minimal, and between 1885 and 1890 the colonial administration amounted to three public administrators. Their interests were served largely through a colonial company (along the lines of the British East India Company in India prior to the Raj), but the organisation couldn't maintain law and order.

So in the 1880s, due to renewed fighting between the Nama and Herero, the German government dispatched Curt von François and 23 soldiers to restrict the supply of arms from British-administered Walvis Bay. This seemingly innocuous peacekeeping regiment slowly evolved into the more powerful Schutztruppe (Imperial Army), which constructed forts around the country to aid its efforts to put down opposition.

At this stage of its history, Namibia became a fully fledged protectorate, known as German South-West Africa. The first German farmers arrived in 1892 to take up expropriated land on the Central Plateau, and were soon followed by merchants and other settlers. In the late 1890s, the Germans, the Portuguese in Angola and the British in Bechuanaland agreed on Namibia's boundaries.

Colonial Atrocities

Once the Germans had completed their inventory of Namibia's natural resources, it is difficult to see how they could have avoided the stark picture that presented itself. Their new colony was a drought-afflicted land enveloped by desert, with a nonexistent transport network, highly restricted agricultural opportunities, unknown mineral resources and a sparse, well-armed indigenous population. It was hardly the stuff of empirical dreams. In fact, the only option that readily presented itself was to follow the example of

the Herero and pursue a system of seminomadic pastoralism. The problem with this was that all the best land fell within the territories of either the Herero or the Nama and they weren't about to give it up without a fight.

In 1904, the paramount chief of the Herero invited his Nama, Baster and Owambo counterparts to join forces with him to resist the growing German presence. This was an unlikely alliance between traditional enemies, especially considering that warring between the Herero and Nama had been a catalyst for increased involvement by the colonial powers. Driven almost all the way back to Windhoek, the German Schutztruppe brought in reinforcements and under the ruthless hand of General von Trotha went out in force to meet the Herero forces at their Waterberg camp.

On 11 August 1904 the Battle of Waterberg commenced. The general's plan was to surround the Herero position and with their massively superior firepower 'annihilate these masses with a simultaneous blow'. Although the casualties on the day were fairly light, Von Trotha ordered the pursuit and extermination of some 65,000 survivors over the following four weeks, only desisting when his troops began to die from exhaustion and typhoid, which they contracted from polluted water holes littered with human bodies. In all, some 80% of the entire Herero population was wiped out.

At this stage, the Nama, under Hendrik Witbooi, took up the resistance cause and launched a large-scale rebellion, but after their defeat at the Battle of Vaalgras on 29 October 1905, the 68-year-old Witbooi died of his wounds. Still, it was to be another three years before the Germans had fully defeated the remaining guerrilla forces in the south.

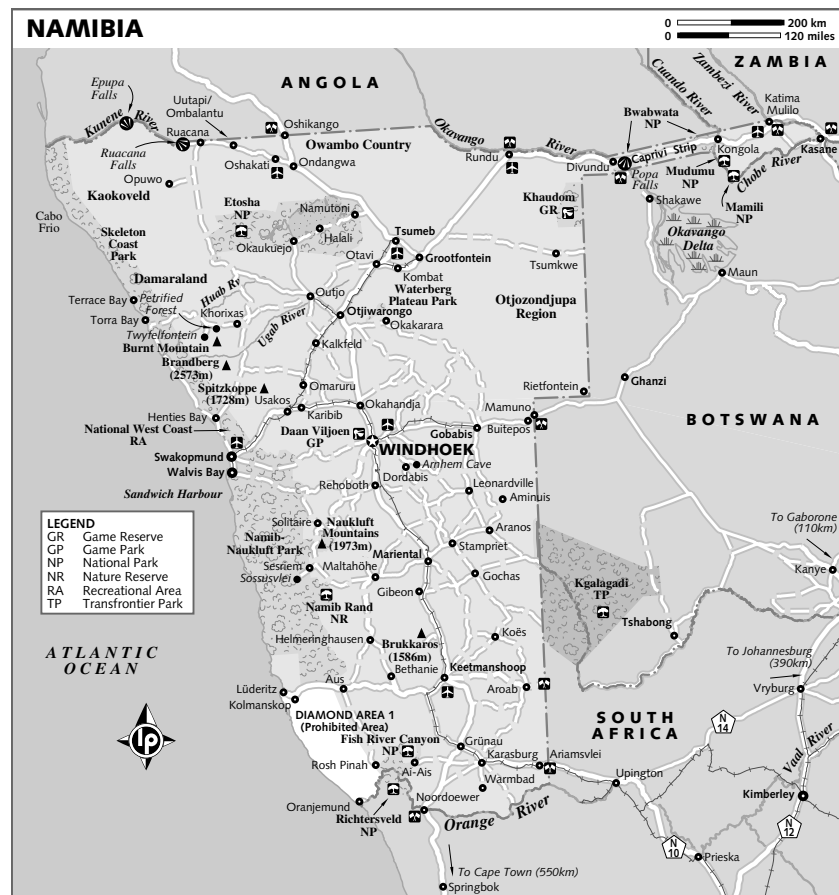
Reaping the Whirlwind

Meanwhile, in the south of the country, diamonds had been discovered at Grasplatz, east of Lüderitz, by a South African labourer, Zacharias Lewala. Despite the assessment of De Beers that the find probably wouldn't amount to much, prospectors flooded in to stake their claims. By 1910, the German authorities had branded the entire area between Lüderitz and the Orange River a *Sperrgebiet* (closed area), threw out the prospectors and granted exclusive rights to Deutsche Diamanten Gesellschaft.

But for all the devastation visited upon the local populace Germany was never to benefit from the diamond riches they found. The advent of WWI in 1914 was to mark the end

of German colonial rule in Southwest Africa. By this time, though, the Germans had all but succeeded in devastating the Herero tribal structures and taken over all Khoikhoi and Herero lands. The more fortunate Owambo, in the north, managed to avoid German conquest, but were subsequently overrun during WWI by Portuguese forces fighting on the side of the Allies.

In 1914, at the beginning of WWI, Britain pressured South Africa into invading Namibia. Under the command of Prime Minister Louis Botha and General Jan Smuts, the South Africans pushed northwards, forcing the outnumbered Schutztruppe to retreat. In May 1915, the Germans faced their final defeat at Khorab, near Tsumeb, and a week



later a South African administration was set up in Windhoek.

By 1920, many German farms had been sold to Afrikaans-speaking settlers and the German diamond-mining interests in the south were handed over to the South Africa-based Consolidated Diamond Mines (CDM), which retains the concession rights to the present day.

South African Occupation

Under the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, Germany was required to renounce all its colonial claims, and in 1921 the League of Nations granted South Africa a formal mandate to administer Namibia as part of the Union. After a brief rebellion in 1924, the Basters at Rehoboth, who were descendants of liaisons between the Cape Colony Dutch and indigenuous African women, were granted some measure of autonomy, and the following year the territorial constitution was amended to permit South Africa to set up a territorial legislature.

The mandate was renewed by the UN following WWII. However, South Africa was more interested in annexing Southwest Africa as a full province in the Union and decided to scrap the terms of the mandate and rewrite the constitution. In response, the International Court of Justice determined that South Africa had overstepped its boundaries and the UN established the Committee on South West Africa to enforce the original terms of the mandate. In 1956, the UN decided that South African control should be terminated.

Undeterred, the South African government tightened its grip on the territory, and in 1949 granted the white population parliamentary representation in Pretoria. The bulk of Namibia's viable farmland was parcelled into some 6000 farms for white settlers, while other ethnic groups were relegated to newly demarcated 'tribal homelands'. The official intent was ostensibly to 'channel economic development into predominantly poor rural areas', but it was all too obvious that it was, in fact, simply a convenient way of retaining the majority of the country for white settlement and ranching.

As a result, a prominent line of demarcation appeared between the predominantly white ranching lands in the central and southern parts of the country, and the poorer but

better-watered tribal areas to the north. Perhaps the only positive result of this effective imposition of tribal boundaries was the prevention of territorial disputes between previously mobile groups now forced to live under the same political entity. This arrangement was retained until Namibian independence in 1990, and to some extent continues up to the present day.

Swapo

Throughout the 1950s, despite mounting pressure from the UN, South Africa refused to release its grip on Namibia. This intransigence was based on its fears of having yet another antagonistic government on its doorstep and of losing the income that it derived from the mining operations there.

Forced labour had been the lot of most Namibians since German annexation, and was one of the main factors that led to mass demonstrations and the increasingly nationalist sentiments during the late 1950s. Among the parties was the Owamboland People's Congress, founded in Cape Town under the leadership of Samuel Daniel Shafishuna Nujoma and Adimba Herman Toivo ja Toivo.

In 1959, the party's name was changed to the Owamboland People's Organisation and Nujoma took the issue of South African occupation to the UN in New York. By 1960, his party had gathered the support of several others and they eventually coalesced into the South West African People's Organisation (Swapo) with its headquarters located in Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). Troops were sent to Egypt for military training and the organisation prepared for war.

In 1966, Swapo took the issue of South African occupation to the International Court of Justice. The court upheld South Africa's right to govern South West Africa, but the UN General Assembly voted to terminate South Africa's mandate and replace it with a Council for South West Africa (renamed the Commission for Namibia in 1973) to administer the territory.

In response, on 26 August 1966 (now called Heroes' Day), Swapo launched its campaign of guerrilla warfare at Ongulumbashe in the Owambo region of northern Namibia. The next year, one of Swapo's founders, Toivo ja Toivo, was convicted of terrorism and imprisoned in South Africa, where he would remain

until 1984; Nujoma stayed in Tanzania. In 1972, the UN finally declared the South African occupation of Southwest Africa officially illegal and called for a withdrawal, proclaiming Swapo the legitimate representative of the Namibian people.

In 1975 the independence of Angola finally gave Swapo a safe base just across the border from the action in Namibia, which enabled them to step up their guerrilla campaign. South Africa responded by invading Angola in support of the opposition party Unita (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). The attempt failed, and by March 1976 the troops had been withdrawn, although incursions continued well into the 1980s.

In the end, however, it was not the activities of Swapo alone or international sanctions that forced the South Africans to the negotiating table. People were growing tired of the war and the economy was suffering badly. South Africa's internal problems also had a significant effect. By 1985, the war was costing some R480 million (around US\$250 million) per year and conscription was widespread. Mineral exports, which once provided around 88% of the country's GDP, had plummeted to just 27% by 1984.

Independence

In December 1988 a deal was finally struck between Cuba, Angola, South Africa and Swapo that provided for the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and South African troops from Namibia. It also stipulated that the transition to Namibian independence would formally begin on 1 April 1989, and would be followed by UN-monitored elections held in November 1989 on the basis of universal suffrage. Although minor score-settling and unrest among some Swapo troops threatened to derail the whole process, the plan went ahead and in September, Samuel Nujoma returned from his 30-year exile. In the elections, Swapo garnered two-thirds of the votes but the numbers were insufficient to give the party the sole mandate to write the new constitution, an outcome that went some way to allaying fears that Namibia's minority groups would be excluded from the democratic process.

Following negotiations between the Constituent Assembly (which was soon to become the National Assembly) and international

advisers including the USA, France, Germany and the USSR, a constitution was drafted. The new constitution established a multiparty system and an impressive bill of rights, covering provisions for protection of the environment, the rights of families and children, freedom of religion, speech and the press, and a host of other matters. It also limited the presidential executive to two five-year terms. The new constitution was adopted in February 1990 and independence was granted a month later, with Sam Nujoma being sworn in as Namibia's first president.

In 1999, Swapo won 76.8% of the vote, although concerns arose when President Nujoma amended the constitution to allow himself a rather unconstitutional third presidential term.

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.

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

On a national level, Namibia is still struggling to attain a cohesive identity. History weighs heavy on generations who grew up during the struggle for independence. As a result, some formidable tensions endure between various social and racial groups. Although most travellers will be greeted with great warmth and curiosity, some people may experience unpleasant racism or apparently unwarranted hostility (this is not confined to black/white relations but can affect travellers of all ethnicities as Namibia's ethnic groups are extremely varied in colour).

Acquainting yourself with Namibia's complex and often turbulent past will hopefully alert you to potentially difficult or awkward situations. Taking care to follow basic etiquette such as dressing appropriately (see p310), greeting people warmly or learning a few words of the local languages will also stand you in good stead.

Socially, Namibians enjoy a rock-solid sense of community thanks to the clan-based system. Members of your clan are people you can turn to in times of need. Conversely, if someone from your clan is in trouble you are obligated to help; this may mean providing

food for someone who is hungry, care for someone who is sick, or even the adoption of an orphaned child in some cases. This inclusivity also extends to others – any traveller who is willing is sure to be asked to participate in a spontaneous game of football or a family meal.

Such an all-embracing social structure also means that the family nucleus is less important. Indeed many Namibian ‘families’ will include innumerable aunts and uncles, some of whom might even be referred to as mother or father. Likewise, cousins and siblings are interchangeable and in some rural areas men may have dozens of children, some of whom they might not even recognise. In fact, it is this fluid system that has enabled families to deal in some way with the devastation wreaked by the AIDS crisis.

Daily Life

On the whole Namibians are conservative and god-fearing people (90% of the country is Christian, with about 10% of people following indigenous belief systems). Education is technically compulsory for all children (the literacy rate is 84%) and the motivation to get a good education is high. Since independence the government has built some 832 classrooms and 700 literacy centres around the country and now at least 80% of the population is receiving a basic primary-school education. But getting an education is by no means easy for everyone and for families living in remote rural areas it often means that very young children must be sent to schools far away, where they board in hostels.

Most Namibians still live in homesteads in rural areas and lead typical village lives. Villages tend to be family- and clan-based and are presided over by an elected *elenga* (headman). The *elenga* is responsible for local affairs, everything from settling disputes to determining how communal lands are managed. He in turn reports to a senior headman, who represents a larger district comprised of several dozen villages. This system functions alongside Namibia’s regional government bodies and enables traditional lifestyles to flourish side by side with the country’s modern civic system.

Modesty in dress and manner are important in Namibia. T-shirts and shorts are unheard of and while foreign men may *just* be able to pull it off, you may feel like the only person at the wedding who came in casual dress! Modest dress is required of women, but probably to an even greater degree. Keeping up appearances is also all-important and extends from dressing well, behaving modestly, performing religious and social duties to fulfilling all essential family obligations.

A Woman’s Place

Namibian society is unquestionably patriarchal, although women have traditionally worked hard to contribute to the family income. As head of the family, men are expected to project their authority through material wealth, charisma or often just their own physical size. Status – according to profession, wealth and family – is also important. One of the key obstacles to the AIDS outreach programme was convincing men with local

status to get tested, the objection being that they were ‘uncomfortable with youngsters or junior officers coming to them and telling them to go for testing’. Being disrespectful to or undermining one’s elders or social and professional superiors is a heinous social crime.

In a culture where male power is mythologised, it’s unsurprising that women’s rights lag behind. It’s not uncommon for men to have multiple partners and, until recently, in cases where women and their children were abandoned by their husbands there was very little course for redress. Part of the problem was that Namibia inherited the rather backward Roman-Dutch law that governed the country during apartheid. However, since independence the Namibian government has been committed to improving women’s rights with bills like the Married Persons Equality Act (1996), which equalised property rights and gave women equal rights of custody over their children.

However, the government acknowledges that achieving gender equality is more about changing grassroots attitudes than passing laws, as a survey into domestic violence in 2000 revealed. Of the women interviewed for the survey in Lüderitz, Karasburg and Keetmanshoop, 25% said they had been abused or raped by their husbands. Endemic social problems, such as poverty, alcohol abuse and the feeling of powerlessness engendered by long-term unemployment, only serve to increase feelings of disaffection and fuel the flames of abuse. And although the government passed one of the most comprehensive rape acts in the world in the same year, it remains to be seen how effectively the laws are enforced.

Population

Namibia’s population in 2006 was estimated to be 2.04 million. This figure takes into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS, which became the leading cause of death in Namibia in 1996. With approximately two people per square kilometre Namibia has one of Africa’s lowest population densities, with an annual population growth rate of over 2.3% according to the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2006.

The population of Namibia comprises 11 major ethnic groups. The majority of people come from the Owambo tribe (50%), with the

other ethnic groups making up a relatively small percentage of the population: Kavango (9%), Herero/Himba (7%), Damara (7%), Caprivian (4%), Nama (5%), Afrikaner and German (6%), Baster (6.5%), San (1%) and Tswana (0.5%).

Although this ethnic diversity is overlain with Western cultural influences, since independence there have been efforts to emphasise the history and traditions of each group. About 75% of the people inhabit rural areas, but urban drift in search of work or higher wages has resulted in increased homelessness, unemployment and crime in the capital and other towns.

Like nearly all other African nations Namibia is struggling to contain its HIV/AIDS epidemic, which is impacting heavily on average life expectancy and population-growth rates. According to the WHO, life expectancy in Namibia has dropped to a shocking 54 years, although some sources place it as low as 46. In 2003 it was estimated that about 21% of the population were HIV-positive and by 2021 it is estimated that up to a third of Namibia’s children under the age of 15 could be orphaned.

RELIGION

About 80% to 90% of Namibians profess to being Christians, and German Lutheranism is the dominant sect in most of the country. As a result of early missionary activity and Portuguese influence from Angola, there is also a substantial Roman Catholic population, mainly in the central and northern areas.

Most non-Christian Namibians – mainly Himba, San and some Herero – live in the north and continue to follow animist traditions. In general, their beliefs are characterised by ancestor-veneration, and most practitioners believe that deceased ancestors continue to interact with the living and serve as messengers between their descendants and the gods.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Namibia is still in the process of developing a literary tradition, but 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 carvings, basketware and tapestry, along with simple but resourcefully designed and produced toys, clothing and household implements.

MOVERS & SHAKERS: SAMUEL NUJOMA

Samuel Daniel Shafiishuna Nujoma was born on 12 May 1929 in the small village of Ongandjera in Owambo. His first rise to power was in the 1950s when he assumed control of the Owamboland People’s Organisation (OPO), which aimed to end the South African occupation of Southwest Africa, and to resist the implementation of apartheid. In 1960, OPO developed into the South West African People’s Organisation (Swapo), and began its multidecade campaign of guerrilla warfare under the helm of Nujoma and other Namibia patriots. During the struggle, Nujoma took the combat name ‘Shafiishuna’, which means lightning in the Owambo language.

Following independence, Nujoma was unanimously declared president after Swapo’s victory in a UN-supervised election in 1989, and was sworn in by UN Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar on 21 March 1990. Nujom was re-elected in 1994 and in 1999 after changing the constitution of Namibia to allow a third five-year term. In 2005, he stepped down despite having an approval rating of over 75%, and hand-picked his successor, the current Namibian president Hifikepunye Pohamba. Nujoma has stepped out of the limelight, and is studying geology at the University of Windhoek in the hopes of improving Namibia’s lucrative mining sector.

Music

Namibia's earliest musicians were the San, whose music probably emulated the sounds made by their animal neighbours and was sung to accompany dances and storytelling. The early Nama, who had a more developed musical technique, used drums, flutes and basic stringed instruments, also to accompany dances. Some of these techniques were later adapted by Bantu peoples, who added marimbas, gourd rattles and animal-horn trumpets to the range. A prominent European contribution to Namibian music is the choir; the German colonists also introduced their traditional 'oom-pah-pah' bands, which feature mainly at German festivals.

For more information on music in Southern Africa, see p52.

Architecture

The most obvious architectural contribution in Namibia was made by the German colonists, who attempted to re-create late 19th-century Germany along the desert coast. In deference to the warmer climate, however, they added features such as shaded verandas to provide a cool outdoor living space. The best examples can be seen in Lüderitz, Swakopmund and Windhoek. The most memorable structures were built in Wilhelminischer Stil and Jugendstil (Art Nouveau) styles.

Painting & Sculpture

Most of Namibia's renowned modern painters and photographers are of European origin; they mainly interpret the country's colourful landscapes, bewitching light, native wildlife and diverse peoples. Artists include François de Mecker, Axel Eriksson, Fritz Krampe and Adolph Jentsch, as well as colonial landscape artists Carl Ossman and Ernst Vollbeh. Non-European rural Namibians, on the other hand, have generally concentrated on wood and stone sculpture. Township art, which develops sober themes in an expressive, colourful and generally light-hearted manner, first appeared in the townships of South Africa during the apartheid years. Names to watch out for include Tembo Masala and Joseph Madisia, among others.

Dance

Each Namibian group has its own dances, but common threads run through most of them. San dancing tends to mimic the animals

they hunt. The Himba *ondjongo* dance is performed only by cattle owners, who dance to demonstrate the care and ownership of their animals. Herero dances feature the *outjina* for women and *otjipirangi* for men, in which dancers strap planks to one foot in order to deliver a hollow, rhythmic percussion. In the Kavango and Caprivi regions, traditional dancing involves rhythmic and exaggerated stamping and gyrating, accompanied by repetitive chanting and a pervasive drumbeat.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

The Namib is one of the oldest and driest deserts in the world, and is the result of Benguela Current sweeping north from Antarctica, which captures and condenses humid air that would otherwise be blown ashore. Its western strip is a sea of sand comprised mainly of apricot-coloured dunes interspersed with dry pans, of which Sossusvlei is the best known. In fact, the oft-photographed dunes near Sossusvlei, which tower 300m above the underlying strata, are regarded as among the tallest in the world.

The barren and inhospitable landscapes of the Namib are markedly different from those of the Kalahari. Unlike the Namib, the Sahara and other 'true' deserts, the Kalahari is a semi-arid landscape that is covered with trees and crisscrossed by ephemeral rivers and fossil watercourses. It is one of the continent's most prominent geographical features, and stretches across parts of Congo, Angola, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

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 Massif may catch sight of the elusive Hartmann's mountain zebra, and along the desert coast live jackass penguins, flamingoes, Cape fur seals and the rare *strandwulf* (brown hyena).

As Namibia is mostly arid, its typical vegetation features mainly scrubby bushveld and succulents such as *Euphorbia*. Some unique

floral oddities include the kokerboom (quiver tree; see the boxed text, p378), which is a species of aloe, and the bizarre *Welwitschia mirabilis* (the welwitschia plant). Along the coastal plain around Swakopmund lie the world's most extensive and diverse lichen fields; in dry weather, they appear to be merely plant skeletons, but with the addition of water they burst into colourful bloom.

National Parks

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 dunefields, desert plains, wild mountains and unique flora. There are also the smaller reserves of the Caprivi region, the renowned Skeleton Coast Park and the awe-inspiring Fish River Canyon, which ranks among Africa's most spectacular sights.

In addition to national parks, Namibia has a network of conservancies, which are individual farms supporting either tourist lodges or hunting opportunities. Examples of these are the 200,000-hectare Namib-Rand Nature Reserve and the 102,000-hectare Gondwana Cañon Park.

Access to most wildlife-oriented parks is limited to enclosed vehicles only; no bicycles or motorcycles are allowed. For some parks, such as Etosha and Namib-Naukluft, a 2WD is sufficient, but you need a 4WD in Mambili National Park and the Khaudom Game Reserve.

Facilities in Namibian national parks are operated by the semiprivate **Namibia Wildlife Resorts** (NWR; ☎ 061-2857000; reservations@mweb.com.na; Independence Ave, Windhoek; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri). When booking park camp sites or accommodation by post, phone, fax or email, include your passport number; the number of people in your group (including the ages of any children); your full address, telephone/fax number or email address; the type of accommodation required; and dates of arrival and departure (including alternative dates). Bookings may be made up to 12 months in advance. 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 for national parks. 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). Note that pets aren't permitted in any wildlife-oriented park.

Environmental Issues

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, their activities in and around 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.

In the wilder areas of Damaraland and Kaokoveld, which aren't officially protected, the desert lion is now extinct, but small numbers of desert elephants and black rhinos still roam freely. Although the white rhino was wiped out in Namibia prior to 1900, some have now been reintroduced into Waterberg and Etosha parks and are doing relatively well. Namibia was a pioneer in using dehorning to protect its rhino, but happily, recent declines in the international market for rhino horn have made such measures less relevant than in the past. The nongovernmental **Save the Rhino Trust** (☎ 064-403829; www.rhino-trust.org.na) and the **Desert Research Foundation of Namibia** (☎ 061-229855; drfn@drfn.org.na) both promote conservation education.

Although Namibia's lion population fluctuates greatly from season to season, the lions in Etosha National Park are free of both feline immunodeficiency virus (a feline form of HIV) and canine distemper virus (which has killed 30% of the lions in some Tanzanian parks).

Other major environmental issues involve projects designed to provide water and power resources for the country's growing industrial and human needs. It appears that the Kunene River dam project has now been shelved, but Namibia continues to examine the possibilities of bringing water to populated areas from the country's five perennial rivers.

See p26 for information on travelling responsibly in Southern Africa.

FOOD & DRINK

Food

Outside Windhoek and Swakopmund, you'll find few gourmet pretences. Most hotels serve three meals, but menus are usually meat-oriented and are rarely very creative. For a treat, try one of the German-style *konditorei* (pastry shops) in Windhoek or Swakopmund, or one of the pleasant cafés that exist in most towns.

Small hotels normally provide a cooked breakfast with cereal and toast, and big hotels may include a buffet breakfast. In addition to bread, cereals, fruit, yogurt and cold meat, they may offer kippers (smoked kingclip) and mielie meal (porridge, also called *pap*). Cooked breakfasts always include eggs, bacon and boerewors (farmers' sausages), as well as steaks and often even curried kidneys.

For lunch, many people go for takeaway snacks, which may include fish and chips, meat pies and sandwiches in *brötchen* (little bread rolls). Evening meals normally feature meat, and restaurants serve typically high-quality cuts. Fish (normally kingclip) is best eaten in Swakopmund or Lüderitz, where it's probably fresh. Chicken is often prepared with a fiery piri-piri sauce.

Drinks

NONALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Tap water is generally safe to drink, but in some locations it may be salty or otherwise unappealing, especially in desert areas and around Windhoek and Etosha. Packaged fruit juices provide an alternative. Every café and takeaway serves coffee and tea, as well as the strong herbal tea known as rooibos (red bush).

ALCOHOLIC DRINKS

Namibia's dry heat means big sales for Namibia Breweries. The most popular drop is Windhoek Lager, a light and refreshing

lager-style beer, but the brewery also produces Tafel Lager, the stronger and more bitter Windhoek Export and the slightly rough Windhoek Special. Windhoek Light (a tasty beer with just 2% alcohol) and the similarly light Das Pilsner are both drunk as soft drinks. The same brewery also produces a 7% stout known as Urbock.

Namibia Breweries' main competitor is Hansa, in Swakopmund, which produces both standard and export-strength beer. South African beers such as Lion, Castle and Black Label are widely available and you'll also find a range of refreshing spirit coolers and typically excellent and great-value South African wines. The best place to buy beer, wine or spirits is a *drankwinkel* (bottle store), but small convenience shops may also sell beer and coolers.

In the rural areas – especially the Owambo regions – people socialise in tiny makeshift bars, enjoying such traditional local brews as *oshikundu* (millet beer), *mataku* (watermelon wine), *tambo* (fermented millet and sugar), *mushokolo* (a beer made from small seeds), and *walende*, which is distilled from the makalani palm and tastes similar to vodka. Apart from *walende*, all of these rural confections are brewed in the morning and drunk the same day, and they're all dirt cheap – around US\$0.20 per glass.

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 city streets, you will see Owambo, Kavango, Herero, Damara and Caprivian peoples, together with Nama, San, coloureds 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 its surprisingly staid and orderly capital city.

HISTORY

Windhoek has only existed for just over a century. The modern name Windhoek, or 'windy corner', was corrupted from the original 'Winterhoek' during the German colonial occupation. At that time, it became the headquarters for the German Schutztruppe, which was ostensibly charged with brokering peace between the warring Herero and Nama. For over 10 years around the turn of the 20th century, Windhoek served as the administrative capital of German South-West Africa.

ORIENTATION

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

Maps

Free city maps are available from the tourist office on Post St Mall. You can buy topographic sheets (US\$3 for maps and US\$2.50 for photocopies) for much of Namibia from the office of the **Surveyor General** (☎ 245055; fax 290 2050; cnr Robert Mugabe Ave & Lazarett St).

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Windhoek Book Den (Map p318; ☎ 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 & Fire Brigade (☎ 211111)

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

Police (☎ 228328)

Police – national (☎ 10111)

Internet Access

Most backpackers' hostels also offer internet and email services. You can also try **Club Internet** (Map p318; Bülow St; per hr US\$3; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Fri, 9am–2pm Sat), near John Meinert St.

Laundry

Tauben Glen Laundrette (Map p316; ☎ 252115) At Village Sq.

Medical Services

Rhino Park Private Hospital (Map p316; ☎ 225434; Sauer St) Provides excellent care and service, but patients must pay up-front.

Windhoek State Hospital (Map p316; ☎ 303 9111) An option for those who are short of cash but have time to wait; the hospital is located off Harvey Rd.

Money

Major banks and bureaux de change are concentrated around Independence Ave, and all will change foreign currency and travellers cheques and give credit-card advances. First National Bank's BOB and other ATM systems handle Visa, MasterCard and home ATM transactions.

Post & Telephone

The modern main post office on Independence Ave (Map p318) can readily handle overseas post. It also has telephone boxes in the lobby, and next door is the Telecommunications Office, where you can make international calls and send or receive faxes.

Tourist Information

Namibia Tourism (Map p318; ☎ 220640, 284 2360; www.namibiaturism.com.au; Independence Ave, Private Bag 13346) The national tourist office; can provide information from all over the country.

Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR; Map p318; ☎ 285 7000; reservations@mweb.com.na; cnr John Meinert & Moltke Sts) In the Oode Voorpost. Books national park accommodation and hikes.

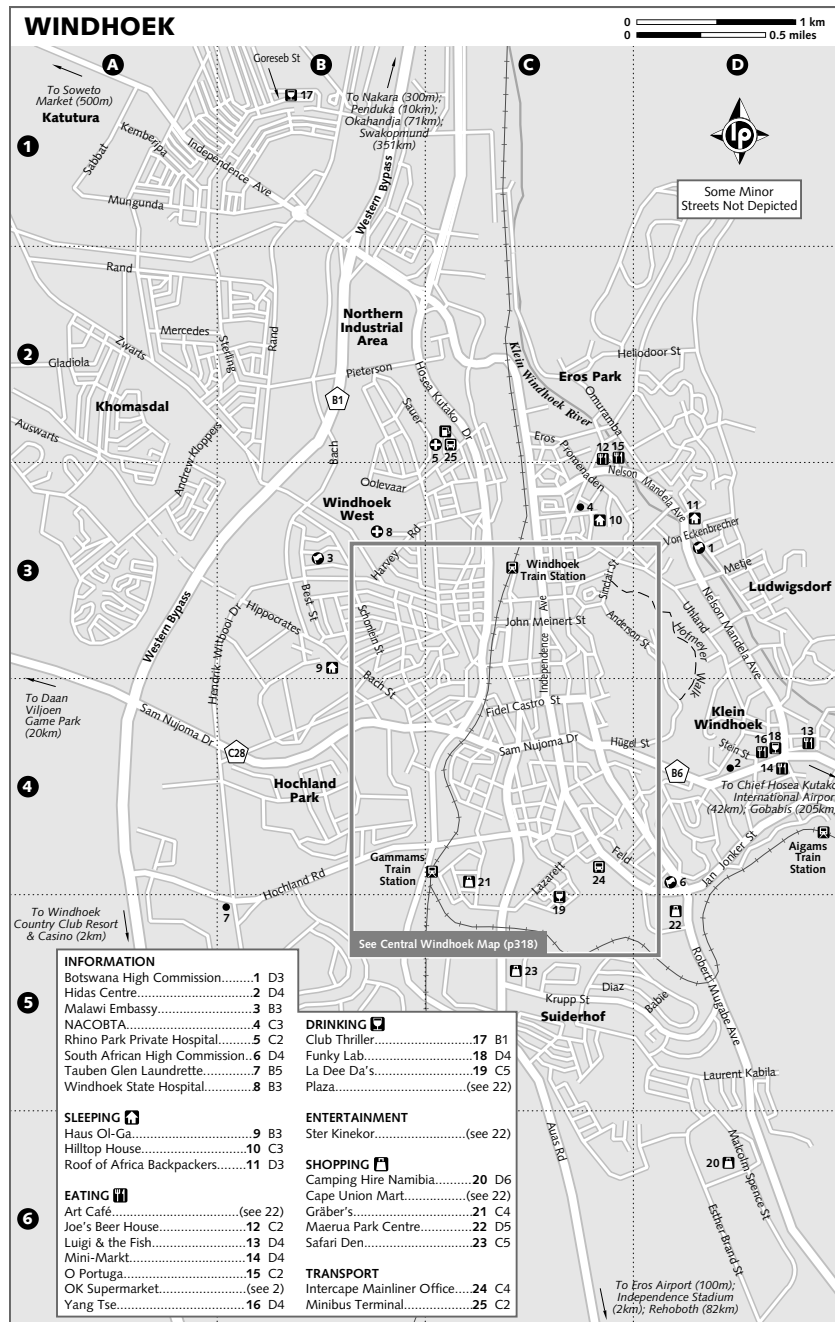
Windhoek Information & Publicity Office (Map p318; ☎ 290 2058; fax 290 2050; Post St Mall) This friendly office answers questions and distributes local publications including *What's On in Windhoek*.

Travel Agencies

Cardboard Box Travel Shop (Map p318; ☎ 256580) Attached to the backpackers' hostel of the same name, 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, and be wary of newspaper sellers, who may shove the paper in your face as a distracting ruse. Don't use bum bags or carry swanky camera or video totes, and never leave anything of value visible in a vehicle. Parts of Katutura and other northwestern suburbs, where boredom and unemployment are rife, should be avoided unless you have



a local contact and/or a specific reason to go there.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Hofmeyer Walk

This walking track (Map p316) through Klein Windhoek Valley starts from either Sinclair St or Uhlund St and heads south through the bushland to finish at the point where Orban St becomes Anderson St. It takes about an hour and affords a panoramic view of the city, as well as a look at the *Aloe littoralis* aloes, which characterise the hillside vegetation. Hikers have recently been robbed along this route, so don't go alone and avoid carrying valuables.

Christuskirche

One of Windhoek's most recognisable landmarks, the 1907 Christuskirche (Map p318) stands at the top of Fidel Castro St. This unusual building, constructed of local sandstone, was designed by Gottlieb Redecker in neogothic and Art Nouveau styles. To see the interior, pick up the key during business hours from the church office on Fidel Castro St.

Alte Feste & the Owela Museum

The whitewashed ramparts of the Alte Feste (National Museum of Namibia; Map p318), Windhoek's oldest surviving building, dates back to 1890–92. It originally served as the headquarters of the Schutztruppe, which arrived in 1889, but now houses the Historical Section of the **State Museum** (Map p318; ☎ 293 4437; Robert Mugabe Ave; admission by donation; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 3–6pm Sat & Sun). The other half of the State Museum, known as the **Owela Museum** (Map p318; ☎ 293 4358; 4 Lüderitz St; admission US\$1.20; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 3–6pm Sat & Sun), features exhibits that focus on Namibia's natural and anthropological history.

National Art Gallery

This **gallery** (Map p318; ☎ /fax 240930; cnr Robert Mugabe Ave & John Meinert St; admission free; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9–11am Sat) contains a permanent collection of works that reflects Namibia's historical and natural scene. It also hosts visiting exhibitions.

Tintenpalast

Now the Parliament building, the Tintenpalast (Map p318) was designed by architect Gottlieb Redecker and built in 1912–13 as

the administrative headquarters for German South-West Africa. The name, 'ink palace', honours the ink spent on the typically bureaucratic paperwork it generated. It has also served as the nerve centre for all subsequent governments, including the present one. On the lawn is Windhoek's first **post-independence monument**, which depicts Herero chief Hosea Kutako, known for his vociferous opposition to South African rule. On weekdays – except when the assembly is in session – you can reserve a place on a 45-minute tour by calling ☎ 288 5111.

Other Historic Buildings

Near the corner of Lüderitz and Park Streets, take a look at the **Old Magistrates' Court** (Map p318). It was built from 1897 to 1898 as quarters for Carl Ludwig, the state architect, and now houses the **Namibia Conservatorium**. Down Park St towards Robert Mugabe Ave lies South-West Africa House, now called the **State House** (Map p318). The site was once graced by the residence of the German colonial governor, but it was razed in 1958 and replaced by the present building. After independence, it became the official residence of the Namibian president.

Robert Mugabe Ave affords good city views and colonial architecture. The **Kaiserliche Realschule** (Map p318), Windhoek's first German primary school, dates back to 1907–08. The curious turret with wooden slats, which was part of the original building, was designed to provide ventilation. The **Old Supreme Court** (Map p318; Obergericht; cnr Korner St & Robert Mugabe Ave) is a gabled brick structure which dates back to 1908.

Further south is the **Turnhalle** (Map p318; cnr Bahnhof St & Robert Mugabe Ave), designed by Otto Busch and built in 1909 as a gymnasium. On 1 September 1975, the first Constitutional Conference on Independence for Southwest Africa (subsequently known as the Turnhalle Conference) was held here. In the 1980s it hosted political summits and debates, which later resulted in Namibian independence.

The classic 1902 **Oode Voorpost** (Map p318; cnr John Meinert & Moltke Sts) originally held the colonial surveyors' offices, where government maps were stored in fireproof archives. It was restored in 1988 and now houses a portion of the Ministry of Finance.

Southward along Independence Ave are three colonial buildings designed by architect

CENTRAL WINDHOEK

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German Embassy.....	5	C3
Kenyan Embassy.....	6	C1
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Malawian Embassy.....	8	B3
Ministry of Home Affairs.....	9	C2
Namibia Tourism.....	10	C2
Namibia Wildlife Resorts.....	11	C3
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Telecommunications Office.....	13	C2
US Embassy.....	14	C4
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INFORMATION

4

5

6

Willi Sander. The southernmost building was built in 1902 as the Kronprinz Hotel. In 1920, Heinrich Gathemann bought it and converted it into a private business, to adjoin **Gathemann House** (Map p318) next door, which he had built in 1913. The northernmost building is the **Erkrath building**, which dates from 1910.

Train Station & Trans-Namib Transport Museum

Windhoek's Cape Dutch-style train station dates from 1912, and near the entrance sits the German steam locomotive *Poor Old Joe*, shipped to Swakopmund in 1899 and reassembled for the run to Windhoek. The small but worthwhile **Trans-Namib Transport Museum** (Map p318; ☎ 298 2186; admission US\$0.70; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), upstairs in the station, gives the history of Namibian transport, particularly railroads.

Post St Mall & Meteorite Exhibit

The busy heart of the Windhoek shopping district is the bizarrely colourful Post St Mall, and its odd architecture that could have been part of the film *Dick Tracy*. It's lined with vendors selling curios, artwork, clothing and other tourist items, and in the centre is a prominent display of 33 meteorites from the Gibeon me-

teor shower, which deposited at least 21 tonnes of mostly ferrous extraterrestrial boulders around Gibeon in southern Namibia.

Katutura

The lively black township of Katutura (Map p316) is relatively safe by day if you stick to the northern areas or find a local who can act as a guide. If you want to visit, Outside Adventures (p398) runs day trips, guided by a Katutura resident. A taxi from Windhoek centre to Katutura costs US\$1.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Windhoek's annual cultural bash is September's **/Ae//Gams Festival**, which replaces the former Mbapira/Enjando Street Festival; it features colourful gatherings of dancers, musicians and people in ethnic dress. True to its partially Teutonic background, Windhoek also stages its own **Oktoberfest** in late October. Similarly, the German-style **Windhoek Karnival** (or WIKA) is held in late April and features a week of events.

SLEEPING Budget

Puccini House (Map p318; ☎ 236355; puccini@mweb.com.na; 4 Puccini St; camping per person US\$3, dm US\$6,

KATUTURA – A PERMANENT PLACE?

In 1912, during the days of the South African mandate – and apartheid – the Windhoek Town Council set aside two 'locations', which were open to settlement by black Africans who were working in the city: the Main Location, which was west of the centre, and Klein Windhoek, to the east. The following year, people were forcibly relocated to these areas, which effectively became communal areas of haphazard settlement. In the early 1930s, however, streets were laid out in the Main Location and the area was divided into regions set aside for each ethnic group. Each subdivision within these regions was referred to by the name of its assigned ethnic group (eg Herero, Nama, Owambo, Damara), followed by a soulless numerical reference.

In the 1950s, the Windhoek municipal council – with encouragement from the South African government (which regarded Namibia as a province of South Africa) – decided to 'take back' Klein Windhoek and consolidate all 'location' residents into a single settlement northwest of the main city. However, there was strong opposition to the move, and in early December 1959, a group of Herero women launched a protest march and boycott against the city government. On 10 December, unrest escalated into a confrontation with the police, resulting in 11 deaths and 44 serious injuries. Frightened, the roughly 4000 residents of the Main Location submitted and moved to the new settlement, ultimately named 'Katutura', which is Herero for 'we have no permanent place' – but it can also be translated as 'the place we do not want to settle'.

In modern, independent Namibia, Katutura is a vibrant Windhoek suburb – Namibia's Soweto – where poverty and affluence brush elbows. Sadly and inexplicably, Katutura's once-lively independence murals along Independence Ave have been removed, but the town council has now extended municipal water, power and telephone services to most areas of Katutura and has also established the colourful and perpetually busy Soweto Market.

s/d 10/18; (P) (Q) (R) The closest backpacker option to the city centre is located near the Wernhill Park Centre, and is characterised by its relaxed atmosphere and friendly staff.

our pick **Cardboard Box Backpackers** (Map p318; ☎ 228994; www.namibian.org; 15 Johann Albrecht St; camping per site US\$4, dm US\$6, d US\$18; (P) (Q) (R)) This lively, colourful and perennial shoestringers' favourite is conveniently located just 15 minutes by foot from the city centre. 'The Box' runs an excellent travel centre that gives unbiased information about Namibian tour operators, and can help sort out all your future travel plans. Backpacker amenities include use of the cooking facilities and access to the swimming pool and the lively bar and restaurant.

Chameleon City Lodge (Map p318; ☎ 244347; www.chameleonbackpackers.com; 5 Voight St; camping per site US\$4, dm US\$6, d from US\$18; (P) (Q) (R)) 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.

Tramper's Haven (Map p318; ☎ 223669; 78 Bülow St; dm US\$10, s/d US\$15/20; (P)) A sparkling, Christian-oriented backpackers' lodge that has kitchen facilities and plenty of showers.

Chameleon Guesthouse (Map p318; ☎ 247668; www.chameleonbackpackers.com; 22 Wagner St; d incl breakfast & shared bathroom US\$20, d incl breakfast \$25; (P) (Q) (R)) Occupying a quiet spot in Windhoek West, the older sister to the Chameleon City Lodge is a budget-oriented guesthouse that is home to a couple of friendly meerkats.

Rivendell Guest House (Map p318; ☎ 250006; rivendell@toothfairy.com; d/tr US\$20/25, self-catering flat US\$45; (P) (Q) (R)) Provides quiet, comfortable accommodation within easy walking distance of the centre – you can choose between doubles and self-catering apartments, but all have use of the swimming pool and communal kitchen.

Midrange & Top End

All rates include breakfast.

our pick **Roof of Africa Backpackers** (Map p316; ☎ 254708; www.roofofafrica.com; 124-126 Nelson Mandela Ave; camping per site US\$5, dm US\$8, s/d US\$35/40, d with air-con US\$50; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) 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. Recent renovations have made

the property feel distinctly upmarket, though guests remain laid-back travellers looking for a quiet retreat from the city. Amenities include a communal kitchen, swimming pool, internet, TV lounge and a swish bar.

Haus Ol-Ga (Map p316; ☎ 235853; 91 Bach St; s/d US\$25/35; (P)) This German-oriented place is named after the owners, Gesa Oldach and Erno Gauerke. The establishment enjoys a nice, quiet garden atmosphere in Windhoek West.

Hotel-Pension Handke (Map p318; ☎ 234904; pensionhandke@iafrica.com.na; 3 Rossini St; s/d US\$40/60; (P)) Run by a caring mother-and-son duo, this homely option in Windhoek West is more reminiscent of staying with family friends than it is a guesthouse.

Hotel-Pension Steiner (Map p318; ☎ 222898; steiner@iafrica.com.na; 11 Wecke St; s/d from US\$45/70; (P) (Q) (R)) This recently renovated hotel features well-equipped rooms with modern amenities that overlook a thatched bar and swimming pool.

Villa Verdi (Map p318; ☎ 221994; villav@mweb.com.na; 4 Verdi St; s/d US\$70/115; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) This utterly unique Mediterranean–African hybrid features whimsically decorated rooms complete with original paintings and artsy finishing. Amenities include a pool, a dining room and a conference centre where you can send faxes and emails.

Hilltop House (Map p316; ☎ 249116; hilltop@iafrica.com.na; 12 Lessing St; s/d US\$85/135; (P) (Q) (R)) Featuring individually decorated rooms, this six-room guesthouse oozes personality.

Hotel Heinitzburg (Map p318; ☎ 249597; heinitz@mweb.com.na; 22 Heinitzburg St; s/d from US\$130/200; (P) (Q) (R)) Located inside Heinitzburg Castle, this is Windhoek's most royal B&B option, and probably one of the best and most personable upmarket accommodations.

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

Kalahari Sands Hotel & Casino (Map p318; ☎ 22230; Gustav Voigts Centre, 129 Independence Ave; s/d from US\$150/185; (P) (Q) (R) (S)) This high-rise hotel in the heart of the city primarily appeals to business travellers with its international four-star standards.

EATING Budget

King Pies (Map p318; ☎ 248978, Levinson Arcade; pies US\$1-2) If you're looking for a quick bite, this popular Namibian institution serves up a variety of filled meat and vegetable pies.

Steenbras (Map p318; ☎ 231445; Bahnhof St; light meals US\$2-4) Near Independence Ave, this is one of Windhoek's best takeaways, serving memorable fish, chicken burgers and spicy chips.

Sardinia's (Map p318; ☎ 225600; 39 Independence Ave; dishes US\$2-5) This rather loud and boisterous place is good for pizza and standard Italian fare, as well as great coffee and gelato.

Art Café (Map p316; ☎ 255020; Maerua Park Centre; US\$2-5) This fashionable spot specialises in breakfast, sweet and savoury crepes and light lunches – with excellent results.

Yang Tse (Map p316; ☎ 234779; /Ae//Gams Shopping Centre, 351 Sam Nujoma Dr; mains US\$3-6) This locally popular cheap Chinese joint is a good choice, especially if you're just coming back from (or heading out to) a long stint of bush cooking.

Midrange & Top End

O Portuga (Map p316; ☎ 272900, 151 Nelson Mandela Ave; mains US\$4-8) The best place in town for genuine Portuguese and Angolan dishes, including numerous seafood options. There is also a good selection of wines.

Joe's Beer House (Map p316; ☎ 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 p316; ☎ 256399; 320 Sam Nujoma Dr; meals 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 p318; ☎ 248022; Independence Ave; mains US\$7-10; ☎ 6-10pm) Here you can sample wonderful North and West African cuisine, including Algerian, Senegalese, Ivorian, Cameroonian and Nigerian dishes.

Gathemann's (Map p318; ☎ 223853; 179 Independence Ave; mains US\$7-12) Located in the prominent colonial building, Gathemann House, overlooking Independence Ave, this splash-out spot serves gourmet German and Continental food; it's a good choice for a gateaux and pastry on the sundeck.

Homestead (Map p318; ☎ 221958; 53 Feld St; meals US\$8-15) Arguably Windhoek's best restaurant, it features a range of starters, salads, pasta, vegetarian dishes, fresh fish, beef and chicken dishes, as well as oryx, crocodile, fondues and a hunters' grill featuring zebra.

Self-Catering

The big names are Pick & Pay in the Wernhill Park Centre and Checkers in the Gustav Voigts Centre. The cheapest supermarket is the crowded Shoprite on lower Independence Ave. The Mini-Markt in Klein Windhoek is larger than it sounds and is open from 7am to midnight daily. The well-stocked OK supermarket at Hidas Centre is the best place for foreign and ethnic ingredients.

DRINKING

Chez Ntemba (Map p318; 154 Uhland St; admission Thu & Sun US\$1.25, Wed, Fri & Sat US\$3.50; ☎ 9pm-5am Wed-Sun) Music from across the continent is played here – Angolan, Zambian, Congolese and South African tunes all in the same night.

Club Thriller (Map p318; Samuel Shikongo St, Katutura; admission US\$3) Lies in a rough area, but beyond the weapons search at the door, the music is Western and African and the atmosphere upbeat and relatively secure.

Funky Lab (Map p316; /Ae//Gams Centre; ☎ 4pm-late Sun-Thu, 2pm-late Fri & Sat) This very popular (and very blue) club is one of Windhoek's hottest night-time dancing spots, especially if you're craving a little disco in your life.

Jazz Bar (Map p318; Shinz St 4; ☎ 6pm-late Tue-Sat) This chilled-out club and cigar bar provides a leisurely respite for the more sophisticated crowd.

La Dee Da's (Map p316; ☎ 0812 434432, Ferry St, Southern Industrial Area; admission before/after midnight US\$2.50/3.50; ☎ 10.30pm-4am Thu-Sat) La De Da's boasts Namibia's largest national flag; here you can dance to Angolan *kizomba*, hip-hop, rave, traditional African, rock and commercial pop. Near Patterson.

Plaza (Map p316; ☎ 0812 560780; Maerua Park Centre; ☎ 5pm-late) This relaxed and pleasant gay-friendly venue is the right choice if you like to listen to your music at levels below ear-shattering.

ENTERTAINMENT

Whether you're in the mood for a night out at the theatre or a Hollywood screening, Windhoek has just the ticket for you.

National Theatre of Namibia (Map p318; ☎ 237 966; 12 John Meinert St, ntn@iafrica.com.na) The national theatre stages infrequent theatre presentations; for information see the Friday edition of the *Namibian*.

Ster Kinekor (Map p316; ☎ 249267; Maerua Park Centre, off Robert Mugabe Ave) This place shows recent films and has half-price admission on Tuesday.

Warehouse Theatre (Map p318; ☎ 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.

Windhoek Conservatorium (Map p318; ☎ 293 3111; Peter Müller St) The conservatorium occasionally holds classical concerts.

SHOPPING

Handicrafts

Namibia Crafts Centre (Map p318; ☎ 222236; 40 Tal St; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) This craft centre is an outlet for heaps of wonderful Namibian inspiration, including leather work, basketry, pottery, jewellery, needlework, hand-painted textiles and other material arts. Information about the artist and the origin of each piece is documented.

House of Gems (Map p318; ☎ 225202; scrap@iafrica.com.na; 131 Stübel St) This is the most reputable shop in Windhoek for buying raw minerals and gemstones.

Penduka (☎ 257210; penduka@namibnet.com) The names means 'wake up'. Penduka operates a nonprofit women's needlework project at Goreangab Dam, northwest of the centre. You can purchase needlework, baskets, carvings and fabric creations for fair prices and you can be assured that all proceeds go to the producers. To be picked up from town call ☎ 081-129 4116.

Camping Gear

Try **Camping Hire Namibia** (Map p316; ☎ /fax 252995; http://natron.net/tour/camping/hiree.html; 78 Malcolm Spence St, Olympia) to hire camping gear, but phone first. **Cymot Greensport** (Map p318; ☎ 234131; 60 Mandume Ndemufayo Ave) is good for quality camping, hiking, cycling or vehicle outfitting equipment, as is **Cape Union Mart** (Map p316; Maerua Park Centre). Gear for 4WD expeditions is sold at **Safari Den** (Map p316; ☎ 231931; 20 Bessemer St); alternatively, try **Gräber's** (Map p316; ☎ 222732; Bohr St) in the Southern Industrial Area.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Chief Hosea Kutako International Airport, 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 services to/from Maun, Botswana, and Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. For more information, see p393.

Eros Airport, immediately south of the city centre, serves most domestic flights into and out of Windhoek. Air Namibia 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).

Airlines with flights into and out of Windhoek include the following:

Air Namibia (code SW; ☎ 299 6333; www.airnamibia.com)

British Airways (code BA; ☎ 248528; www.ba.com)

Lufthansa Airlines (code LH; ☎ 226662; www.lufthansa.com)

South African Airways (code SA; ☎ 237670; www.flysaa.com)

Bus

From the main bus station, at the corner of Fidel Castro and Rev Michael Scott Sts, the Intercap Mainliner runs on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday to and from Cape Town (US\$45, 19½ hours) and Johannesburg (US\$58, 24½ hours, with a change in Upington). There are also daily services to Swakopmund (US\$14, 4¼ hours); and Monday and Friday departures to Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe (US\$52, 19¼), via Okahandja, Otjiwarongo, Grootfontein, Rundu and Katima Mulilo.

Local combis (minibuses) leave when full from the Rhino Park petrol station and can get you to most urban centres in Namibia: Gobabis (US\$5, 2½ hours), Buitepos (US\$7, five hours), Swakopmund (US\$7, four hours), Walvis Bay (US\$7.50, 4½ hours), Rehoboth (US\$2.50, 1½ hours), Mariental (US\$6, three hours), Keetmanshoop (US\$8, six hours), Lüderitz (US\$13, 10 hours), Otjiwarongo (US\$7, three hours), Outjo (US\$7.50, four hours), Grootfontein (US\$8, seven hours), Tsumeb (US\$8,

seven hours), Oshakati (US\$9, 11 hours), Ruacana (US\$15, 15 hours), Rundu (US\$10.50, 10 hours), Divundu (US\$12, 12 hours) and Katima Mulilo (US\$14, 15½ hours).

Car & Motorcycle

Windhoek is literally the crossroads of Namibia – the point where the main north-south route (the B1) and east-west routes (B2 and B6) cross – and all approaches to the city are extremely scenic, passing through beautiful desert hills. Roads are clearly signposted and those travelling between northern and southern Namibia can avoid the city centre by taking the Western Bypass.

Hitching

Due to its location and traffic, hitching to or from Windhoek is easier than anywhere else in Namibia.

Train

The station has a **booking office** (☎ 7.30am-4pm Mon-Fri); note that from 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. Travel times and Friday to Sunday business-class fares from Windhoek are: Rehoboth (US\$4.30, 2¼ hours), Mariental (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 train 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.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

To 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; they also meet international flights. Alternatively, try the **Marenko Shuttle** (☎ 226331)

or **VIP Shuttle** (☎ 0812 563657), which charges 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 from the main bus stations or by radio dispatch, fares are either metered or are calculated on a per-kilometre basis, but you may be able to negotiate a set fare per journey. Plan on spending US\$3 to US\$3.50 to anywhere around the city centre. Try **Crown Radio Taxis** (☎ 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 US\$2.50, per vehicle US\$2.50; ☎ day visitors sunrise-6pm) is situated in the Khomas Hochland about 18km west of Windhoek. Because there are no dangerous animals, hikers can wander freely through lovely desertlike hills and valleys. You'll almost certainly see gemsboks, kudus, mountain zebras, springboks, hartebeests, elands and up to 200 bird species.

The 3km **Wag-n-Bietjie Trail** follows a dry riverbed from near the park office to Stengel Dam. A 9km circuit, the **Roobos Trail** crosses hills and ridges and affords great views back to Windhoek in the distance. The 34km **Sweet-Thorn Trail** circuits the empty eastern reaches of the reserve. One group of three to 12 people is permitted on this trail each day for US\$8 per person, including accommodation in a shelter halfway along. Advance bookings through NWR are required.

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

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.

DORDABIS

📞 062

The lonely ranching area around Dordabis is the heart of Namibia's karakul country, and supports several sheep farms and weaveries. At the **Farm Ibenstein Weavery** (Map p325; 📞 573524; 🕒 8am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), located 4km down the C15 from Dordabis, you can learn about spinning, dyeing and weaving, as well as purchase hand-woven rugs and carpets. You can also try the **Dorka Teppiche Weavery** (Map p325), which produces some of the finest original rugs and weavings in the country and progressive marble and soapstone sculpture. The weavery is located in the grounds of the Eningu Clay House Lodge (below).

Sleeping

Holiday Farm Scheidthof (Map p325; 📞 573584; discovaf@africa.com.na; camping per person US\$5, r per person incl breakfast US\$45; 📍) This lovely 7400-hectare farm offers a full complement of activities for the visitor, but the highlights are a 32km hiking trail and two 4WD tracks (which may also be used for hiking). Turn south on the M51, east of the international airport, then east on the DR1506. The farm is 6km down this road.

Eningu Clay House Lodge (Map p325; 📞 226979; logufa@mweb.com.na; Peperkorrel Farm; s/d per person with half-board US\$65/115; 📍) Yes, the name sounds a lot like the title of a children's book and appropriately, this place is a bit of a fantasy. It was painstakingly designed and constructed by Volker and Stephanie Hümmer, whose efforts with sun-dried adobe have resulted in an appealing African-Amerindian architectural cross. To get to the lodge, follow the D1458 for 63km southeast of Chief Hosea Kutako International Airport and then turn west on the D1471; travel for another kilometre to the Eningu gate.

Getting There & Away

To reach Dordabis, head east from Windhoek on the B6 and turn right onto the C23, 20km east of town; the town centre is 66km down this road. At 7.30am on Friday, Star Line runs a bus from Windhoek to Dordabis (US\$5); the bus returns at 4.45pm the same day.

ARNHEM CAVE

At 4.5km, Arnhem Cave is the longest cave system in Namibia. It was formed in a layer of

limestone and dolomite, sandwiched between quartzite and shale, in the rippled Arnhem Hills synclines and anticlines (folds of stratified rock). The cave was discovered in 1930 by farmer DN Bekker and, shortly thereafter, mining operations began extracting the deposits of bat guano, which were used as fertilizer.

Guided tours cost US\$8, plus US\$3.50 to hire helmets and torches. The route dives into darkness, beyond the reach of sunlight. Because it's dry, there are few stalagmites or stalactites, but it's possible you could see up to six bat species. It's also inhabited by a variety of insects, worms, shrews and shrimps. The grand finale is the indescribable first view of the blue-cast natural light as you emerge from the depths.

Note that it gets extremely dusty, so wear old clothing and avoid wearing contact lenses. Tours must be booked in advance through Arnhem Cave Guest House.

Sleeping

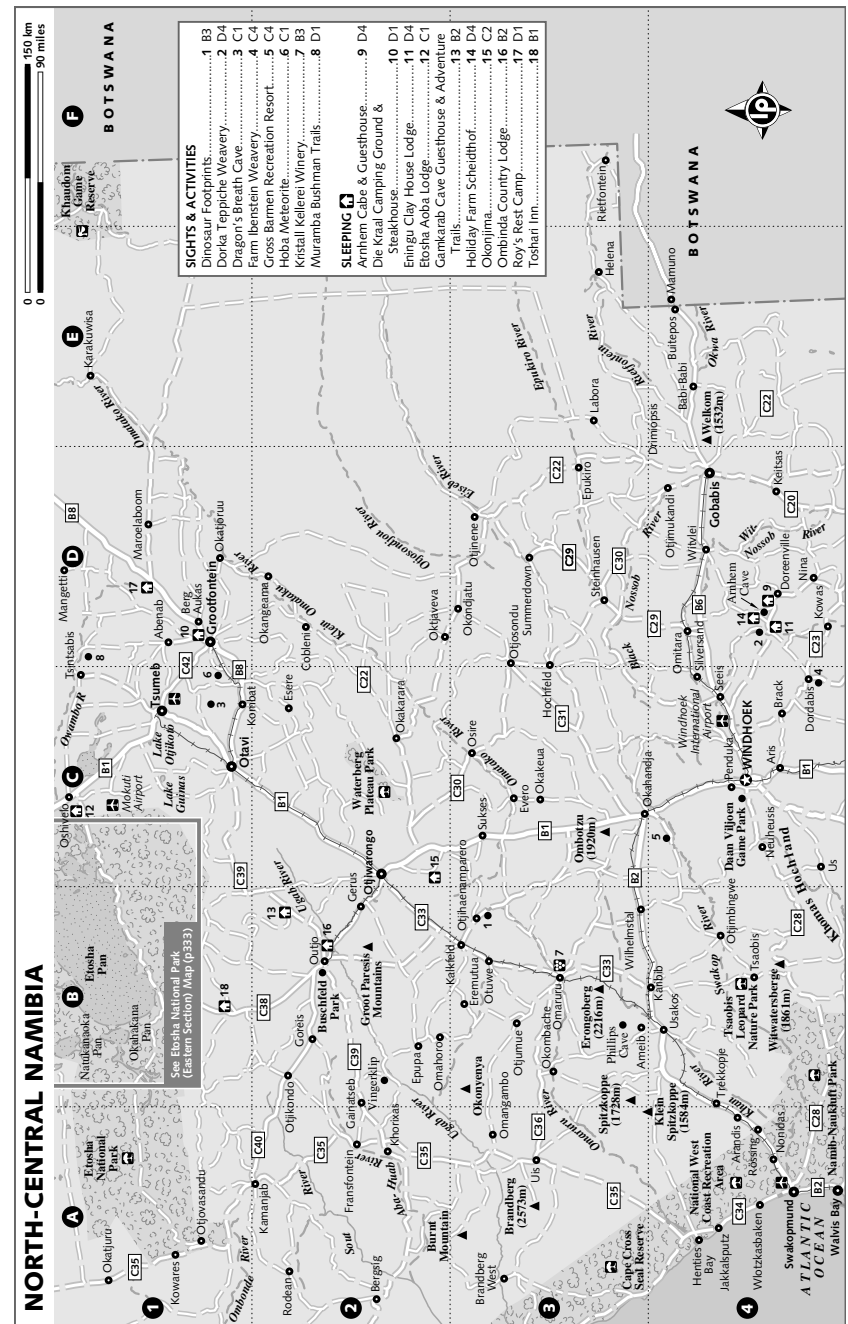
Arnhem Cave Guest House (Map p325; 📞 581885; arnhem@mweb.com.na; camping per person US\$7, d self-catering chalets US\$35, s/d with half board US\$40/65; 📍) This pleasant place offers an excellent overnight getaway from Windhoek, and lies within an hour's walk of Arnhem Cave, on the same farm.

Getting There & Away

The cave is on the private farm of Mr J Bekker. To get there, turn south 3km east of Chief Hosea Kutako International Airport on the D1458. After 66km, turn northeast on the D1506 and continue for 11km to the T-junction, where you turn south on the D1808. The farm is 6km down this road.

NORTH-CENTRAL NAMIBIA

The tourist trail in North-Central Namibia leads directly to Etosha National Park, one of the world's pre-eminent wildlife areas. Unlike most safari parks in Africa, roads inside Etosha are 2WD-accessible and open to private vehicles. This of course means that if you've been fortunate enough to rent your own vehicle, you're in for one of the most memorable safaris of your life. Anyone call tell their friends and



family back home how quickly their guide spotted a leopard in a tree, but how many people can say they drove on the edges of a salt pan while spotting elephant herds in the distance?

OKAHANDJA

☎ 062

Okahandja, the Herero administrative centre, is best-known for its two immense **craft markets** – one near the junction of the B1 and B2, the other about 1km out on the B1 towards Windhoek. At the southern end of Church St is **Friedenskirche**, the Rhenish mission church, which was consecrated in 1876. Both in the churchyard and over the road are the **graves** of several historical figures, including those of Herero leader Willem Maherero, Nama leader Jan Jonker Afrikaner and Hosea Kutako, the ‘father of Namibian independence’. Okahandja’s big events are **Maherero Day** in August and the **gathering** of the Green Flag Herero people in June.

Okahandja Rest Camp (☎ 504086; camping per site US\$9, d bungalows with shared bathroom US\$12, d bungalows US\$22; **P**) is a secure camp located just outside of town that offers modern ablution blocks, communal kitchens and braai (barbecue) facilities.

Pleasant **Sylvanette B&B** (☎ 501213; sylvanet@iafrica.com.na; s/d incl breakfast US\$24/36; **P**) has seven tidy rooms, and is in a quiet and garden-like suburban setting.

Bäckerei Dekker & Café (☎ 501962; Main St; meals & snacks US\$1.50-3) is a German café and bakery serving full breakfasts, toasted sandwiches, healthy snacks, pies, light lunches – and desserts.

Okahandja lies on the Interscape Mainliner, minibus and train routes between Windhoek and points north. For train information, phone **Trans-Namib** (☎ 503315).

GROSS BARMEN RECREATION RESERVE

The former mission station of **Gross Barmen** (Map p325; ☎ 062-501091; admission per person US\$2.50, per vehicle US\$1.50; camping for up to 4 people US\$12, d US\$24, 5-bed bungalows from US\$40; **P** 🚰), 26km southwest of Okahandja, has hot springs, short hikes and fine bird-watching around the adjacent dam. Book your accommodation through (NWR) in Windhoek.

KARIBIB

☎ 064

The rustic ranching town of Karibib began as a station on the narrow-gauge rail line between Windhoek and Swakopmund. It’s now dominated by the Palisandro marble quarries, which annually yield more than 1200 tonnes of aragonite, the world’s hardest and highest-quality marble. For tourist information, contact **Henckert Tourist Centre** (☎ 550028; fax 550720; www.henckert.com; 38 Main St; ☎ 8am-5.30pm), which also sells mineral specimens and local weavings.

Hotel Erongoblick (☎ /fax 550009; dm US\$6, s/d with shared bathroom US\$12/22, s/d US\$18/30; **P**) offers nice digs and a swimming pool. The best place to eat in Karibib is the Western Restaurant, on the main road. Karibib Bakery, which dates from 1913, does great breakfasts and brewed coffee.

All of the bus and train services between Windhoek and Swakopmund pass through Karibib.

OMARURU

☎ 064

Dusty Omaruru, beside the shady Omaruru Riverbed, has a real outback feel to it. For a view over the town, you can climb **Captain Franke’s tower**, which was erected in honour of

German Captain Victor Franke, who defended the colonial town in 1904 against a Herero attack. The **Rhenish mission station** (admission free), constructed in 1872 by missionary Gottlieb Viehe, now houses a small **town museum**. Pick up keys to either place at the Central Hotel in the town centre.

A highlight is the **Kristall Kellerei Winery** (Map p325; ☎ 570083; winery@omaruru.na; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, dinner by appointment only). This, Namibia’s only winery, produces colombar and ruby cabernet, and offers wine tasting and great meals just 4km from town on the D2328. Don’t miss its wonderful mineral water, Oasis, which is sold only in Omaruru.

Each year on the weekend nearest 10 October, the White Flag Herero people hold a **festive procession** in Omaruru.

A worthwhile day trip from Omaruru would be to the Otjihaenampanero **dinosaur footprints**, 23km east of Kalkfeld, which features the 170-million-year-old tracks of a three-toed dinosaur.

Sleeping & Eating

Omaruru Rest Camp (☎ 570516; jdg@iway.na; camping per person US\$4, s bungalows US\$20-30, d bungalows US\$25-40; **P** 🚰) This travellers’ rest camp at the edge of town also attracts locals with its popular restaurant (meals US\$3 to US\$7) and sports bar. Internet access is available for US\$4 per hour.

Hotel Staebe (☎ 570035; staebe@africa.com.na; camping per person US\$5, s/d incl breakfast US\$35/50; **P** 🚰 🚰) This quaint German-run hotel occupies a shady riverside setting, and features comfortable rooms with modern amenities as well as a decent restaurant specialising in German fare.

Central Hotel (☎ 570030; central@africaonline.com.na; Wilhelm Zeraua St; s/d US\$30/45; **P** 🚰) This small and spartan place enjoys a central location and friendly staff.

Omaruru Souvenirs & Kaffeestube (☎ 570230; Wilhelm Zeraua St) This cosy café is housed in a historic building dating from 1907. It’s a good choice for a strong cup of coffee and traditional German baked goods, as well as a cold pint of Hansa and some pub grub in the outdoor beer garden.

Getting There & Away

Trains to Tsumeb from either Walvis Bay or Windhoek pass through Omaruru. For train information, call **Trans-Namib** (☎ 570006).

OUTJO

☎ 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; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri).

Sleeping & Eating

Outjo Backpackers (☎ 313470; camping US\$4, dm US\$7, d with shared bathroom US\$15; **P**) Behind the African Curios Shop, this no-frills shoestringers’ spot is centrally located, and has basic but clean rooms and a well-stocked communal kitchen.

Ombinda Country Lodge (Map p325; ☎ 313181; ombinda@ovt.namib.com; camping US\$5 per person, s/d incl breakfast US\$35/50; **P** 🚰 🚰) This jacaranda-studded lodge is located 1km south of town, and features reed-and-thatch chalets with modern amenities including satellite TV and air-con.

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

Outjo Cafe-Bäckerei (☎ 313055; light meals US\$2-4) Although it’s regionally famous for its bread and sweet treats, this is also a good choice for light meals including chicken, schnitzels and burgers.

Getting There & Away

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.

GAMKARAB CAVE

Gamkarab Cave, 50km northeast of Outjo, is replete with lovely stalagmites and stalactites, and the surrounding area has an abundance of hiking trails, unusual vegetation and the world’s only source of *pietersite* mineral.

Gamkarab Cave Guesthouse & Adventure Trails (Map p325; ☎ 067-313827; evg@agrnamibia.com.na; camping per person US\$5, chalet per person US\$12) offers cave tours (US\$4.50), horse riding (US\$6 per hour), three-day horse tours (US\$110) and

FIREWOOD

Firewood – normally split camelthorn acacia – is available for around US\$2 per bundle at national park rest camps, most private camping grounds and general stores. Firewood gathering and open fires are prohibited in national parks, but even outside the parks wilderness hikers are advised to carry a fuel stove and avoid lighting open fires, which can scar the landscape and may get out of control in the typically dry conditions. If you must gather your own firewood, note that it’s technically illegal in Namibia to use anything but mopane or acacia; burning or even carrying any other sort of wood will incur a fine, even outside national parks.

Warning: *do not* burn dried branches of Euphorbia, as the plant contains a deadly toxin and it can be fatal to inhale the smoke or eat food cooked on a fire containing it. If you’re in doubt about any wood you’ve collected, leave it out of the fire.

hiking trails (US\$6 per day). With your own equipment, you can also go cave diving in the underground lake (US\$7) or participate in camping tours to Mooihoek Cave and the upper Ugab Canyon (US\$85 including meals).

OTJIWARONGO

☎ 067

Otjiwarongo ('the pleasant place' in Herero) lies at the junction of the roads between Windhoek, Swakopmund, Outjo, Etosha and the Golden Triangle. At the train station sits **Locomotive No 41**, which was manufactured by the Henschel company of Kassel, Germany, in 1912 and was brought to Namibia to haul ore between the Tsumeb mines and the port at Swakopmund.

The **Otjiwarongo Crocodile Ranch** (☎ 302121; admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun), beside the caravan park, provides a marginally interesting attraction.

The very basic **tourist office** (☎ 303830; otjtc@iafrica.com.na) is in the mineral shop opposite the Hamburger Hof Hotel.

Sleeping & Eating

Falkennest B&B (☎ 302616; otjbb@iafrica.com.na; 21 Industria Ave; s/d incl breakfast US\$18/30; ☎) This welcoming guesthouse is a friendly and affordable option – bird lovers will appreciate the colourful aviary, and everyone else will enjoy the pool and braai pits.

Out of Africa Town Lodge (☎ 303397; www.out-of-africa.com; Long Street; s/d US\$50/60; ☎) This attractive whitewashed, colonial-style lodge has recently renovated rooms featuring satellite TV and air-con. There is also an on-site bistro, pool, outdoor bar and restaurant.

Okonjima (Map p325; ☎ 304563; www.okonjima.com; s/d with half board US\$180/245) The 'Place of Baboons' is home to the AfriCat Foundation, which sponsors a cheetah and leopard rehabilitation centre as well as a sanctuary for orphaned or problem lions, cheetahs and other cats. Guests can take part in cheetah and leopard tracking expeditions, in addition to more relaxing activities including hiking, birding and wildlife drives. To reach Okonjima, turn west onto the D2515, 49km south of Otjiwarongo; follow this road for 15km and turn left onto the farm road for the last 10km.

Carstensen's (☎ 302326; St George's St) This excellent bakery and takeaway in the town centre is a long-standing Otjiwarongo institution.

Getting There & Away

The Intercape Mainliner service between Windhoek and Victoria Falls passes through Otjiwarongo and minibuses between Windhoek and the north stop at the Engen petrol station. All train services between Tsumeb and Windhoek or Walvis Bay (via Swakopmund) also pass through.

WATERBERG PLATEAU PARK

Taking in a 50km-long and 16km-wide Etjo sandstone plateau, **Waterberg Plateau Park** (per person US\$2.50, plus per vehicle US\$2.50; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2pm-sunset year-round) looms 150m above the plain. Around this sheer-sided 'Lost World' are numerous freshwater springs supporting a lush mosaic of trees and lots of wildlife. The park is also 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, NWR conducts three-hour wildlife drives (US\$12/5 per adult/child).

Hiking

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.

Also from April to November, the four-day guided Waterberg Wilderness Trail (US\$24 per person) operates every second, third and fourth Thursday of the month and is open to groups of six to eight people. Accommodation is in huts, but participants must carry their own food and sleeping bags. All hikes must be prebooked through NWR in Windhoek.

Sleeping & Eating

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; ☎) 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.

Getting There & Away

There's no public transport, but taxis from Otjiwarongo will get you there for around

THE RED LINE

Between Grootfontein and Rundu, and between Tsumeb and Ondangwa, the B8 and B1 cross the Red Line, the Animal Disease Control Checkpoint (veterinary control fence) separating the commercial cattle ranches of the south from the communal subsistence lands to the north. This fence bars the north-south movement of animals as a precaution against foot-and-mouth disease and rinderpest, and animals bred north of this line may not be sold to the south or exported to overseas markets.

As a result, the Red Line also marks the effective boundary between the developed and developing Worlds. The landscape south of the line is characterised by a dry scrubby bushveld (open grassland) of vast ranches, which are home only to cattle and a few scattered ranchers. However, north of the Animal Disease Control Checkpoint, travellers enter a landscape of dense bush, baobab trees, mopane scrub and small kraals, where people and animals wander along the road and the air is filled with smoke from cooking fires and bush-clearing operations.

US\$25 each way and quite a few budget safaris include it in their itineraries. Note that bicycles and motorcycles aren't permitted.

GROOTFONTEIN

☎ 067

With a pronounced colonial feel, Grootfontein (Big Spring) has an air of uprightness and respectability, with local limestone construction and avenues of jacaranda trees that bloom in September. It was the water that attracted the earliest travellers, and in 1885, the Dorsland (Thirst Land) trekkers set up the short-lived Republic of Upingtonia. By 1887, the settlement was gone, but six years later Grootfontein was selected as the headquarters for the German South-West Africa Company, thanks to the area's agricultural potential and mineral wealth. In 1896, the German Schutztruppe constructed a fort and it became a garrison town.

You'll find the most useful tourist information at **Meteor Tours** (☎ /fax 240086; dirkv@namibnet.com; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri), which also provides email and internet access.

Sights

GERMAN FORT & MUSEUM

In 1968 it was only a last-minute public appeal that saved the old German fort from demolition, and in 1974 it was restored to house the **municipal museum** (Map p330; ☎ 242478; ☎ 4-6pm Tue & Fri, 9-11am Wed). To visit at other times, phone Mrs Prickett or Mrs Blumer (☎ 242479).

HOBA METEORITE

Near the Hoba Farm, 25km west of Grootfontein, the world's largest **meteorite** (Map p325; admission US\$1.30) was discovered in 1920

by hunter Jacobus Brits. This cuboid bit of space debris is composed of 82% iron, 16% nickel and 0.8% cobalt, along with traces of other metals. No-one knows when it fell to earth (it's thought to have been around 80,000 years ago), but since it weighs in at 54,000kg it must have made a hell of a thump. There's no public transport, but taxis from town charge about US\$15 each way.

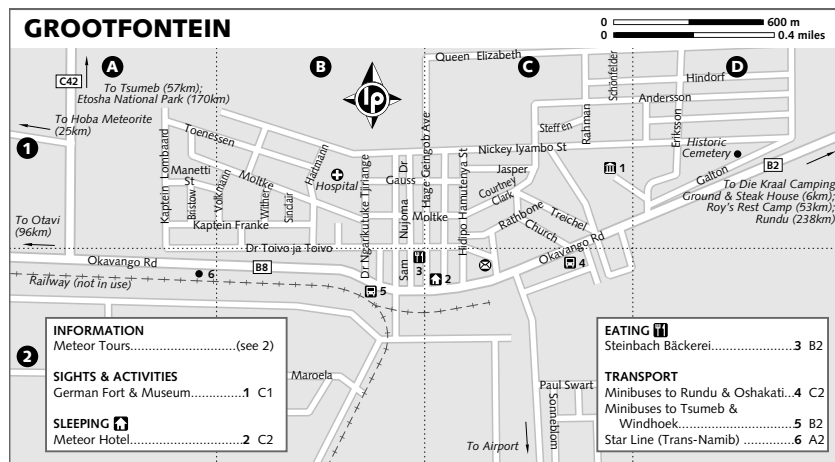
DRAGON'S BREATH CAVE

On Harasib Farm, 46km northwest of Grootfontein, is the Dragon's Breath Cave (Map p325), which holds the world's largest known underground lake. This fabulous 2-hectare subterranean reservoir occupies an immense chamber 60m below the surface. Its waters are crystal clear and, with sufficient light, allow visibility for 100m. The name is derived from the spontaneous condensation caused by warm, moist outside air forcing its way into the cool chamber.

At the time of writing, the cave was closed to the public and permission to explore it was granted only to professional caving expeditions. However, following a recent change in ownership, there are currently plans to develop the site for tourism.

Sleeping & Eating

Die Kraal Camping Ground & Steak House (Map p325; ☎ 240300; camping per person US\$4; ☎) Located 6km from town on the Rundu road, this German-run guest farm provides the safest and most attractive camping in the immediate Grootfontein area. Die Kraal is locally famous for its top-prize steaks and game meat – even if you're not spending the night, be sure to stop by for a meal.



Roy's Rest Camp (Map p325; ☎ 240302; royscamp@iway.na; PO Box 755; camping per person US\$5, s/d US\$32/45, 3-/4-bed bungalows US\$60/65; **P** **♿**) Accommodation in this recommended place appears to jump straight from a fairy-tale illustration – the handmade wood furnishings are all fabulously rustic, while the thatched bungalows are tranquil beneath towering trees. Meals are US\$4 to US\$8. Roy's is located 53km outside of Grootfontein on the road towards Rundu, and it's a convenient stop if you're heading to Tsumkwe (p346).

Meteor Hotel (Map p330; ☎ 242078; s/d incl breakfast B&B US\$30/50; **P** **♿**) Modern rooms with satellite TV and air-con are bright and airy, and the attached dining room is an excellent choice for local and European dishes.

Steinbach Bäckerei (Map p330; ☎ 242348; snacks US\$2-3.50) This Grootfontein institution is a good bet if you're hankering for a slice of German chocolate cake or fresh-baked brown bread.

Getting There & Away

Minibuses run frequently between Grootfontein and Tsumeb, Rundu, Katima Mulilo and Windhoek, departing when full from informal bus stops along Okavango Rd at the appropriate ends of town. The Intercap Mainliner bus between Windhoek (US\$33, seven hours) and Victoria Falls (US\$25, five hours) also passes through. On Thursdays at 11.30am, Star Line runs buses from the train station to Tsumkwe (US\$8, 6½ hours); it returns the next day, leaving Tsumkwe at 10.15am.

TSUMEB

☎ 067

Tsumeb, which is perhaps Namibia's loveliest town, enjoys quiet streets lined with flame trees and jacarandas and surroundings that have geologists salivating. Of the 184 minerals that have been discovered here, 10 are found nowhere else in the world, and mineral collectors justifiably rank the area as one of the world's great natural wonders.

The town's name is derived from a melding of the San word *tsoumsoub* (to dig in loose ground) and the Herero *otjissime* (place of frogs). Tsumeb isn't really known for little croakers, but the red, brown, green and grey streaks created by minerals of the area resemble dried frog spawn, and both the frogs and digging equipment appear on the town's crest.

Information

Travel North Namibia tourist office (Map p331; ☎ 220728, 0811 246722; travelnn@tsu.namib.com; 1551 Omeg Alee, PO Box 799) The friendly tourist office provides information about the whole country, accommodation and transport bookings, as well as car hire anywhere in northern Namibia (with special rates for Etosha trips). It also provides Etosha bookings; fax, email and internet services; and laundry (US\$2 to wash and dry; US\$3 for a service wash).

Sights & Activities

Tsumeb's history and mineralogical heritage is recounted in the worthwhile **Tsumeb Mining Museum** (Map p331; ☎ 220447; Main St; admission US\$1;

9am–noon & 2–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat), in the 1915 Old German Private School.

The **Tsumeb Cultural Village** (☎ 220787; admission US\$1.30), on the Grootfontein road, presents Namibia's many cultures with artefacts, demonstrations and buildings from around the country.

Lake Otjikoto (admission US\$1.30), meaning 'deep hole' in Herero, lies on the B1 about 24km northwest of Tsumeb. It was created when the roof of a 150m by 100m limestone sinkhole collapsed; the resulting 55m-deep lake and nearby Lake Guinas are the only natural lakes in Namibia. In 1915, during WWI, the retreating Germans dumped weaponry and ammunition into Lake Otjikoto – most of which is still there – to prevent the equipment falling into South African hands. If you'd like to dive in the lake, contact the **Windhoek Underwater Club** (☎ 061-238320, 0811 281945; theo@schoemans.com.na).

Sleeping & Eating

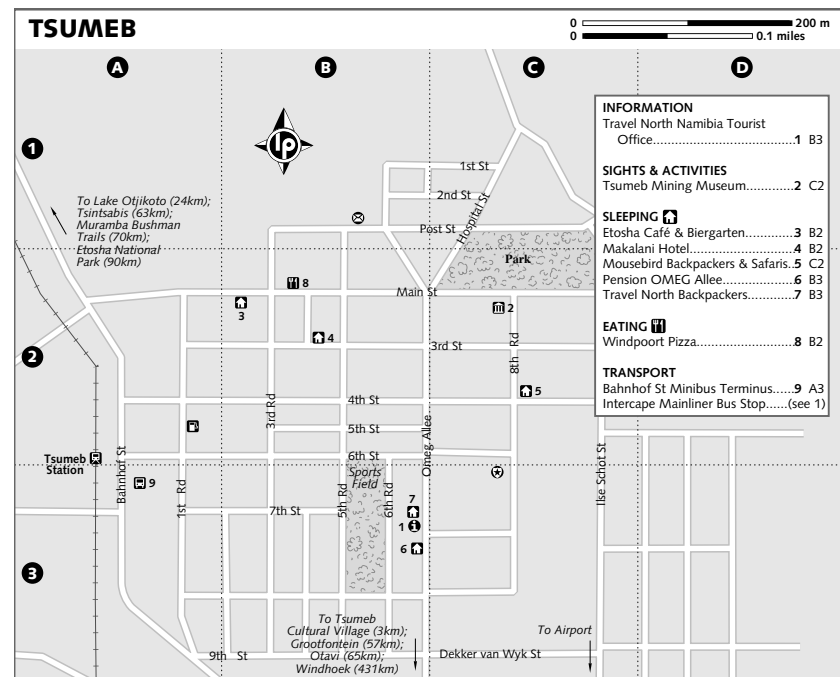
Travel North Backpackers (Map p331; ☎ 220728; travelnn@tsu.namib.com; Omeg Alee; camping per person US\$4, dm US\$7, s/d from US\$14/25; **P**) Adjacent to the tourist office, this no-frills lodge lacks the

personality of Mousebird, though it's still a cheap and comfortable option if you're counting your Nam dollars.

Mousebird Backpackers & Safaris (Map p331; ☎ 221777; www.mousebird.com; 533 4th St; camping per person US\$4, dm US\$8, d US\$16; **P**) Tsumeb's friendliest and most economical accommodation, Mousebird offers comfortable rooms, excellent kitchen facilities and a nice little bar. If you don't have a car, it also operates affordable safaris to Etosha (US\$160 for three days) and Otjozondjupa region (US\$125 for two days).

Etosha Café & Biergarten (Map p331; ☎ 221207; Main St; s/d with shared bathroom US\$13/22; **P**) This quaint place offers clean, inexpensive accommodation, and it's also one of the best places in town for a hearty breakfast (with real brewed coffee!) or a relaxed lunch or dinner in the shady beer garden.

Pension OMEG Alee (Map p331; ☎ 220631; 858 Omeg Alee; s/d incl breakfast US\$30/45; **P** **♿**) For a healthy dose of German hospitality, this friendly, family-run *pension* (boarding house) is a good choice. Comfortable rooms with modern amenities are warm and homely.



Makalani Hotel (Map p331; ☎ 221051; www.makalani.hotel.com; 3rd St; s/d incl breakfast US\$60/85; 🍷 🚽 🚿) Located in the town centre, the Makalani 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.

Windpoort Pizza (Map p331; ☎ 220243; Main St; medium pizzas US\$2.50-4; 🕒 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm & 5-7.30pm Sat, 5-7.30pm Sun) Housed in a video shop, Windpoort does a range of excellent (and often bizarre) pizza concoctions.

Getting There & Away

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** (☎ 220358).

ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK

☎ 067

Etosha National Park, the 'Great White Place of Dry Water', takes in more than 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 Lindquist, 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.

Orientation

Only the eastern two-thirds of Etosha is open to the general public; the western third is reserved exclusively for tour operators. All roads are passable with 2WD vehicles and it's in the eastern section 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 info.

Information

Visitors to the park must check in at von Lindequist, Andersson or King Nehale gates 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 prepaid through a travel agency or to **NWR** (☎ 061-2857000; reservations@mwweb.com.na; Independence Ave, Windhoek; 🕒 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) in Windhoek.

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

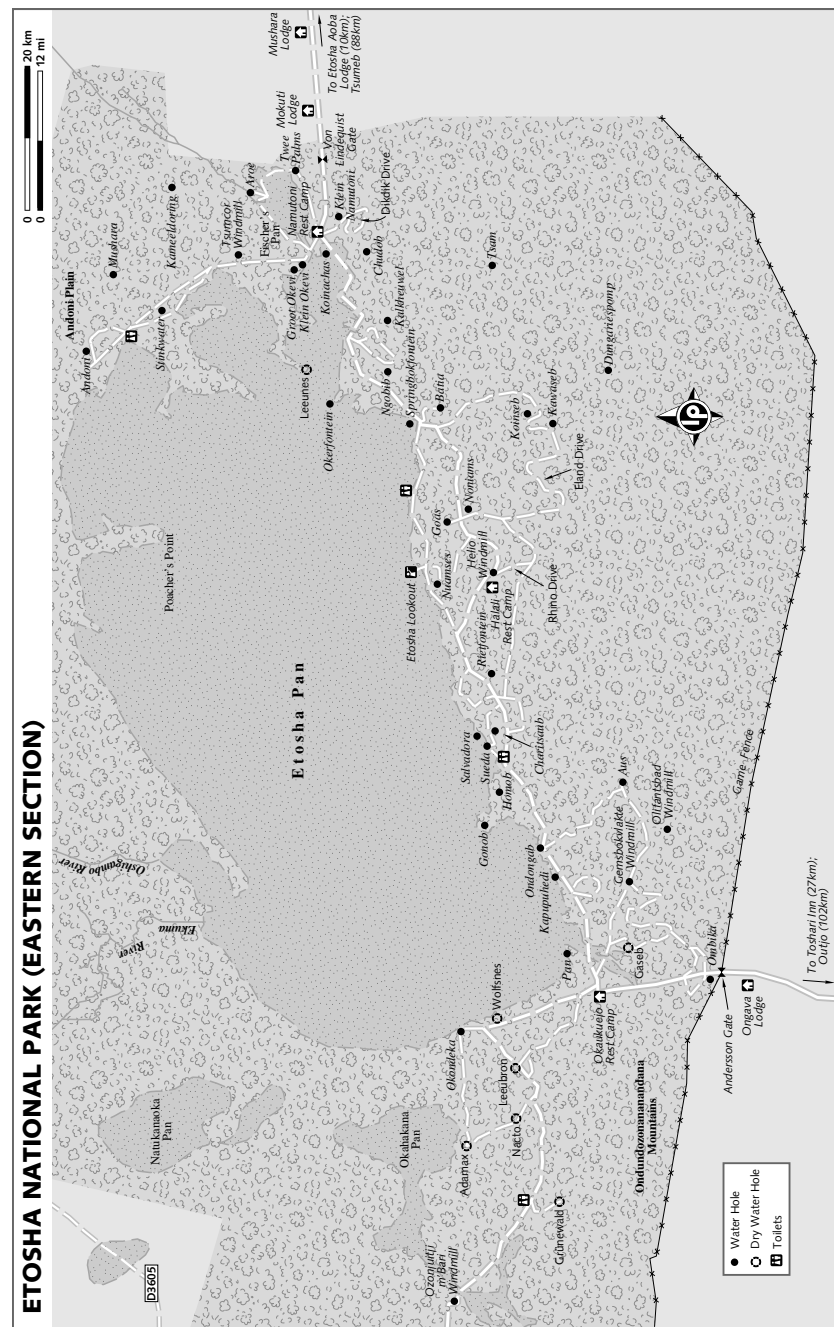
Etosha is open to day visitors, but it's impossible to see much of the park in less than two or three days. Most visitors spend a couple of nights at one of its three rest camps, Namutoni, Halali and Okaukuejo, which are spaced at 70km intervals. Each has its own character, so it's worth visiting more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

Each camp is open year-round and has a restaurant, which is open from 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, however, it's considerably cheaper if you stock up on groceries prior to entering the park.

IN THE PARK

Prebooking for the NWR-run rest camps listed following is mandatory. Although it is sometimes possible to reserve a space at either of the park gates, it's best to contact the NWR office in Windhoek (see p315) well in advance of your visit.

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



A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO TRACKING GAME

Visitors to Africa are always amazed at the apparent ease with which professional guides locate and spot their quarry. While most of us can't hope to replicate their skills in a brief visit, a few pointers can hone your approach.

- Time of day – this is possibly the most important factor for determining animal movements and behaviours. Dawn and dusk tend to be the most productive periods for mammals and many birds. They're the coolest parts of the day, and also produce the richest light for photographs. Although the middle of the day is usually too hot for much action, this is when some antelope feel less vulnerable at a watering hole, and when raptors and reptiles are most obvious.
- Weather – prevailing weather conditions can greatly affect your wildlife-viewing experience. For example, high winds may drive herbivores and birds into cover, so concentrate your search in sheltered areas. Summer thunderstorms are often followed by a flurry of activity as insect colonies and frogs emerge, followed by their predators. Overcast or cool days may prolong activity such as hunting by normally crepuscular predators, and extremely cold winter nights force nocturnal species to stay active at dawn.
- Water – most animals drink daily when water is available, so water sources are worthwhile places to invest time, particularly in the dry season. Predators and very large herbivores tend to drink early in the day or at dusk, while antelopes tend to drink from the early morning to midday. On the coast, receding tides are usually followed by the appearance of wading birds and detritus feeders such as crabs.
- Food sources – knowing what your quarry eats will help you to decide where you should spend most of your time. A flowering aloe might not hold much interest at first glance, but knowing that it is irresistible to many species of sunbirds might help to change your mind. Fruiting trees attract monkeys while herds of herbivores with their young are a predator's dessert cart.
- Habitat – knowing which habitats are preferred by each species is a good beginning, but just as important is knowing where to look in those habitats. Animals aren't merely randomly dispersed within their favoured habitats. Instead, they seek out specific sites to shelter – hollows, trees, caves and high points on plains. Many predators use open grasslands, but also gravitate towards available cover such as large trees, thickets or even grass tussocks. Ecotones – where one habitat merges into another – can be particularly productive because species from both habitats overlap.
- Tracks and signs – even when you don't see animals, they leave many signs of their presence. Spoor (tracks), scat (droppings), pellets, nests, scrapes and scent-marks provide information about wildlife, and may even help to locate it. Check dirt and sand roads when driving – it won't take long for you to recognise interesting spoor. Elephant footprints are unmistakable, and large predator tracks are fairly obvious. Also, many wild cats and dogs use roads to hunt, so look for where the tracks leave the road – often they mark the point where they began a stalk or sought out a nearby bush for shade.
- Equipment – probably the most important piece of equipment you can have is a good pair of binoculars. These help to not only spot wildlife, but also correctly identify it (this is essential for birding). Binoculars are also useful for viewing species and behaviours where close approaches are impossible. Field guides, which are pocket-sized books that depict mammals, birds, flowers etc of a specific area with photos or colour illustrations, are also invaluable. These guides also provide important identification pointers and a distribution map for each species.

Remember, although the majority of foreign visitors to Southern Africa choose to join an organised safari, nothing is comparable to the thrill of doing it yourself.

US\$58, 4-bed self-catering bungalows US\$95; (P) (🚽) 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, braai pit, and bathroom and toilet facilities.

The floodlit water hole is probably Etosha's best rhino-viewing venue, particularly from 8pm to 10pm. Also popular is the sunset photo frenzy from Okaukuejo's landmark stone tower, which affords a view across the spaces to the distant Ondundozonanandana (Lost Shepherd Boy) Mountains; try saying that after three pints of Windhoek lager (or even before!).

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

Namutoni Rest Camp (camping for 4 people US\$20; 2-bed r with shared bathroom US\$18, 2-bed r US\$41, 2-bed economy flats inside/outside the fort US\$38/27, 4-bed chalets US\$45, 4-bed flats 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 cavalry built a fort from which to control Owambo uprisings.

OUTSIDE THE PARK

Pre-booking for the lodges listed below is strongly recommended.

Toshari Inn (Map p325; ☎ 333440; toshari@out.namib.com; camping per site US\$16, r per person incl breakfast US\$42; (P) (🚽) Located 27km south of Andersson

Gate, Toshari is the most affordable option outside the park, and a convenient place to crash if you can't reach the park by sunset or if the rest camps are fully booked.

Mokuti Lodge (☎ 229084; www.namibsunhotels.com.na/english/e_mokuti.htm; s/d incl breakfast from US\$120/165, f incl breakfast US\$215; (P) (🚽) (🚿) This sprawling lodge, located just 2km from von Lindequist gate, has more than 100 rooms as well as several swimming pools and tennis courts, though the low-profile buildings create an illusion of intimacy. The lodge seeks to create an informal, relaxed atmosphere, and is a good choice if you're travelling with the little ones.

Mushara Lodge (☎ 229106; www.mushara-lodge.com; s/d chalet incl breakfast US\$140/225; (P) (🚽) (🚿) Located on a 25-sq-km concession just 8km east of the von Lindequist gate, this rustic lodge is dotted with 'mushara' or purple pod terminalia trees, and attractively blends modern and traditional design elements. Accommodation is in 12 reed and thatched chalets that are scattered across a manicured lawn.

Etosha Aoba Lodge (Map p325; ☎ 229100; www.etosha-aoba-lodge.com; s/d incl breakfast US\$145/225; (P) (🚽) (🚿) Situated on a 70-sq-km private concession about 10km east of von Lindequist gate, this tranquil lodge is located in Tamboti forest next to a dry riverbed. The property is comprised of 10 light and airy thatched cottages that blend effortlessly into the surrounding riverine forest.

Hobater Lodge (Map p348; ☎ 067-330261; res.africa.net/hobater-lodge; s/d with full board US\$155/280; (P) (🚽) (🚿) Located 80km north of Kamanjab on the western border of Etosha, Hobater is a fine base for exploring the western Etosha (closed to private vehicles) and the Kaokoveld (p350), though it's a bit far from Etosha Pan. Accommodation is in 12 pastel-washed cottages located close to a popular water hole (elephants gather here in the dry season).

THE NAME OF THE GAME

The word 'game' actually hails from hunting: originally the game was the thrill of the sport, but gradually the quarry itself came to be called game. Derivation notwithstanding, the term pops up regularly in Southern Africa when people refer to wildlife, and doesn't necessarily mean that some poor beast is about to receive a lethal dose of lead poisoning. 'Game viewing' is the most common local term for wildlife watching, and is usually done on a 'game drive', a guided tour by vehicle. 'Big Game' is, of course, the Big Five (the black rhino, Cape buffalo, elephant, leopard and lion), whereas 'general game' collectively refers to the diverse herbivore community, ranging from duikers to giraffes. Of course, while 'game' in its various forms is used widely, hunters also still employ the term, most often as 'Big Game', as well as 'Plains Game,' their term for herbivores.

Ongava Lodge (☎ 061-274500; www.wilderness-safaris.com; s/d with full board & activities US\$600/830; (P) (B) (E)) The most exclusive luxury lodge in the Etosha area is located on a private game reserve near Andersson Gate that protects several prides of lions, a few black and white rhinos and your standard assortment of herd animals. Ongava is divided into two properties; the main Ongava Lodge is a collection of safari-chic chalets surrounding a small water hole, while the Ongava Tented Camp is six East African-style canvas tents situated deep in the bush.

Getting There & Away

Air Namibia flies daily between Windhoek's Eros Airport and Mokuti Airport (US\$90/145 one way/return), immediately south of Von Lindquist Gate.

Etosha's two main entry gates are Von Lindquist (Namutoni), west of Tsumeb; 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, including some very economical options (see p397).

Hitching is prohibited inside Etosha, but hitchhikers may be able to find lifts from Tsumeb to Namutoni or Outjo to Okaukuejo. Sort out entry permits when you enter the park or your driver may have problems when trying to exit the park (it will appear that some of their original party has vanished!) Your best bet is to explain when you enter the park that you need separate entry permits for your own records.

Getting Around

As well as hitching, pedestrians, bicycles and motorcycles are prohibited in Etosha, and open bakkies must be screened off. Outside the rest camps, visitors must stay in their vehicles (except at toilet stops).

NORTHERN NAMIBIA

Known as the 'Land of Rivers', Northern Namibia is bounded by the Kunene and Okavango Rivers along the Angolan border, and in the east by the Zambezi and the Kwando/Mashe/Linyanti/Chobe river systems. Although Windhoek may be the capital,

Northern Namibia, which is the country's most densely populated region, is undeniably its cultural heartland.

OSHAKATI

(☎ 065)

The Owambo capital is an uninspiring commercial centre that is little more than a strip of characterless development along the highway. While it lacks specific attractions, it's worth spending an hour at the large and odorous covered market, which proffers everything from clothing and baskets to mopane worms and glasses of freshly brewed *tambo* (beer).

Information

For changing money, major banks (Bank of Namibia, Bank of Windhoek, First National Bank and Standard Bank) are represented along the bustling commercial centre. Email and internet access are available at the **Iway I-café** (☎ 224070; per hr US\$4.50; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri). Alternatively, there's the **Pick-a-Phone** (☎ 221300; per hr US\$3.50; ☎ 8am-6pm), in the Yetu Centre.

The **Angolan Consulate** (☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri) issues 30-day visas for around US\$50. Drop off

your passport in the morning and pick it up in the afternoon.

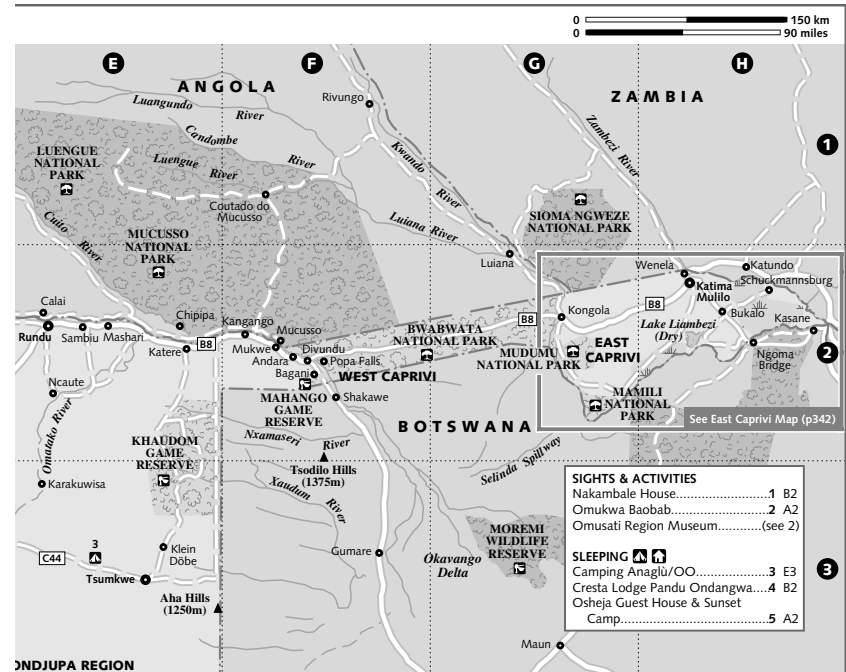
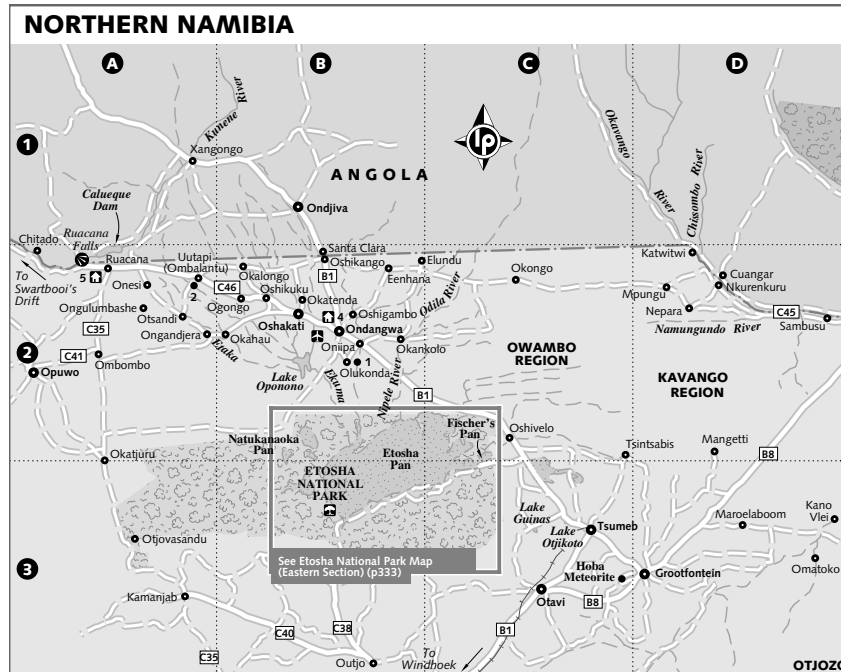
Sleeping & Eating

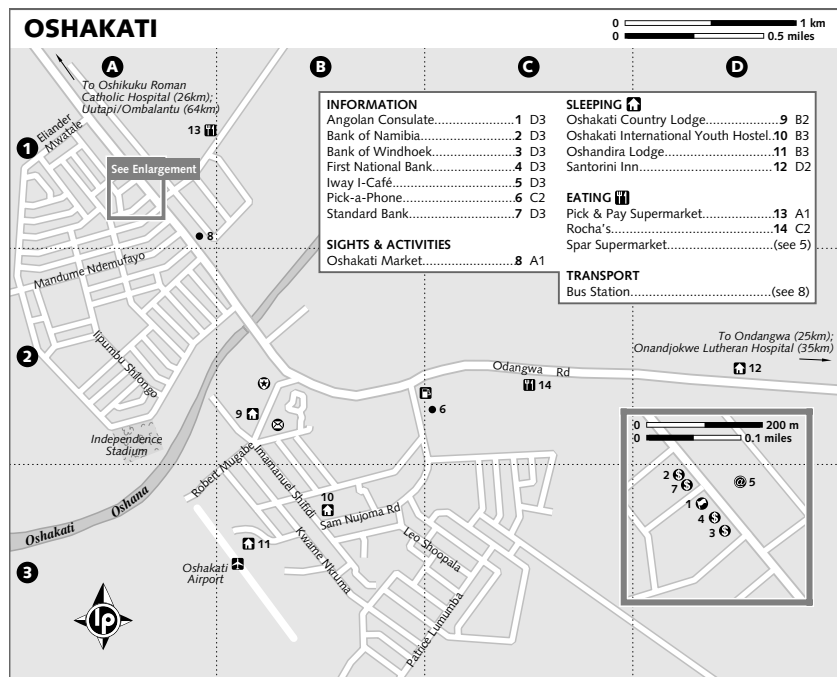
Oshakati International Youth Hostel (☎ 224294; San Nujoma Rd; dm US\$4, r per person US\$10; (P)) Caters mainly to Namibian school groups, but the hostel is clean and friendly to foreigners. Men and women are housed in separate rooms.

Santorini Inn (☎ 220457; bookings@santorini-inn.com; s/d incl breakfast from US\$45/60; (P) (B) (E)) This somewhat out-of-place inn may inspire the sensation that you've died and gone to Florida. With a distinctly tropical feel, the Santorini features a pool, bar, digital satellite TV, restaurant, and a refrigeration shop that ensures that the air-con is functional.

Oshandira Lodge (☎ 220443; oshandira@iway.na; per person incl breakfast US\$45; (P) (E)) Located next to the airport, this pleasant lodge is a good choice – simple but spacious rooms surround a landscaped pool and thatched open-air restaurant.

Oshakati Country Lodge (☎ 222380; countrylodge@mweb.com, Robert Mugabe Rd, per person US\$70; (B) (E)) Provides posh but fairly heartless accommodation for business travellers and government





officials. Rooms are well furnished and come equipped with air-con and satellite TV.

Rocha's (☎ 222038; Ondangwa Rd; mains US\$4-8) For a taste of Angola, head to Rocha's where you can feast on Portuguese-style fare including a wide range of local fish dishes.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Oshakati's airport is used for charters only. Commercial flights use the airport in Ondangwa, 25km down the road.

BUS & COMBI

From the bus terminal at the market, white (minibuses) leave frequently for Ondangwa (US\$1.50, one hour) and Uutapi/Ombalantu (US\$2, two hours). Minibuses for Windhoek (US\$10, 11 hours), via Tsumeb (US\$3, four hours) set out when full, with extra departures on Sunday afternoon.

CAR

The C46 and B1 through the Owambo region are tarred and in good condition, but off these routes, road maintenance is poor and 4WD

is required in places, especially after rain. Petrol is available at Oshakati, Ondangwa, Oshikango and Uutapi (Ombalantu).

ONDANGWA

☎ 065

The second-largest Owambo town, Ondangwa boasts several colourful buildings, a booming market and warehouses that provide stock to the 6000 tiny *cuca* shops (small bush shops named after the brand of Angolan beer that they once sold) that serve the area's rural residents.

Lost in the maze of routes and tracks south of Ondangwa lies **Lake Oponono**, a large wetland fed by the Culevai *oshanas* (underground river channels). After rain, the region attracts a variety of bird life, including saddle-bill storks, crowned cranes, flamingoes and pelicans. The edge of the lake lies 27km south of Ondangwa.

Also worthwhile is **Nakambale House** (Map pp336-7; admission US\$0.75; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun), which was built in the late 1870s by Finnish missionary Martti Rautanen, and is the oldest building in northern

Namibia. It now houses a museum. In 1889, Reverend Rautanen also constructed the area's first church, which is open by request.

Sleeping & Eating

Ondangwa Rest Camp (☎ 240351; restcamp@osh.namib.com; camping per person US\$4) Surrounds a rather fetid pond behind Ondangwa's very obviously pink shopping centre. Although the camp site is less than appealing, the attached Oasis Restaurant & Beer Garden is probably the best place in town for a beer and a bite to eat.

Olukonda National Monument (☎ 245668; olukonda.museum@elcin.org.na; camping per tent US\$4 plus per person US\$1.50, traditional huts per person without/with linen US\$5/8, cottages per person incl breakfast US\$10) Here's your opportunity to sleep in a basic missionary cottage or a hut that would have been used historically by an Owambo chief or one of his wives. The site is located in Olukonda village (which also contains Nakambale House), just 6km southeast of Ondangwa along the D3606.

Cresta Lodge Pandu Ondangwa (Map pp336-7; ☎ 241900; ondangwa@crestanamibia.com.na; s/d from US\$55/70; ☎ ☎ ☎) This plush new business-travellers' option features bright rooms decorated with tasteful artwork as well as modern furnishings. The attached Chatters restaurant prepares decent Continental-inspired cuisine, and there's also a small takeaway in the lobby.

Getting There & Away

All transport services between Oshakati and Tsumeb or Windhoek stop at Ondangwa's BP petrol station.

UUTAPI (OMBALANTU)

Dusty Uutapi (frequently spelled Outapi, or called Ombalantu, after a formerly adjacent village) is one of Namibia's most typically African commercial towns.

Its main attraction is its former South African army base, which is dominated by the enormous **Omukwa Baobab**. In the past, this amazing hollow tree was used to shelter cattle from invaders, and later used as a turret from which to ambush invading tribes. It didn't work against the South African army, however, which invaded and used the tree for everything from a chapel to a coffee shop (a sign outside reads 'Die Koffiekamer Koelste', meaning 'The Coffee Chamber Cult'), a post office, a storage shed and an interrogation chamber for prisoners of war. The site, 1km off the D3612, is loosely described as the **Omusati Region Museum** (Map pp336-7; admission free; ☎ 24hr) and includes a nearby bunker and watchtower from the South African days.

RUACANA

☎ 065

The tiny Kunene River town of Ruacana (the name comes from the Herero words *orua hakahana* - 'the rapids'), was constructed as

WHAT'S BREWING IN THE OWAMBO COUNTRY?

Forget the Pig & Whistle, Hare & Hounds and King George & the Dragon. The Owambo have their own pub culture, and the bars, nightclubs and bottle shops - better known as '*cuca* shops' - along the northern highways bear wonderfully colourful names. One bottle store is called Serious, another is the Fruit of Love and yet another is California BS. Perhaps the best is simply the unpretentious Botol Stor.

Then there are the bars: the Clinic Happy Bar, Hot Box, Daily Needs, Salon for Sure, Club Jet Style, Sorry to See, Bruce Lee Bar, Oversize Bar, Club Euro Frique, Let's Push, California City Style, Come Together Good Life, Happy Brothers & Sisters, Join Us, Hard Workers Bar, Every Day Bar, Bar We Like and USA No Money No Life. A few are more philosophical: The System, Just Another Life, The Agreement Centre, Take Time, Keep Trying No 1, Keep Trying No 2, Tenacity Centre and Try Again. There also seems to be a new hydrological theme emerging: Sea Point, Quay 4, Club LA Coast, Pelican, Friend Ship, Titanic, Titicaca, and Seven Seas Up & Down.

Some names, however, boggle the mind. Who, for example, came up with the Sign of Mr Hans, We Push & Pull, One Moo, No Wally Let's Support Bar, Far Well Mr Happy Bar, Let's Sweat for Tailor Bar, Club Say Father of Mustache, Let We Trust Uncle Simon, Three Sister in Beer Garden and Wet Come to Big Mama? And given the choice, would you prefer to down a drop in the Peace Full Bar or the Water is Life, or choke down a foul brew in the Oshakati establishment known as Vile Waters?

a company town to serve the 320-megawatt underground Ruacana hydroelectric project, which currently supplies more than half of Namibia's power requirements.

The dramatic 85m-high **Ruacana Falls** was once a great natural wonder, but thanks to Angola's Calueque Dam the water flows only during heavy rains, when the power station is satisfied and excess water is released over the dam. In 2001 and 2002, the falls roared to life in March and April, presenting a spectacle comparable to Victoria Falls – if you hear that it's flowing, you certainly won't regret a side trip to see it. To enter the border area, visitors must sign the Namibian immigration register.

Osheja Guest House & Sunset Camp (Map pp336-7; ☎ 0812 424916; camping per person US\$4, Sunset bungalows per person US\$10, Osheja guest house per person US\$18; P) is a two-part lodge consisting of a leafy camping and bungalow area as well as the nearby Osheja Guest House. During business hours, you can register with Venessa at the BP petrol station. Meals are available with advance booking.

Minibuses connect Ruacana with Oshakati daily from the BP petrol station.

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/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) is run by the same folks who operate the Ngandu Safari Lodge (see below). It can provide basic tourist information.

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

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

Sleeping & Eating

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.

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 town, though it's about 1km from the riverfront.

N'Kwazi Lodge (☎ 255467; nkwazi@iafrica.com.na; camping per person US\$4, African huts US\$25, d incl breakfast US\$55) 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.

Tambuti Lodge (☎ 255711; tambuti@namibnet.com; s/d incl 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 beauty of a riverside setting. Highlights are the on-site restaurant feature a host of traditional Swiss dishes, and the honeymoon suite, which has one of the most bizarre Jacuzzis you've ever seen.

Hakusemb Lodge (☎ 257010; www.natron.net/hakusemb; 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, nine 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 that runs 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 un-touristed wildlife venue in Namibia, head for the undeveloped **Khaudom Game Reserve** (day admission per person US\$2.50 plus per vehicle US\$2.50),

which takes in 384,000 hectares. Along its meandering sand tracks you'll see roans, wild dogs, elephants, zebras and most other species you'd encounter at Etosha National Park, but in a much lonelier context.

Namibia Wildlife Resorts 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 camps **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 NWR in Windhoek.

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 ceasefire, 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.

Sights

MAHANGO GAME RESERVE

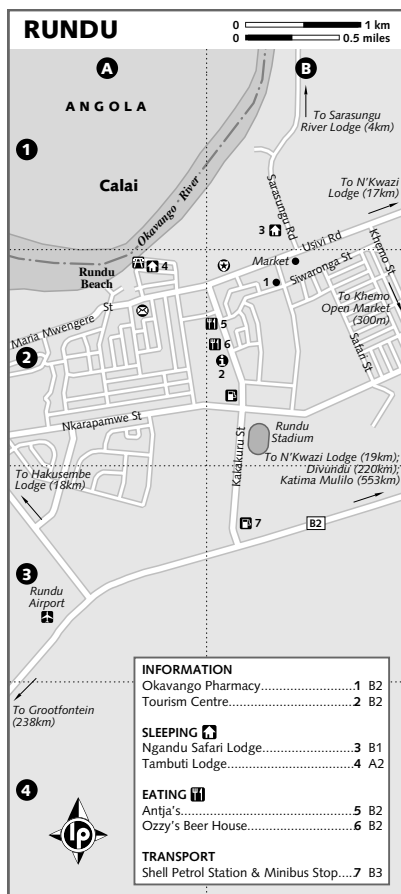
The 25,400-hectare **Mahango Game Reserve** (admission per person US\$3.50 plus per vehicle US\$3.50) occupies a broad flood plain that's best known for its dry-season concentrations of thirsty elephants. This is the only national park unit in Namibia where visitors are permitted to walk at will; winter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

DIVUNDU

Nondescript Divundu, which serves as a commercial centre for the adjacent villages of Mukwe, Andara and Bagani, has a couple of supermarkets and three (ostensibly) 24-hour petrol stations.

POPA FALLS

Near Bagani, the Okavango River tumbles down a broad series of cascades known as



Popa Falls (day admission per person US\$2.50 plus per vehicle US\$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.

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.

N/goabaca Camp (camping per person US\$4; **P**) This locally run camp site is a member of Namibia Community Based Tourism Association (Nacobta; www.nacobta.com.na), a collective of various 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.

Mahangu Safari Lodge (☎ 259037; www.mahangu.com.na; camping per person US\$4, small/large tent per person with half-board US\$20/35, chalet per person with half-board US\$50; **P**) Situated among a grove of jackalberry trees along the Okavango River near the entrance to the Mahangu Game Reserve gate, this reader-recommended lodge has a variety of accommodation to suit all budgets. Note that during rainy periods, the access road leading to the lodge may be impassable to 2WD vehicles.

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.

Suclobo Lodge (☎ 259005; marlon@ravemail.com.na; camping B&B per person US\$7, s/d bungalows B&B US\$75/100; **P**) This German-run lodge occupies a scenic bluff above the Okavango River about 500m upstream from Popa Falls. It's a good base for organising boat trips (US\$9) and Mahangu wildlife drives (US\$20), though non-Germans may feel a bit out of place.

EASTERN SECTION

At the eastern end of the park are a number of accommodation options. See also p345.

Nambwa Camp Site (Map p342; camping per person US\$5) Nambwa, 14km south of Kongola, lacks facilities, but it's the only official camp in 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 (Map p342; ☎ South Africa 27-11-706 7207; www.islandsinafrica.com; low/high season per person US\$305/465) This chic safari lodge is located on a remote island in the Kwando River, and it is surrounded by a wildlife-rich habitat of savanna, woodland and wetland. Accommodation is in six stylish brick and thatch chalets adorned in soft earth tones. Susuwe is accessible only by charter flight or 4WD. Prebooking is mandatory.

Getting There & Away

All buses and minibuses travelling between Katima Mulilo and Rundu pass through Divundu. The gravel road between Divundu and Moheumbo (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.

Information

Tourist information is dispensed at **Tutwa Tourism & Travel** (Map p344; ☎ 253048; tutwa@mweb.com.na; PO Box 126), which also organises custom tours around the region. On weekdays, the Bank of Windhoek, beside the main town square, changes cash and travellers cheques at an appropriately tropical pace. For fax, email and internet access, see **IWAY** (Map p344; per hr US\$2.50; ☎ 8am-9pm Mon-Sat, 1-9pm Sun), in a nondescript building beside the Caprivi Arts Centre. If you're either entering or leaving Namibia, be sure to pay the road tax (US\$10) at the Cross-Border Charge Office.

Sights

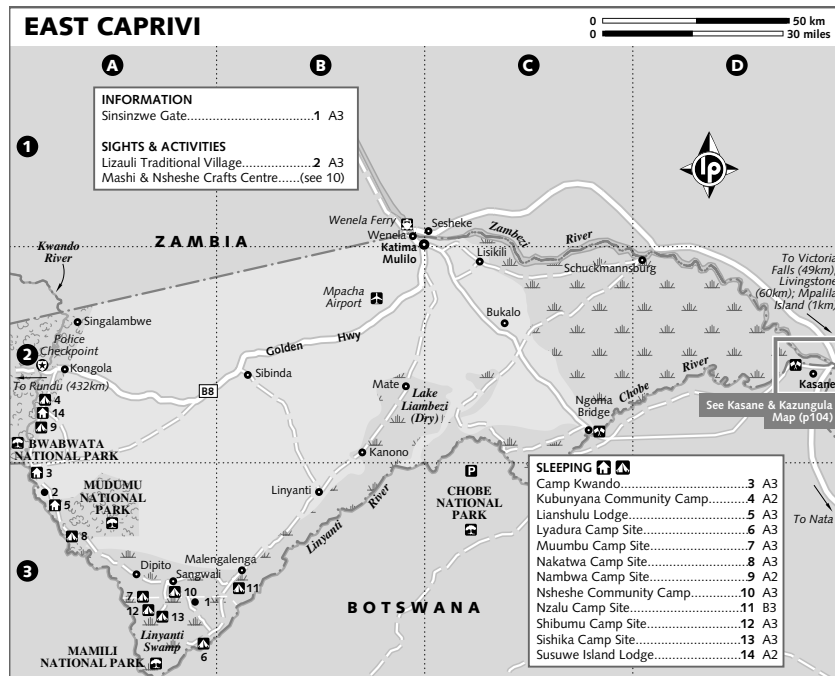
The **Caprivi Arts Centre** (Map p344; ☎ 8am-5.30pm), run by the Caprivi Art & Cultural Association, is a good place to look for local curios and crafts, including elephant and hippo wood-carvings, baskets, bowls, kitchen implements and traditional knives and spears.

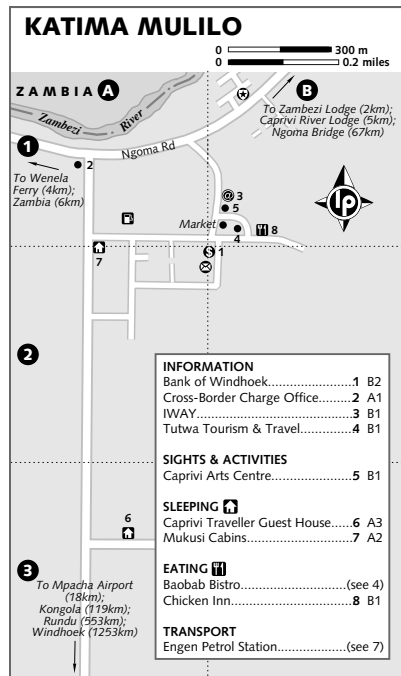
Sleeping

Caprivi Traveller Guest House (Map p344; ☎ 252788; dm US\$5, s/d US\$14/16; **P**) Although it advertises itself as a backpackers' lodge, the Caprivi Traveller 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 800m from the centre, turn left onto the nameless gravel road and continue on for 50m; the guesthouse is on the left.

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

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





Mukusi Cabins (Map p344; ☎ 253255; Engen petrol station; budget per person US\$14, s/d cabins US\$20/28; (P) (♿)) This oasis in the centre of town has everything from simple backpackers' rooms with fan to small but comfortable air-con cabins. The lovely bar-restaurant dishes up a range of unexpected options such as calamari, snails, king-clip, as well as steak and chicken standbys.

Eating

If you're self-catering, there are two supermarkets to be found in the main square, as well as an open-air market near the Caprivi Arts Centre. Proper restaurants are scarce in Katima Mulilo, though there are a couple of takeaways – the **Chicken Inn** (Map p344; meals US\$2-5) and the **Baobab Bistro** (Map p344; ☎ 252047; meals US\$2-5) both offer your standard selection of greasy-spoon fare.

Getting There & Away

The Intercape Mainliner passes Katima Mulilo en route between Windhoek and Victoria Falls (Zimbabwe). Minibuses run when full to and from Windhoek (US\$15, 1½ 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 did not receive one on entry, purchase one at the road tax office in town. For information on the Wenela ferry, see p394.

MPALILA ISLAND

☎ 066

Mpalila Island (also spelt Impalila) resembles a wedge driven between the Chobe and Zambezi Rivers. The island represents Namibia's outer limits at the 'four-corners meeting' of Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and Zambia, and actually reaches out and touches the mid-Zambezi point common to all four countries. In fact, on an area map, this international convergence resembles Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (really – check it out!).

The island, which is within easy reach of Chobe National Park and Victoria Falls, is home to a handful of exclusive lodges catering to upmarket tourists in search of luxurious isolation.

Sleeping

Prebooking for all of the accommodation listed below is essential. All lodges offer a variety of activities for guests including cruises on the Chobe River, guided wildlife drives, fishing expeditions, island walks and mokoro (traditional dugout canoe) trips. Rates include full-board as well as transfer from Kasane, Botswana (p101).

King's Den/Zambezi Queen (☎ 6250814; www.namibsun.com.na; s/d Zambezi Queen US\$85/130, s/d King's Den US\$170/275; (♿) (♿)) The King's Den consists of five rustic chalets that are perched along the Chobe River and surrounded by tropical gardens. The *Zambezi Queen* is a riverboat moored opposite Sedudu Island on the Chobe River, and features eight luxury cabins with bathrooms.

Chobe Savannah Lodge (☎ Bookings through Desert & Delta Safaris, Maun 686 1243; www.desertdelta.com; low/high season per person US\$250/325; (♿) (♿)) The sister lodge of the Chobe Game Lodge is renowned for its panoramic views of the Puku Flats. Each stylishly decorated room has a private veranda where you can spot wildlife without ever having to change out of your pyjamas.

Impalila Island Lodge (☎ in South Africa 27-11-706 7207; www.islandsinafrica.com; low/high season per person US\$305/465; (♿) (♿)) Overlooking the impressive

Mombova rapids, this stylish retreat has eight luxury chalets built on elevated decks at the water's edge. The centrepiece of the lodge is a pair of ancient baobab trees, which tower majestically over the grounds.

Ichingo Chobe River Lodge (☎ 26-76 250143; www.ichingo.com; per person US\$360) Ichingo consists of eight East African-style luxury safari tents complete with thatched bathrooms. The ambience is more relaxed and rustic than some in of its chic counterparts, though the lodge is perfect for a tranquil, worry-free escape.

Getting There & Away

Access to Mpalila Island is either by charter flight (US\$100 to US\$150) or by boat from Kasane, Botswana, though lodges will organise all transport for their booked guests.

MUDUMU NATIONAL PARK

☎ 066

Until the late 1980s, Mudumu was a hunting concession gone mad, and over the years the wildlife was depleted by both locals and trophy hunters. In 1989, Mudumu National Park and Mamili National Park were officially proclaimed in a last-ditch effort to rescue the area from environmental devastation.

In hopes of linking wildlife conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources and local economic development, the former managers of Lianshulu Lodge helped the local community establish **Lizauli Traditional Village** (Map p342; tours per person US\$2.30; ☎ 8.30am-5pm), where visitors learn about rural Caprivan life. To get there, follow the D3511, south of the Kongola petrol station.

Sleeping

Nakatwa Camp Site (Map p342; camping free; (P)) Mudumu's only camp site, 7km southeast of Lianshulu, is little more than a dry spot to pitch a tent. Although it lacks any kind of facilities, it overlooks extensive wetlands, and the price is certainly right.

Kubunyana Community Camp (Map p342; Choyi village; camping per person US\$4, fixed tents per person US\$8; (P)) This locally run camp site 7km south of Kongola petrol station is a member of Nacobta (www.nacobta.com.na), a collective of various organisations that aims to foster increased community-based tourism. Here you can rent canoes (US\$3 per hour) to paddle around the adjacent backwater or take a guided walk (US\$3.50 per hour). The camp

site is accessible in the dry season by 2WD, though the road frequently floods after the rains.

Camp Kwando (Map p342; ☎ 6860221; www.campkwando.com; camping per person US\$6.50, luxury tents s/d US\$90/140, treehouses s/d US\$165/260; (P) (♿)) Near the park entrance, 25km south of Kongola, this is a convenient base for exploring Mudumu. Whether you're camping, bedding down in a luxury tent or climbing up a tree to your bungalow in the sky, you'll be able to relax and unwind at this secluded lodge. Rates include meals and activities.

Lianshulu Lodge (Map p342; ☎ 254317; www.lianshulu.com.na; per person US\$195; (P) (♿)) Occupying a private concession inside the boundaries of Mudumu National Park, Lianshulu is one of the most beautifully situated accommodations in Namibia. The lodge is dominated by an impressive bar and dining area that overlooks the surrounding wetlands. Rates include meals and activities. To reach the lodge, follow the D3511 about 40km south of Kongola and turn west on the signposted track. Rates include meals and activities.

MAMILI NATIONAL PARK

☎ 066

Wild and little visited, 320-sq-km Mamili National Park is Namibia's equivalent of the Okavango Delta, and when there's water, the park combines river channels, delightful wetlands and wildlife-rich islands. The forested areas brim with stands of sycamore figs, jackalberry, leadwood and sausage trees, and are fringed by vleis and reed-choked marshes. Mamili's crowning glory is its bird life – more than 430 species have been recorded. The best time to visit is from September to early November.

Accommodation in the park is limited to the Lyadura and Nzalu wilderness camp sites in the eastern part of the park and Muumbu, Shibumu and Sishika in the west (see Map p342), but no facilities are available and campers must be self-sufficient. Camping permits (US\$3.50 per person and US\$3.50 per vehicle) are available at Sinsinzwe Gate or from the **MET office** (☎ 253027, 253341; Katima Mulilo). Access is by 4WD only.

At Sangwali village, north of the park, Nacobta runs the **Mashi & Nsheshe Crafts centre** (Map p342), which produces and markets Caprivan wood carvings, basketry and jewellery. It also operates the **Nsheshe Community**

Camp (Map p342; ☎ 696999; PO Box 1707, Ngweze; camping per person US\$3.50), 1km north of Sangwali.

OTJOZONDJUPA REGION

☎ 067

The eastern part of Otjozondjupa region is commonly referred to as Bushmanland, a pejorative term that unfortunately seems incapable of dying away. This largely flat landscape of scrub desert lies at the edge of the Kalahari, and is part of the traditional homeland of the Ju/hoansi San. Following a spurt in worldwide interest in the San, there has been a recent increase in tourist traffic throughout the region. Although Westerners typically perceive the San as a self-sufficient hunter-gatherer society, witnessing the stark reality of their modern lifestyle is a sobering experience.

Fortunately, a number of influential Westerners ranging from academics and journalists to development workers and cultural survivalists have long been interested in the advocacy of indigenous rights throughout Southern Africa. In Northern Namibia, US film-maker John Marshall and his British colleague, Claire Marshall, established the Nyae Nyae Development Fund in the late 1980s to encourage the Ju/hoansi San to return to their traditional lands. Over the years, however, the foundation has suffered from a number of ideological conflicts, including to what extent tourism should be fostered in the region.

If you're thinking about whether or not to visit Otjozondjupa, please consider the impact that you might have on the San community. On one hand, revenue from tourism can play a vital role in the development of the region, particularly if you are buying locally produced crafts or paying for the services of a San guide. However, Otjozondjupa is not a human zoo, though unfortunately indigenous tourism is usually an exploitative force. If you do decide to visit, please remember that Western interests have already caused an irreversible amount of damage to the region; be aware of your surroundings, and be sensitive to the plight of the San.

Information

Tourism is regulated by the **Nyae Nyae Conservancy** (☎ 244011; nndfn@iafrica.com.na; entry per person US\$3.50), which also collects fees and activities charges from visitors. You can arrange activi-

ties such as hunting with the San (US\$8) and gathering wild foods (US\$4). Fees are per guide (up to three or four guides); there will also be a fee for the translator (US\$15 per group). In the evening, you can experience traditional music and dancing by up to 15 performers for US\$33. Book through the Nyae Nyae office during regular business hours.

Sights

The dry hard-crust landscape supports baobabs, including several giants. The imaginatively named **Grootboom** (Big Tree) has a circumference of over 30m, and the historic **Dorslandboom** (Thirst Land Tree) bears carvings made by the Dorsland trekkers who camped here on their 1891 trek to Angola. The immense **Holboom** (Hollow Tree) grows near the village of **Tjokwe** (also spelled Djokhoe).

The region's diminutive service centre, **Tsumkwe**, provides little more than basic groceries, snacks and a tourist lodge.

Sleeping & Eating

The conservancy has set up five very basic camp sites (US\$5 per person) beneath notable baobab trees: Makuri, Kremetart/N=amapan, !O'baha, Holboom/Tjokwe and !A=0. Water is normally available in adjacent villages, but otherwise, campers must be self-sufficient. Avoid building fires near the baobabs, as it damages the tree roots.

Omatoko Valley Rest Camp (camping per person in tents/thatched shelters US\$2.50/3) Outside the conservancy at the junction of the C44 and D3306, this rest camp has solar power, a water pump, hot showers and a caretaker. It offers both hunting/gathering trips (US\$3 per person) and traditional music presentations (US\$20 per group).

Camping Anaglù/oo (Anaglù/oo Village; camping per person US\$3) This village has a nice little camp site with picnic areas, rubbish barrels, firewood, water, a pit toilet and showers. It lies 11km west of Tsumkwe along the C44, then 1km north.

Bushmanland Safari Camp (☎ 061-246708; camping per person US\$6) This wilderness outpost is located about 80km west of Tsumkwe, and offers basic meals, fuel, mechanical repairs and a small shop.

Tsumkwe Lodge (☎ 244028; www.tsumkwel.iway.na; camping per person US\$9, s/d bungalows US\$65/105, full board US\$95/170) The only tourist lodge in the

area is run by Arno and Estelle, who have lived in the area for several years and are well respected by the local communities. From Tsumkwe, go 1.5km south of the crossroads, turn right at the Ministry of Housing and continue for 500m.

There's a restaurant at Tsumkwe Lodge, and Tsumkwe Winkel sells limited groceries, but beyond that, you must be self-sufficient.

Getting There & Away

Remote Tsumkwe is surprisingly accessible on the Thursday Star Line bus from Grootfontein (US\$8, 6½ hours), but beyond there, you'll need to either have a private vehicle or be part of an organised tour.

There are no sealed roads in the region, and only the C44 is passable to low-clearance vehicles. Petrol is sometimes available at the Bushmanland Safari Camp and the Tsumkwe Lodge, though it's best to carry a few jerry cans with you. If you're planning to explore the bush around Tsumkwe, it is recommended that you hire a local guide and travel as part of a convoy.

The Dobe border crossing to Botswana requires 4WD and extra fuel to reach the petrol stations at Maun or Etsha 6, which are accessed by a difficult sand track through northwestern Botswana.

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 one moves 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.

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. Although 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 US\$1.80, plus per car US\$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, which is 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 comprises enormous granite domes.

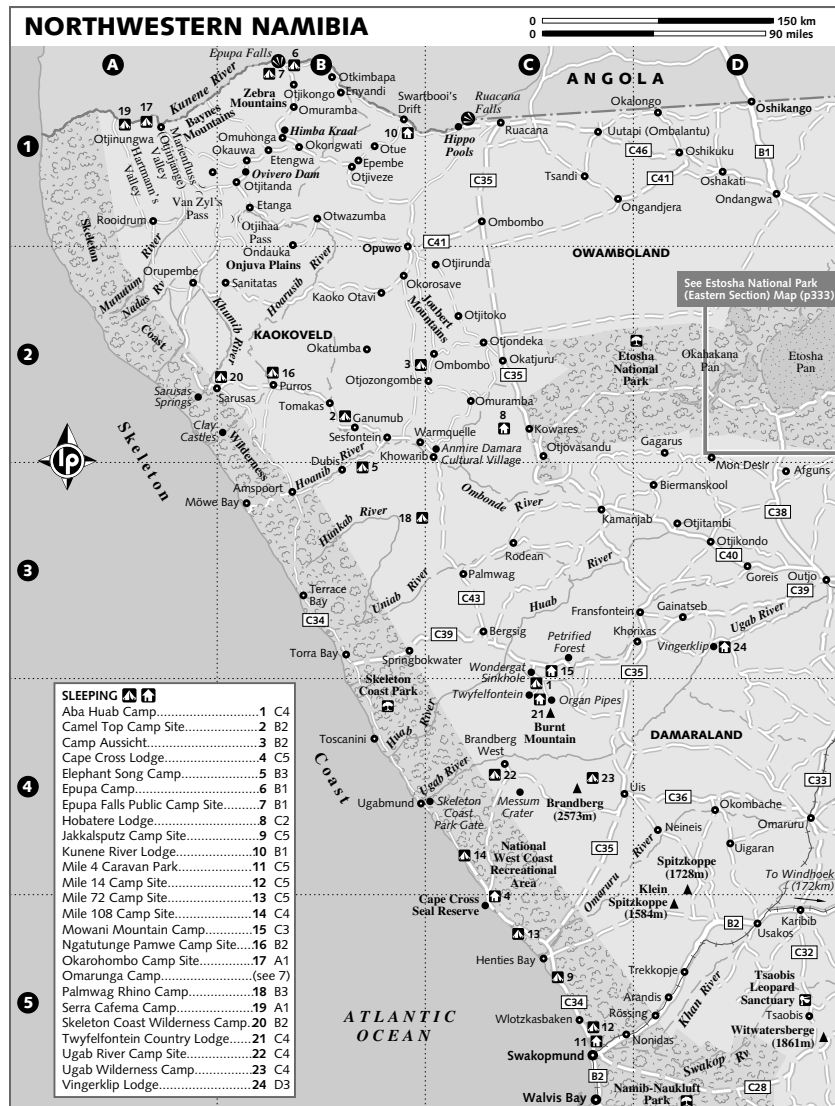
Around the massif are dotted a number of beautiful wild **camp sites** (☎ 530879; camping per person US\$4; P), which are maintained by the local community. Near the entrance, a small shop sells staples and a range of local rocks and minerals. Water (US\$0.05/L) is scarce; it's wise to bring all you'll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

There's no public transport, 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.

Ugab Wilderness Camp (Map p348; camping per person US\$4, plus per vehicle US\$2.50, s/d tents US\$18/26; (P)), a locally run camp site, is a member of Nacobta (www.nacobta.com.na) and is an excellent base for exploring the nearby hills. The turnoff is signposted from the D2359.

Uis

(P) 064

The company town of Uis (Khoikhoi for 'Bad Water') sprang up in 1958 when the South African corporation Iscor started a large-scale tin mine in the area. However, the mine closed in 1991 due to low world tin prices, and today Uis appears to be a ghost town in the making.

For travellers, Uis is the only town of any size near the Brandberg, and is a good place to fill up on petrol and stock up on supplies.

A worthwhile Uis-based venture is the **Däurb Craft & Brandberg Community Tourism Project** (☎ 504030), which conducts guided tours to the Brandberg rock-art sites and educates travellers about the Damara culture. For information about the project and tours, contact Tertius !Oeamseb at the project.

The **Haus Lizenstein** (☎ 504052; lizen@iway.na; camping US\$5, r per person incl breakfast US\$35; (P)) is an amenable family-run place at the edge of town. You can also try the **White Lady B&B** (☎ 504102; nicovydk@iway.na; camping per person US\$5, r per person US\$40; (P)) which occupies an inconspicuously green compound with a welcoming pool and bird-friendly water hole.

Khorixas

(P) 067

Although it's the administrative capital of Damaraland, Khorixas serves mainly as a refuelling spot and a supply stop. You may want to visit **Khorixas Community Craft Centre** (☎ 232154; Main St), a self-help cooperative, which provides an outlet for local artists. The town holds an annual **arts festival** in May.

iGowati Lodge (☎ 331592; camping per person US\$4, bungalows per person incl breakfast US\$60), opposite the petrol station, is a pricey but comfortable lodge that provides a splash of colour and the best meals in town.

Star Line has a Sunday bus from Khorixas to Henties Bay (US\$7, 4½ hours), Swakopmund (US\$9, six hours) and Walvis Bay (US\$10, 6½ hours); it returns on Friday. Combis travel the same route several times daily.

Petrified Forest

The Petrified Forest, 40km west of Khorixas, is an area of open veld scattered with petrified tree trunks up to 34m long and 6m in circumference, which are estimated to be around 260 million years old. The original trees belonged to an ancient group of cone-bearing plants that are known as *Gymnospermae*, which includes such modern plants as conifers, cycads and welwitschias. Because of the lack of root or branch remnants, it's thought that the fossilised trunks were transported to the site in a flood.

Admission is US\$4 per person, and guides are compulsory (tips are their only income); plan on US\$2 per group for the 500m walking

tour. At the entrance there's a large thatched picnic shelter and a small curio shop selling palm-ivory pendants, woodcarvings, local crystals and gems.

The Petrified Forest, which is signposted 'Versteende Woud', lies on the C39. En route from Khorixas, watch for the prominent sandstone formation known as 'the Ship', which is visible just south of the C39, 52km west of Khorixas.

Twyfelfontein

(P) 067

At the head of a grassy valley, **Twyfelfontein** (admission per person US\$1, plus per vehicle US\$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.

Nearly sites of interest include the **Wondergat sinkhole**, the volcanic **Burnt Mountain** and the very worthwhile **Organ Pipes** dolerite (basalt) columns. There's no public transport here; access is only by private vehicle or with an organised tour.

SLEEPING

Aba Huab Camp (Map p348; ☎ 697981; camping per person US\$4, exclusive camp sites per person US\$6, double tents US\$7, s/d A-frame US\$27/42; (P)) This popular camp site is attractively perched beside the Aba Huab riverbed immediately north of the Twyfelfontein turn-off.

Twyfelfontein Country Lodge (Map p348; ☎ 374750; www.namibialodges.com; r per person incl breakfast US\$115; (P) (P) (P)) Over the hill from Twyfelfontein, this architectural wonder 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.

Mowani Mountain Camp (Map p348; ☎ 232009; www.mowani.com; standard/luxury tent per person with full board US\$310/345; (P) (P)) There's little to prepare you for this beautiful lodge – hidden among a jumble of boulders, its domed buildings seem

to disappear into the landscape and you don't see it until you're there. The mountain camp is located 5km north of the Twyfelfontein turn-off from the D2612.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There's no public transport in the area and little traffic. Turn off the C39 73km west of Khorixas, turn south on the D3254 and continue 15km to a right turning signposted Twyfelfontein. It's 5km to the site.

Vingerklip

The unusual Vingerklip lies on the Bertram farm, 54km east of Khorixas on the C39, then 21km south on the D2743. This towering 35m-high pillar of limestone is an erosional remnant of a plateau formed more than 15 million years ago.

Vingerklip Lodge (Map p348; ☎/fax 061-255344; vingerkl@mweb.com.na; PO Box 11550, Windhoek; s/d US\$85/130; 📍) affords spectacular views that include the Vingerklip itself, and the panorama from the bar recalls the famous scenes of Monument Valley in old John Ford westerns.

Sesfontein

☎ 067
Sesfontein (Six Springs), which seems reminiscent of the Algerian Sahara, is built around a petrol station and a 1901 German fort. You'll

find food staples at a small shop featuring a painting of a Score *mielie* meal.

Camel Top Camp Site (Map p348; camping per person US\$3.50; 📍) is a well-run community camping ground with hot showers and large, shady trees. It's located 2km west of town, then 1km north of the road.

Although accommodation at **Camp Aussicht** (Map p348; ☎ 064-203581, ask for radio 217; nomad@namibnet.com; camping per person US\$4.50, d US\$25; 📍) is quite simple, the friendliness, the views and the geology are sure to inspire. Turn east off the D3704 at the Camp Aussicht signpost, 55km north of Sesfontein; the final 5km requires a high-clearance vehicle.

Ever fancy spending the night in a German fort in the middle of the desert? At **Fort Sesfontein** (☎ 065-275534; www.fort-sesfontein.com; camping US\$6, r per person incl breakfast US\$100; 📍 🚽), you and 63 other guests can live out all your bizarre colonial fantasies.

The road between Palmwag and Sesfontein is good gravel, and you'll only have problems if the Hoanib River is flowing.

KAOKOVELD

☎ 065
The northwest corner of the country represents Namibia at its most primeval. The Kaokoveld (also known as the Kaokoland) is a vast repository of desert mountains that is crossed only by sandy tracks laid down by

the South African Defence Force (SAFDF). It is one of the least-developed regions of the country, and is oft described as one of the last true wildernesses in Southern Africa. It is also home to the Himba (p352), 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 in the region and hitching is near impossible, so the best way to explore Kaokoveld is with a well-outfitted 4WD vehicle or an organised camping safari (see p397). In the dry season, the routes from Opuwo (via Swartbooi's Drift) and Sesfontein to Purros may be passable with high-clearance 2WD vehicles, otherwise, you'll need 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.

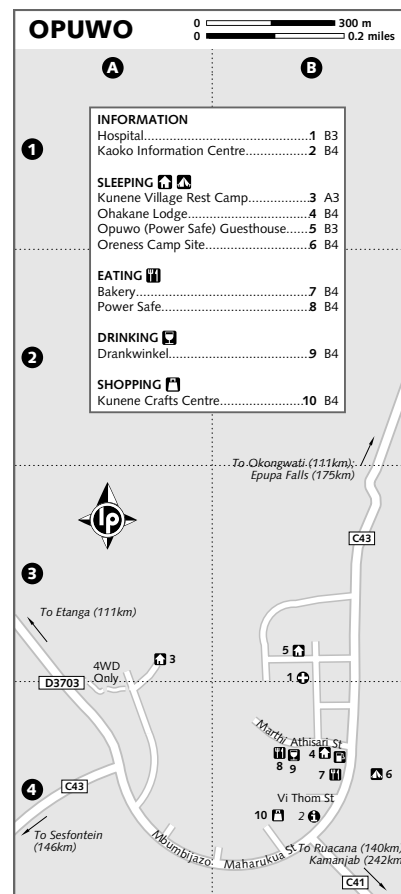
To meet local artisans and purchase arts and crafts, see the **Kunene Crafts Centre** (☎ 273209; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat).

KK and Kemuu, the friendly guys at the **Kaoko Information Centre** (☎ 273420; gnn@iway.na; PO Box 217; ☎ 8am-6pm), provide direction and guides for your trip through the Kaokoveld region. Ohakane Lodge runs half-day visits to Himba villages (from US\$22) and camping trips around Kaokoveld, including Epupa Falls (from US\$105 per day). Book tours at least a week in advance.

SLEEPING & EATING

Opuwo (Power Safe) Guesthouse (☎ 273036; camping per person US\$4, dm US\$9; 📍) 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).

Oreness Camp site (☎ 273572; camping per person US\$4, bungalows per person with shared bathroom US\$15; 📍) This French-owned camping ground occupies a compound immediately east of the centre,



and is relaxed and comfortable choice featuring a shady camp site and rustic bungalows.

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

Ohakane Lodge (☎ 273031; ohakane@iafrica.com.na; s/d US\$40/55; 📍 🚽 📺) The most established lodge in town is your best bet if you need modern amenities such as air-con, cable TV, Western-style furniture and a pool.

You'll find the Opuwo equivalent of quick culinary delights at the bakery beside the petrol station on the main road, which sells

SAVE THE RHINO TRUST

The group **Save the Rhino Trust** (SRT; www.rhino-trust.org.na) was formed by a concerned group of individuals in order to cease illegal poaching. Since the trust was formed, it has actively collaborated with both the Namibian government and local communities in order to provide security for the rhino, monitor population size and bring benefit to the locals through conservation and tourism initiatives.

Save the Rhino Trust operates in Damaraland, a sparsely populated region that is lacking in resources and deficient in employment opportunities. As a result, SRT has worked to include locals in conservation efforts in the hope that they will benefit from the preservation of the species. This is especially important as Damaraland does not have a formal conservation status, and thus does not receive government funding. To date, SRT has successfully protected the only free-ranging black rhino population in the world, and allowed the group to expand in size. In fact, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has identified the population as the fastest growing in Africa.

For visitors interesting in tracking black rhinos through the bush, SRT operates the exclusive **Palmwag Rhino Camp** (Map p348; ☎ 061-225178; www.wilderness-safaris.com; s/d luxury tent low season US\$445/630, high season US\$530/800), a joint-venture with Wilderness Safaris. Accommodation is in eight East Africa-style linen tents with en-suite toilets and hot-water bucket showers. Rates include all meals, wildlife drives and rhino-tracking excursions. Prebooking is essential, and 4WD transfers and air charters are available.

BEYOND THE CLICHÉS: A TRAVELLER'S PERSPECTIVE *Ian Ketcheson*

It's hard to write about the Himba in a way that doesn't sound like a cliché or a bad *National Geographic* article. They are the widely photographed subject of many travel brochures and glossy coffee-table books. They are often portrayed as an 'early people' who have lived untouched by outside influence for thousands of years. Their practice of smearing red ochre over their bodies, and their not-so-modest attire of leather miniskirt and loin cloths, has also made them quite popular on the tourist circuit for those wishing to travel to a remote corner of the continent for a glimpse of 'traditional' Africa.

While these stereotypes might seem at first glance to be accurate, the reality is much more complex. The Himba have only lived in this part of Namibia for about 200 years. After being on the losing end of many ethnic battles during the 18th and 19th centuries, this group of people managed some success on the battlefield in the late 19th century, stole a bunch of cattle and goats, and headed off to the remote northwestern corner of the country where they could finally get some peace and quiet – at least until the tourists started turning up.

As for their attire, it's just a sign of the lack of success that Christian missionaries have had in colonising the Himba. One of the top priorities of missionaries across Namibia (and beyond) was to convince people that the first thing a 'civilised' person could do was to put on hot, uncomfortable and expensive clothes. After they had 'proper' clothes, all they had to do was get a 'real' (read Christian) name, exchange their mistresses for wives, and sit through long church services. Next stop, heaven.

Although the Himba are also widely portrayed as victims of the steady march of modernisation, their leaders have shown themselves to be quite adept at dealing with the outside world. In the late 1990s the Namibian government was moving ahead with plans to dam Epupa Falls in order to reduce the country's dependence on imported electricity. The plan would have flooded large areas of Himba land and posed a major threat to their way of life. Chief Kapika, the Himba leader for the area bordering the falls, with the assistance of some of the top lawyers in the country, mounted a campaign of opposition to the scheme that included a high-profile trip to Europe where he spoke to foreign investors, nongovernmental organisations and activists. Chief Kapika quite successfully managed to shine an international spotlight on his cause, attracting attention and generating support to help in their fight against the government. In recent years, the dam proposal has fallen through, and it's unlikely that the government will raise the issue again in the near future.

Ian Ketcheson lived in Namibia for two years in the village of Odibo.

doughnuts, yogurt, beer, bread and renowned sausage rolls. The best-stocked supermarket is the Power Safe, and the Drankwinkel next door sells soft drinks and alcohol.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There's currently no public transport to Opuwo, but minibuses may be hired from Ruacana or Otjojo for a negotiated rate. The most economical option for visiting Opuwo and the surrounding Himba villages would be a budget safari from Windhoek; a recommended company is Enyandi Safaris (see p397).

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 flow, the pools above the falls make fabulous natural Jacuzzis. Here you are safe from crocodiles in the eddies and rapids, but be sure to hang on to 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.

SLEEPING & EATING

Epupa Falls public camp site (Map p348; camping per person US\$4; ☐) This enclosed camp, right at the falls, can get very crowded, but it has

hot showers and flush toilets that are maintained by the local community. There's a less-crowded overflow section east of its neighbour, Omarunga Camp.

Epupa Camp (Map p348; ☎ 695102, reservations 061-232740; epupa@mweb.com.na; PO Box 26078, Windhoek; s/d US\$135/205) This place, 800m upstream from the falls, was originally used as an engineering camp for a now-shelved hydro project. It has been converted into a beautifully situated camp where rates include tented accommodation with meals, drinks and activities (including Himba visits, sundowner hikes, bird-watching walks and trips to rock-art sites).

Epupa village now boasts a real supermarket where visitors and locals alike buy food staples or gather to socialise and drink a cold beer in the shade.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

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.

Swartbooi's Drift

☎ 065

From Ruacana, a rough track heads west along the Kunene to Swartbooi's Drift, where a monument commemorates the Dorsland trekkers who passed en route to their future homesteads in Angola.

Kunene River Lodge (Map p348; ☎ 274300; www.kuneneriverlodge.com; camping per adult US\$12, s/d hut US\$65/100, s/d hut incl breakfast, s/d US\$110/150; ☐ ☎), 5km east of Swartbooi's Drift, makes a lovely, leafy riverside stop. You can hire canoes (US\$12), fishing gear (US\$8.50) and mountain bikes (US\$12), and organise a range of quadbiking tours (from US\$47) and white-water rafting trips on the Kunene River (from US\$47).

The Northwest Corner

West of Epupa Falls lies the Kaokoveld of travellers' dreams: stark, rugged desert peaks, vast landscapes, sparse scrubby vegetation, drought-resistant wildlife and semipermanent settlements of beehive-shaped Himba huts. This region, which is contiguous with

the Skeleton Coast Wilderness, has been designated as the Kaokoveld Conservation Area.

A large number of 4WD tracks cross the area, but some that appear on maps are now impassable, or may be used only during dry periods (mainly due to flooding of the potentially raging Hoarusib River).

Obvious destinations include the wild Otjinjange (also called Marienflüss) and Hartmann's Valleys, both of which end at the Kunene River. From Okongwati, follow the westward route through Etengwa to Otjitanda, where you can choose between the dramatic and treacherously steep Van Zyl's Pass (which may only be traversed from east to west) or head south over the equally beautiful but much easier Otjihaa Pass towards the scenic desert country around Orupembe. About 9km north of Orupembe, a track turns north and follows a broad valley to a fork where you can choose between Hartmann's and Otjinjange Valleys; note that wild camping is prohibited in either valley.

An easier but equally spectacular route leads westward from Sesfontein through a series of desert valleys to the tiny settlement of Purros, on the Hoarusib River. A logical circuit heads south from Purros to the river junction known as Amspoort, then northeast back to Sesfontein via the Hoanib riverbed. Note that the Hoanib lies within the Palmwag Concession, and access costs US\$7 per vehicle plus US\$2.50 per person per day, payable at Elephant Song Camp. Wild camping is possible anywhere away from the Hoanib riverbed.

SLEEPING

Okarohombo Camp Site (Map p348; Otjunungwa; camping per person US\$4; ☐) This community-run camp site is located at the mouth of the Otjinjange Valley. Facilities are limited to long-drop toilets and a water tap, and travellers must be self-sufficient.

Elephant Song Camp (Map p348; ☎ 064-403829; Hoanib River track, PO Box 339, Swakopmund; camping per person US\$4, bungalows per person US\$8; ☐) In the Palmwag Concession a very rough 25km down the Hoanib River from Sesfontein, the Elephant Song offers hot showers, great views, hiking, bird-watching and the chance to see rare desert elephants. There is a bar, but otherwise, you'll have to be self-sufficient. Access is by 4WD only.

Ngatutunge Pamwe Camp Site (Map p348; camping per person US\$4, double bungalows US\$20; (P) (♿)) Perched along the Hoarusib River in Purros, this community-run camping area is a real surprise – there are hot showers, flush toilets, well-appointed bungalows, a communal kitchen and (believe it or not!) a pool.

Serra Cafema Camp (Map p348; ☎ 061-225178; www.wilderness-safaris.com; 4-day fly-in/s/d US\$3900/5900; (♿)) This exclusive luxury camp is centred on a grove of Albida trees overlooking the Kunene River, and consists of eight canvas and thatched chalets with en-suite bathrooms. Although you're going to pay dearly for the privilege to stay at Serra Cafema Camp, the unworldly isolation of the camp almost justifies the price tag. Advance bookings are mandatory.

SKELETON COAST

The term 'Skeleton Coast' is derived from the treacherous nature of the coast – a foggy region with rocky and sandy coastal shallows that has long been a graveyard for unwarly ships and their crews. Early Portuguese sailors called it *As Areias do Inferno* (the 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

☎ 064

A 200km-long, 25km-wide strip from Swakopmund to the Ugab River, the National West Coast Recreation Area makes up the southern end of the Skeleton Coast. It's extremely popular with anglers, and no-one needs a permit to visit.

Most visitors head for the **Cape Cross Seal Reserve** (Map p348; admission per person US\$3 & per vehicle US\$3; (♿) 10am-5pm), a breeding reserve for thousands of Cape fur seals. There's a basic snack bar with public toilets. No pets or motorcycles

are permitted and visitors may not cross the low barrier between the seal-viewing area and the rocks where the colony lounges.

For keen hikers, a new **40km trail** begins at the southern end of Henties Bay and follows the coast south to Jakkalsputz (Jackals' Well), then back north to the Omaruru River Mouth. Highlights include the sand dunes, freshwater springs and fields of desert lichen that flank the route.

SLEEPING

Along the salt road in the National West Coast Recreation Area are several bleak beach camp sites used mainly by sea anglers. Basic camp sites (see Map p348) at Mile 14 and Jakkalsputz cost US\$15 for two people plus US\$2 for each additional person, including showers and drinking water, while Mile 72 and Mile 108 cost US\$12 for two people plus US\$2 for each additional person, without water.

Myl 4 Caravan Park (Map p348; ☎ 064-461781; camping per site US\$4, plus per person US\$2, plus per vehicle US\$2 & for electricity US\$1, 6-bed bungalows US\$45, 2-bed self-catering r US\$15, 4-/6-bed self-catering flats US\$30/45) This bleak beachfront camping ground 6km north of Swakopmund is exposed to the wind, sand and drizzle. Having said that, it's definitely one of the world's more unusual places to pitch a tent.

De Duine Country Hotel (☎ 061-374750; www.namibia lodges.com; per person incl breakfast US\$45; (P) (♿)) The most established hotel in Henties Bay sits on the coast, though not a single room has a sea view – go figure that! However, the German-colonial style property does feature rooms with swimming pool and garden views.

Cape Cross Lodge (Map p348; ☎ 064-694012; www.capecross.org; s/d from US\$175/265; (P) (♿)) The odd architecture is self-described as a cross between Cape Dutch and fishing-village style, but it's quite amenable and well sheltered from the odiferous seal colony. The lodge is located just before the official reserve entrance.

Skeleton Coast Park

At Ugabmund, 110km north of Cape Cross, the salt road crosses into the Skeleton Coast Park. Only the zone south of the Hoanib River is open to individual travellers, and everyone requires a permit (US\$2.50 per person and US\$2.50 per vehicle). To reach the accommodation options at Terrace Bay or Torra Bay, you must pass the Ugabmund gate before 3pm or the Springbokwater gate before 5pm.

Day visits are not allowed, but transit permits (US\$2.50 per person and US\$2.50 per vehicle) for the road between the Ugabmund and Springbokwater gates are available at the Springbokwater and Ugabmund checkpoints. You must enter through one gate before 1pm and exit through the other before 3pm the same day. Transit permits can't be used to visit Torra Bay or Terrace Bay, but in December and January transit travellers may refuel in Torra Bay.

All park accommodation must be pre-booked through NWR in either Windhoek or Swakopmund.

UGAB RIVER HIKING TRAIL

The 50km Ugab River guided hiking trail crosses the coastal plain before climbing into hills and following a double loop through fields of lichen and past caves, natural springs and unusual geological formations. Groups of three to eight people can leave from Ugabmund at 9am on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. It costs US\$24 per person and must be prebooked through the NWR in Windhoek (p315). Hikers must provide and carry their own food and camping gear.

TORRA BAY

The **camping ground** (camping for 4 people US\$12; (♿) Dec & Jan only) here is open to coincide with Namibian school holidays. Petrol, water, firewood and basic supplies are available, and campers may use the restaurant at Terrace Bay.

TERRACE BAY

The more luxurious **Terrace Bay Resort** (s/d US\$60/85, self-catering ste for up to 8 people US\$265; (P)) attracts mainly surf anglers, but there's also a nice line of dunes to the north.

UGAB RIVER SAVE THE RHINO TRUST CAMP

Located just outside the Skeleton Coast Park, the **Ugab River Camp Site** (Map p348; ugab@rhino-trust.org.na; camping per person US\$4; (P)) is administered by the Save the Rhino Trust (see the boxed text, p350). This remote landscape is truly enigmatic, and those who've visited have only glowing comments. It's also one of the best places in Namibia to see the elusive black rhino – multiday rhino-tracking expeditions cost US\$90 per day. To get there, turn east onto the D2303, 67km north of Cape Cross; it's then 76km to the camp.

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. The most commonly visited sites lie around **Sarusas Springs**, near Wilderness Safaris' Skeleton Coast Wilderness Camp (Map p348). Other sites of interest include the coastal dunes, the **Cabo Frio seal colony**, the Clay Castles in **Hoarusib Canyon** and the **Roaring Sands**.

A lone park ranger at **Möwe Bay** maintains a small museum of shipwreck detritus and newspaper clippings recounting the stories of shipwreck survivors.

SLEEPING

Skeleton Coast Wilderness Camp (Map p348; ☎ 061-274500; www.wilderness-safaris.com; s/d for 4 days US\$2586/4372, for 5 days US\$2966/4932) Located close to Sarusas Springs, this exclusive luxury retreat is the most remote camp in the Wilderness Safari collection. 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.

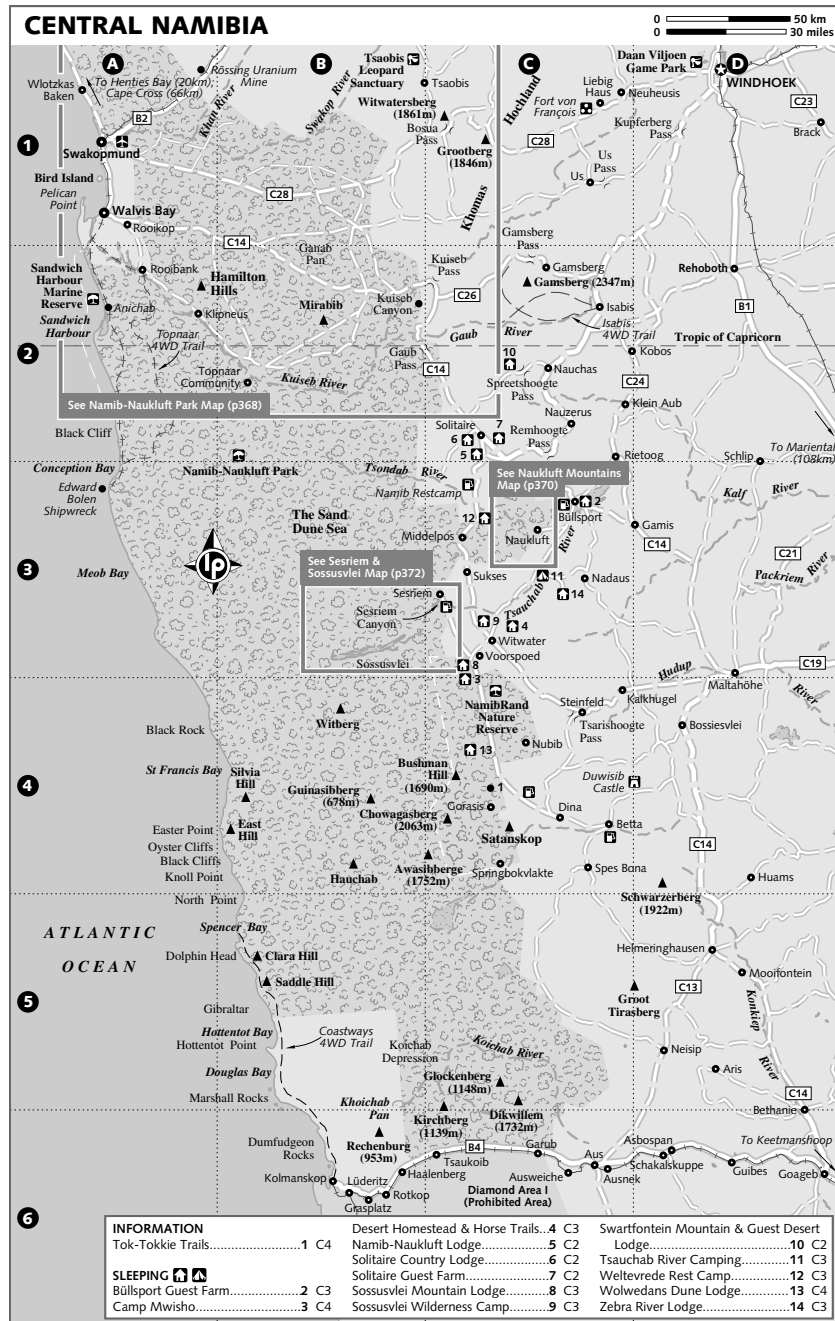
CENTRAL NAMIBIA

Central 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 and Botswana are often surprised by the lushness of the Kalahari, the soaring sand dunes of the Namib rarely disappoint. Much of the surface between Walvis Bay and Lüderitz is covered by enormous linear dunes, which roll back from the sea towards the inland gravel plains that are occasionally interrupted by lone mountain ranges.

SWAKOPMUND

☎ 064

Often described as being more German than Germany, Swakopmund (population 25,000) is a quirky mix of German-Namibian residents and overseas German tourists, who feel right at



home with the town's pervasive *Gemütlichkeit*, a distinctively German appreciation of comfort and hospitality. With its seaside promenades, half-timbered homes and colonial-era buildings, it seems that only the wind-blown sand and the palm trees distinguish Swakopmund from holiday towns along Germany's North Sea and Baltic coasts.

Swakopmund is Namibia's most popular holiday destination, and it attracts surfers, anglers and beach lovers from all over Southern Africa. However, Swakopmund has recently reinvented itself as the adventure-sports capital of Namibia, and now 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

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.

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

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 405731)

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

Police (☎ 10111)

INTERNET ACCESS

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

LAUNDRY

Swakopmund Laundrette (☎ 402135; 15 Swakop St; wash up to 6kg US\$1.30, dry US\$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.

MONEY

The most convenient option for changing money is the **Bureau de Change** (Sam Nujoma Ave; ☎ 7am-7pm), which charges no commission to change travellers cheques – the catch is that you'll need the slips verifying proof of purchase.

POST

Main post office (Garnison St)

TELEPHONE

Main post office (Garnison St) Sells rechargeable telephone cards and also offers fax services (per page US\$0.50, plus per telephone unit US\$0.15).

TOURIST INFORMATION

Namib i Information Centre (☎ /fax 403129; swainfo@iafrica.com.na; Sam Nujoma Ave, PO Box 829; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon & 3.30-5.30pm Sat, 9.30am-noon & 3.30-5pm Sun) This centre is helpful. **Namibia Wildlife Resorts** (NWR; ☎ 204172; fax 402697; Woermannhaus; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) This office is also useful, selling 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 office or in Windhoek (p315).

Sights

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Swakopmund is brimming with picturesque historic buildings; a good source of information is *Swakopmund – A Chronicle of the Town's People, Places and Progress*, sold at the museum and in local bookshops.

The imposing, fortlike **Alte Kaserne** (Old Barracks; Bismarck St) was built in 1906 by the railway company, which got Swakopmund's economic ball rolling by completing the pier two years earlier. It now houses the **Hostelling International Hostel**.

The **Kaiserliches Bezirksgericht** (State House; Am Zoll St), which originally served as the District Magistrate's Court, was designed by Carl Schmidt in 1901 and constructed the following year. It was extended in 1905 and a tower was added in 1945. After WWI, the building was modified to serve as an official holiday home of the territorial administrator.

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TO SWAKOPMUND

- To Airport (50km): 1
- To Beach (50km): 2
- To Beach Lounge (1km): 3
- To Sea Breeze Guesthouse (4.5km): 4
- To Vineda Point (2km): 5

TO SWAKOPMUND

- From Airport (50km): 1
- From Beach (50km): 2
- From Beach Lounge (1km): 3
- From Sea Breeze Guesthouse (4.5km): 4
- From Vineda Point (2km): 5

In keeping with that tradition, it's now the official Swakopmund residence of the executive president.

Designed by Otto Ertl, the gabled **Altes Amtsgericht** (Garrison St) was constructed in 1908 as a private school. However, when the funds ran out, the government took over the project and requisitioned it as a magistrates' court. In the 1960s it functioned as a school dormitory, and now houses municipal offices. Just so its identity isn't left to question, the words *Altes Amtsgericht* are painted across the building.

The ornate **train station** (Bahnhof) was built in 1901 and declared a national monument in 1972. It was originally constructed as the terminus for the Kaiserliche Eisenbahn Verwaltung (Imperial Railway Authority) railway, which connected Swakopmund with Windhoek. When this state railway was closed in 1910, the building assumed the role as the main station for the narrow-gauge mine railway between Swakopmund and Otavi. It now houses the Swakopmund Hotel & Entertainment Centre.

The 1906 baroque-style **Hohenzollern building** (nr Moltke & Libertine Sts) was originally intended to be a hotel. Its outlandish décor is crowned by a fibreglass cast of Atlas supporting the world, which replaced the precarious cement version that graced the roof prior to renovations in 1988.

Especially picturesque is the 1905 **Woermannhaus** (Bismarck St), which over the years has served as the main offices for the Damara & Namaqua Trading Company, a hostel for merchant sailors, a school dormitory, and now, the **public library**. The prominent Damara tower once served as a water tower and a landmark for ships at sea and traders arriving by ox-wagon from the interior. In the 1920s it fell into disrepair, but was declared a national monument and restored in 1976. It now contains the **Swakopmund Military Museum** (Bismarck St; admission US\$1.30; ☎ 10am-noon Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat, 3-6pm Mon-Thu) and a gallery of historic paintings, and the **tower** (adult/child US\$1.30/0.80) affords a splendid panorama over the town; stop by the library and pick up a key.

The impressive **Alte Gefängnis** (Old Prison; Nor-dring) was designed by architect Heinrich Bause and dates back to 1909. If you didn't know this building was a prison, you'd swear it was either an early German train station or a health-spa hotel. In fact, the main building was used only for staff housing, while the

prisoners occupied less opulent quarters to one side. Note that it still serves as a prison and is considered a sensitive structure, so photography is not permitted.

The colonial company Otavi Minen und Eisenbahn-Gesellschaft (OMEG) oversaw the rich mines around Otavi and Tsumeb in North-Central Namibia. As there was a connection to the coast by a narrow-gauge railway in the early 1900s, the company also maintained an office in Swakopmund. Until 1910, the **OMEG House** (Sam Nujoma Ave) served as a warehouse. Next door is the **Otavi Bahnhof**, the old train station for the Tsumeb line, which is slated to house a Transport Museum (it wasn't open at the time of writing). The complex now houses the **Sam Cohen Library** (☎ 9am-1pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat), with 2000 titles on local history, and the **Living Desert Snake Park** (☎ 0811 205100; admission US\$2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat), which houses an array of serpentine sorts. Here you'll learn everything you'd want to know – or not know – about snakes, scorpions, spiders and other widely misunderstood creatures. Feeding times are 10am and 12.30pm.

NATIONAL MARINE AQUARIUM

The **National Marine Aquarium** (admission adult/child US\$3.50/1.80; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun), on the waterfront, provides an excellent introduction to the cold offshore world in the South Atlantic. Most impressive is the tunnel through the largest aquarium, which allows close-up views of graceful rays, toothy sharks (you can literally count the teeth!) and other marine beasts found on seafood platters around the country. The fish are fed daily at 3pm, which makes for an interesting spectacle.

KRISTALL GALERIE

At this architecturally fascinating **gallery** (☎ 406080; www.kristallgalerie.com; Bahnhof St; admission US\$2.50; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) are some of the world's most incredible crystal formations, including the largest quartz crystal ever found. The adjacent shop features some lovely items, including mineral samples, crystal jewellery, and intriguing plates, cups and wine glasses carved from local stone.

SWAKOPMUND MUSEUM

In an old harbour warehouse near the light-house, this **museum** (☎ 402046; Strand St; museum@mweb.com.na; adult/student US\$2/1; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm)

displays exhibits on Namibia's history, ethnology, flora and fauna. It also contains a well-executed reconstruction of early colonial home interiors and an informative display on the nearby Rössing Uranium Mine.

HANSA BREWERY

Aficionados of the amber nectar will want to visit the **Hansa Brewery** (☎ 405021; 9 Rhode Allee), which is the source of Swakopmund's favourite drop. Free brewery tours – with ample opportunity to sample the product – run on Tuesday and Thursday at 10am and 2pm if there are at least six participants; prebook at the office on Rhode Allee near the corner of Bismarck St.

DUNES

A short hike across the Swakop riverbed from town will take you into the dunes, where you can easily spend several hours exploring the sand formations and their unique vegetation. Alternative Space loans dune carts to its guests, and several tour companies offer sandboarding and quadbiking (see the section opposite).

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 agency for just about every breathtaking activity you'd like to pursue is the **Desert Explorers Adventure Centre** (☎ 406096; www.swakop.com/adv). Here you can organise sandboarding (US\$30), ecologically sensitive quad-biking (US\$55), tandem skydiving (US\$160), dolphin cruising (US\$40), deep-sea fishing (US\$60), hot-air ballooning (from US\$130), dune parasailing (US\$40), descending on the flying fox (cable slide) at Rössing Mountain (US\$55), paragliding (US\$55), horse riding (US\$35), and kayaking (from US\$15) in Walvis Bay. Check out Desert Explorers 10-minute introductory video, which describes what's on offer.

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 a half-/full-hour flight for US\$140/190 per person, with a minimum of three people.

CAMEL RIDES

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.

HORSE RIDING

Okakambe Trails (☎ 0811 246626) runs 1½-hour horse-riding trips 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). Note that it is currently in the process of moving, 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). If you have any experience snowboarding or surfing, it's recommended that you go for the stand-up option. You'll be given a new snowboard, gloves, goggles and enough polish to ensure a smooth ride. The lie-down option (which makes use of a greased-up sheet of masonite) requires much less finesse but is equally fun. The highlight is an 80km/h 'schuss' down a 120m mountain of sand with a big jump at the end. Slogging up the dunes can be rather taxing work, so you need to be physically fit and healthy (which isn't a bad idea anyway). Trips depart in the morning and last about four hours. The price includes equipment rental, transport to and from the dunes, instruction, lunch and beer or soda upon completion.

SCENIC FLIGHTS

Pleasure Flights (☎ 404500; www.pleasureflights.com.na) offers 'flightseeing' tours over the colourful salt works, Sandwich Harbour, Welwitschia Drive,

the Brandberg, the dunes, the Skeleton Coast and beyond. Rates start at around US\$80 per person for a one-hour circuit, though prices vary according to the length of the flight and the number of passengers on board.

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. The guys at Ground Rush have an impeccable safety record, and make even the most nervous participant feel comfortable about jumping out of a plane at 3000m and freefalling for 30 seconds (1500m) at 220km/h! The price includes a 25-minute scenic flight.

QUAD-BIKING

Outback Orange (☎ 400968; www.outbackorange.com; rides from US\$50) offers stomach-dropping tours on quad bikes (motorcycle-style 4WD). In two hours, you'll travel over 60km and race up and down countless dunes. The safety-conscious owners tailor trips to ability, but if you're feeling comfortable, ask them to let you fly down one of the really big dunes.

Tours

The most popular operators are **Charly's Desert Tours** (☎ 404341; charlydt@mweb.com.na), **Namib Tours** (☎ 404072), **Turnstone Tours** (☎ 403123; www.turnstone-tours.com) and **Swakop Tour Company** (☎ 404088; proverb@mweb.com.na). The operators listed above don't have central offices, so it's best to make arrangements through your hostel or hotel. **Hata-Angu Cultural Tours** (☎ 0812 515916; hata-angu@hotmail.com) operates tours to the outlying Mondaesa township, where you'll visit a shebeen, 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 BUDGET

Hostelling International (HI) Youth Hostel (☎ 404164; Alte Kaserne, Nordring St; dm US\$4, d US\$14; ☎) The ambience here is appropriately military (the building is the old German barracks), though

mature adults may feel a bit cramped, and there's not a backpackers' vibe (but it certainly is cheap).

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

Grüner Kranz (☎ 402039; swakoplodge@yahoo.com; 7 Nathaniel Maxuillili St; dm US\$7, s/d US\$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 probably bumping and grinding most nights of the week.

Karen's Attic (☎ 404825; katic@iafrica.com.na; Daniel Tjongarero St; dm US\$8; ☎) This quiet and low-key backpackers' lodge offers simple yet comfortable rooms as well as immaculate kitchen facilities and a cosy communal TV lounge.

Gull's Cry (☎ 461591; rdawning@iafrica.com.na; camp sites US\$9 plus per person US\$2; ☎) This camping ground sits right on the sand at the beachfront, sheltered from the wind by lovely tamarisk trees. It's convenient to the city centre, but facilities are basic.

Villa Wiese (☎ 407105; www.villawiese.com; cnr Bahnhof & Windhoek Sts; dm US\$14, d US\$38; ☎) This friendly and funky upmarket backpackers' place is housed in a historic colonial mansion complete with vaulted ceilings, rock gardens and period furniture, and draws a good mix of overlanders and independent travellers.

Dunes Lodge (☎ 463139; www.africandestinations.co.za; 12 Lazarett St; dm US\$14, d US\$43; ☎) Although more expensive than other budget options, the Dunes Lodge features a number of attractive perks including an indoor pool and billiards table as well as traditional backpackers' amenities including a communal kitchen, internet, a TV lounge and laundry service.

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

MIDRANGE

Swakopmund Rest Camp (☎ 410 4333; www.swakopmund-restcamp.com; Swakop St; 2-bed/4-bed fishermen's shacks US\$17/27, 4-bed flats US\$30, 4-bed A-frame huts US\$43, self-contained 6-bed bungalows/flats US\$53/58; **P**) This municipal rest camp was recently renovated, and now boasts some quite smart accommodation.

Alte Brücke Rest Camp (☎ 404918; accomod@iml-net.com.na, The Strand; 6-person camp site US\$25, s/d/tr/q chalet US\$50/70/85/115; **P**) This upmarket version of the Swakopmund Rest Camp features spacious camp sites with private braai pits and power points as well as fully equipped chalets featuring modern kitchens, full bathrooms, TV lounges and private patios.

Cooke's House (☎ 462837; cooks.b@mwweb.com.na; 32 Daniel Tjongarero St; s/d incl breakfast US\$26/40; **P**) Housed in a 1910 historic home, this three-bedroom inn is an excellent choice if you're looking for personalised attention at the hands of the delightful owners.

Seagull B&B (☎ 405278; www.seagullbandb.com.na; 60 Strand St North; s/d from incl breakfast US\$30/50; **P**) This well-priced B&B is run by an accommodating Brit, and features a variety of uniquely decorated rooms that will suit a wide range of travellers.

Pension Rapmund (☎ 402035; rapmund@iafrica.com.na; 6-8 Bismarck St; s/d incl breakfast from US\$35/55; **P**) This friendly pension overlooks the promenade, and has a number of bright and airy rooms – the more expensive have ocean views.

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

Secret Garden Guesthouse (☎ 404037; secretgarden@iway.na; 36 Bismarck St; s/d/tr US\$45/60/75; **P**) The 'secret garden' is the lush, palm-fringed courtyard in the centre of the guesthouse, which is the perfect oasis if you're in search of a little solitude.

Atlanta Hotel (☎ 402360; atlantah@iafrica.com.na; 6 Roon St; s/d US\$45/65; **P**) Although the rooms are basic and slightly worn here, the Atlanta is centrally located, and it's upstairs (or an easy stumble away) from the popular Fagin's Pub (opposite).

Prinzessin-Rupprecht Residenz (☎ 412540; www.prinzrupp.com.na; 15 Lazarett St; s/d incl breakfast US\$40/75; **P**) Housed in the former colonial military hospital, this family-run *pension* contains a lovely palm-fringed courtyard and features distinctly German-style hospitality.

TOP END

Brigadon (☎ 406064; brigadon@iafrica.com.na; 16 Ludwig Koch St; s/d US\$60/70; **P**) This Scottish-run B&B is comprised of four Victorian-style cottages with period furniture that occupy a pleasant garden setting opposite Palm Beach.

Beach Lodge B&B (☎ 400933; volkb@iafrica.com.na; 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 best sea views in town (through your own personal port-hole!). If the beach is your bag, you can't beat it.

Hotel Adler (☎ 405045; adler@natron.net; 3 Strand St; standard s/d US\$60/95; **P**) This chic and modern hotel would probably feel more at home somewhere in German suburbia, though it is an excellent choice if you're a fan of creature comforts.

Hotel Schweizerhaus (☎ 400331; www.schweizerhaus.net; 1 Bismarck St; s/d incl breakfast from US\$60/95; **P**) This beachside hotel has a spectacular view of the lighthouse, and offers German-style rooms with regal wooden furniture and overlooking either the ocean or the landscaped courtyard.

Hotel Europa Hof (☎ 405061; europa@iml-net.com.na; 39 Bismarck St; s/d/tr US\$65/85/100; **P**) This hotel resembles a Bavarian chalet, and simply overflows with European atmosphere, complete with colourful flower boxes, aloof service, a German-style beer garden and European flags flying from the 1st-floor windows.

Sam's Giardino Hotel (☎ 403210; www.giardino.com.na; 89 Lazarett St; s/d from US\$90/105, ste US\$125; **P**) 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 named Mr Einstein.

Hansa Hotel (☎ 400311; hansa@iml-net.com.na; 3 Roon St; s/d US\$115/150; **P**) Swakopmund's most established upmarket stand-by bills itself as 'luxury in the desert'; individually decorated rooms are tasteful and elegant, the service is top-notch and its restaurant is arguably the best in town.

Swakopmund Hotel & Entertainment Centre (☎ 400800; www.legacyhotels.co.za; 2 Bahnhof St; s/d US\$125/195; **P**) This posh, four-star hotel is located in the shell of the historic train station, and boasts a Mermaid Casino, a cinema, several restaurants, a large swimming pool, a conference centre, a gymnasium and a spa.

Eating BUDGET

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.

Original China Tong Hua Restaurant (☎ 402081; cnr Libertine & Roon Sts; mains US\$2.50-5) If you're looking for a cheap alternative to Namibian or German fare, look no further than this Chinese greasy spoon.

Western Saloon Pizzeria (☎ 403925; fax 464176; 8 Moltke St; pizzas US\$3-5) This popular local spot is famous for its enormous pizzas and its boisterous clientele.

Kücki's Pub (☎ 402407; Moltke St; meals US\$3-6) This local haunt is a good choice for cheap pub grub, which is all the better after a pint or two of frothy Hansa.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Oasis Bistro (☎ 402333; 5 Moltke St; lunches US\$3-5.50, dinners US\$5-8) This excellent bistro does imaginative breakfasts, lunches and dinners, including a variety of salads, crepes, gyros, steaks and seafood specials.

Cafe Anton (☎ 402419; Hotel Schweizerhaus, Bismarck St; US\$4-6) This somewhat pretentious spot serves up superb coffee, *apfelstrudel* (apple strudel), *kugelhopf* (cake with nuts and raisins), *mohnkuchen* (poppyseed cake), *linzertorte* (cake flavoured with almond meal, lemon and spices and spread with jam) and other European delights.

Blue Whale Café (☎ 0811 294018; Atlanta Hotel, Roon St; mains US\$5-9) This popular lunch spot has alfresco pavement seating, which is perfect for people watching.

Napolitana (☎ 402773; 33 Nathaniel Maxuillili St; US\$5-9) This quaint and romantic Italian bistro specialises in gourmet pizzas and pasta as well as heartier meat and seafood dishes.

Swakopmund Brauhaus (☎ 402214; 22 Sam Nujoma Ave; 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 Pub & Cafe 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 gourmet variety of dishes from across the continent. Its game meats are exceptional, though vegetarians will have no problem feasting here on hearty chapatis 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, and is 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 has 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, faithful clientele and evening videos of your day's adrenaline activities.

O'Kelley's (Moltke St) Emphasises local disco music, dancing and billiards – this is 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, regardless 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 is becoming the most popular tourist bar in Swakopmund.

Getting There & Away AIR

Air Namibia (☎ 405123) flies between Eros Airport in Windhoek and Swakopmund (US\$90) daily.

BUS

From Roon St, the Intercape Mainliner bus travels to and from Walvis Bay (US\$8, 30 minutes) 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 Sunday.

There are occasional combis between Swakopmund and Windhoek (US\$7, three hours) and Swakopmund and Walvis Bay (US\$2, 45 minutes), which depart from the Engen petrol station.

HITCHING

Hitching isn't difficult between Swakopmund and Windhoek or Walvis Bay, but conditions can be rough if you're heading for Namib-Naukluft Park or the Skeleton Coast; hitchhikers risk heatstroke, sandblasting and hypothermia – sometimes all in the same day.

TRAIN

Overnight trains connect Windhoek with Swakopmund (US\$7, 9½ hours) and Walvis Bay (US\$3.80, 1½ hours) daily except Saturday. The three-times-weekly trains between Walvis Bay and Tsumeb (US\$7, 17½ hours) also pass through Swakopmund. For rail or Star Line information, telephone **Trans-Namib** (☎ 463538).

THE MARTIN LUTHER

In the desert 4km east of Swakopmund, a lonely and forlorn steam locomotive languished for several years. The 14,000kg machine was imported to Walvis Bay from Halberstadt, Germany in 1896 to replace the ox-wagons used to transport freight between Swakopmund and the interior. However, its inauguration into service was delayed by the outbreak of the Nama-Herero Wars, and in the interim, its locomotive engineer returned to Germany without having revealed the secret of its operation.

A US prospector eventually got it running, but it consumed enormous quantities of precious local water. It took three months to complete its initial trip from Walvis Bay to Swakopmund and subsequently survived just a couple of short trips before grinding to a halt just east of Swakopmund. Clearly, this particular technology wasn't making life easier for anyone, and it was abandoned and dubbed the *Martin Luther*, in reference to the great reformer's famous words to the Diet of Reichstag in 1521: 'Here I stand. May God help me, I cannot do otherwise'.

Although the *Martin Luther* was restored in 1975 and declared a national monument, over the past several decades it suffered once more from the ravages of nature. At the time of writing, the locomotive was in the process of being removed from the ground, and it is likely that it will find a new home in a museum sometime in the near future.

AROUND SWAKOPMUND

Rössing Uranium Mine

The world's largest open-cast uranium mine, **Rössing Uranium Mine** (☎ 402046), 55km northeast of Swakopmund, 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. Three-hour mine tours (US\$2.50) leave from Cafe Anton at Hotel Schweizerhaus in Bismarck St at 10am on the first and third Friday of each month; book the previous day at the museum.

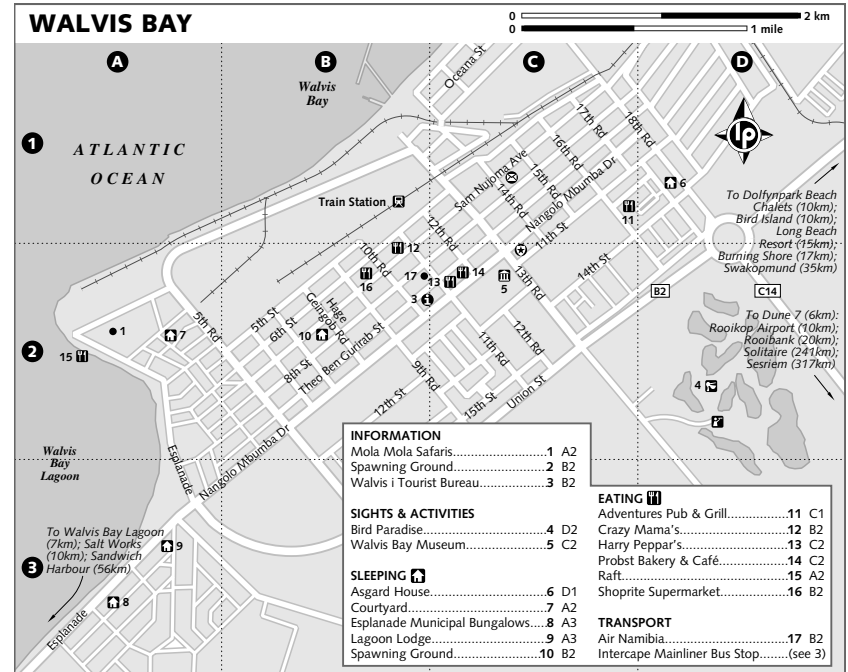
Welwitschia Drive & Moon Landscape

A worthwhile excursion by vehicle or organised tour is to Welwitschia Drive, east of Swakopmund. The NWR office in Swakopmund issues entry permits and a leaflet describing the drive, with numbered references to 'beacons', or points of interest, along the route. The drive can be completed in two hours, but allow more time to experience this otherworldly landscape. The **Welwitschia camp site** (Map p368; up to 4 people US\$10) at the Swakop River must also be booked through NWR in Swakopmund or Windhoek.

WALVIS BAY

☎ 064

Due to the city's strategic location, Walvis Bay (population 54,000) has a long and storied history of British and South African occupation. Since 1992, however, the city has rested firmly in Namibian hands, and is the country's second-largest city after Windhoek.



Today, Walvis Bay boasts a tanker berth, a dry dock and container facilities as well as a lucrative salt works and fish-processing industry.

Unlike neighbouring Swakopmund, Walvis Bay was snatched by the British years before the German colonists could get their hands on it. As a result, Walvis Bay is architecturally uninspiring, and lacks the old-world ambience of its northerly neighbour. However, although most visitors fail to see the city's charms, the area around Walvis Bay is home to a number of unique natural attractions including one of the largest flocks of flamingoes in the whole of Southern Africa.

Orientation & Information

Although some streets have been renamed after Swapo luminaries, Walvis Bay streets, from 1st St to 15th St, run northeast to southwest. The roads, from 1st Rd to 18th Rd, run northwest to southeast.

The helpful **Walvis i Tourist Bureau** (Map p365; ☎ 209170; fax 209171; Shop 6, Hickory Creek Spur Bldg, Theo-Ben Gurirab St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) provides visitor information.

Sights & Activities

The **Walvis Bay Museum** (Map p365; Nangolo Mbumba Dr; admission free; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3-4.30pm Mon-Fri), in the library, describes the town's maritime and natural history and archaeology.

About 10km north of town on the Swakopmund road, look out to sea and you'll see the huge wooden platform known as **Bird Island**, which was built to provide a roost and nesting site for sea birds and to provide 1000 tonnes of smelly bird guano annually.

Dune 7 (Map p368) rises above the bleak expanses just off the C14, 6km northeast of town; there's a picnic site, but water is available only sporadically.

Three diverse wetland areas – the **Walvis Bay Lagoon**, the **Bird Paradise** and the **Walvis Bay Salt Works** (Map p368; ☎ 202376) – together form the single most important coastal wetland for migratory birds in Southern Africa, annually attracting up to 150,000 transient avian visitors. The 45,000-hectare Walvis Bay Lagoon, a shallow bay southwest of town, boasts about half the flamingo population of Southern Africa, as well as pelicans, chestnut banded plovers, avocets, damara terns and curlew

sandpipers, plus other migrants and waders. Southwest of the lagoon is the salt works, a 3500-hectare complex that supplies over 90% of South Africa's salt and also attracts flamingoes with its mineral content; tours are available with advance booking. At the municipal sewage works immediately east of town, an observation tower overlooks a series of shallow artificial pools, fringed by reeds, and provides rewarding bird-watching. The site is known locally as the Bird Paradise.

Tours

Eco-Marine Kayak Tours (☎ 203144; jeannem@iafrica.com.na) Run by Jeanne Mientjes, this company offers wonderful sea-kayaking trips around the beautiful Walvis Bay wetlands (US\$20) as well as trips to Pelican Point (US\$35).

Mola Mola Safaris (Map p365; ☎ 205511; www.mola-mola.com.na; cnr Esplanade & Atlantic St) Runs an extremely popular dolphin and seal cruise (US\$40).

Spawning Ground (Map p365; ☎ 204400; spawning@iafrica.com.na) Runs backpacker trips to Walvis Bay Lagoon, Dune 7 and Bird Paradise (US\$20) as well as Pelican Point, Sandwich Harbour, Cape Cross and Welwitschia Drive (US\$40).

Sleeping

Accommodation is located either in the city centre or at Langstrand (Long Beach), which is 10km north of Walvis Bay on the road to Swakopmund.

CITY CENTRE

Spawning Ground (Map p365; ☎ 204400; spawning@iafrica.com.na; cnr 8th St & 8th Rd; camping per person US\$5, dm US\$10, d US\$25; (P) (A)) Owner, manager and all-around great guy, Wayne, knows exactly how to create a great vibe – guests often check in for one night and check out days later.

Asgard House (Map p365; ☎ 205955; www.gateway-afrika.com/asgard; 72 17th Rd; s/d US\$38/50; (P)) This quaint family-run guesthouse features a nice homey lounge, a tropical garden and a frog pond (the frogs do their bit by eating the mosquitoes).

Esplanade Municipal Bungalows (Map p365; ☎ 206145; gkruger@walvisbaycc.or.na; 5-/7-bed bungalows US\$45/55; (P)) Perched on the Esplanade between the dunes and the lagoon, this affordable municipal-run rest camp comprises several bungalows featuring full kitchens and braai pits.

Courtyard (Map p365; ☎ 206252; courtyard@iafrica.com.na; 16 3rd Rd, s/d US\$55/65, ste from US\$75; (P) (A))

This recently renovated hotel is now under new ownership, and is regarded as one of the better hotels in Walvis Bay.

Lagoon Lodge (Map p365; ☎ 200850; www.lagoonlodge.com.na; 2 Nangolo Mbumba Dr; s/d US\$75/120, ste US\$130; (P) (A)) This pastel-drenched French-run lodge commands a magnificent location next to the lagoon, and features individually decorated rooms with private terraces facing out towards the flamingoes.

LANGSTRAND (LONG BEACH)

Long Beach Resort (☎ 203134; camping per site US\$10, plus per person US\$1, 2-/4-bed bungalows US\$30/40; (P) (A)) This municipal camp site is about as otherworldly as you can get, particularly during a heavy fog or a sandstorm when the entire property is reminiscent of a desert mirage.

Dolfynpark Beach Chalets (☎ 204343; gkruger@walvisbaycc.org.na; 2-/4-bed self-catering chalets US\$30/50; (P) (A)) You couldn't imagine a structure more alien to its setting than this – kids will love the pool and hydro-slide, while the parents will wonder how a water park can operate at the edge of a dune sea.

Burning Shore (☎ 207568; www.burningshore.info; d standard/luxury/ste with full board US\$165/215/335; (P) (A) (V)) This upmarket luxury retreat received a huge publicity boost in 2006 following Angelina Jolie's and Brad Pitt's surprise trip to Namibia. If the Burning Shore is good enough for Hollywood, it's probably good enough for you too.

Eating

The best self-catering option is the Shoprite Supermarket on Sam Nujoma Ave.

Probst Bakery & Café (Map p365; ☎ 202744; cnr 12th Rd & 9th St; US\$2-5) If you're feeling nostalgic for Swakopmund, take comfort in knowing that Probst specialises in stodgy German fare: pork, meatballs, schnitzel and the like.

Harry Peppar's (Map p365; ☎ 203131; cnr 11th Rd & Nangolo Mbumba Dr; pizzas US\$3-5) Harry comes up with all sorts of creative thick-crust pizzas, and if you're feeling lazy, he'll deliver his mad creations right to your hotel.

Crazy Mama's (Map p365; ☎ 207364; cnr Sam Nujoma Ave & 11th Rd; mains US\$3-6) The service and atmosphere are great, the price is right and the eclectic menu features fabulous pizzas, salads and vegetarian options.

Adventures Pub & Grill (Map p365; ☎ 206803; 230 12th St; meals US\$3-7; ☎ 10am-late) This popular night spot serves up traditional Namibian fare

by day including *potjies* (stew) and braais, as well as a heavy dose of beer, booze and pool.

Raft (Map p365; ☎ 204877; Esplanade; mains US\$5-12) This Walvis Bay institution sits on stilts offshore (though it looks more like a porcupine than a raft), and has a great front-row view of the ducks, pelicans and flamingoes.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Namibia (☎ 203102) flies twice weekly between both of Windhoek's airports and Walvis Bay's Rooikop Airport (US\$85), 10km southeast of town on the C14.

BUS & COMBI

Intercape Mainliner has Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday services from Windhoek (US\$14, five hours) to the Spur Restaurant bus terminal in Walvis Bay, via Swakopmund.

Star Line has a Friday bus from Walvis Bay to Khorixas (US\$20, 7½ hours); it returns on Sunday. Book at the train station. Book Star Line buses at the **train station** (☎ 208504).

Combis occasionally run to Windhoek (US\$7, three hours) via Swakopmund (US\$2, 45 minutes).

HITCHING

Hitching is easy between Walvis Bay and Swakopmund, though you need to be prepared for rough conditions if you're trying to thumb a ride to the Namib-Naukluft Park or the Skeleton Coast.

TRAIN

The overnight rail service to Windhoek (US\$9, 11 hours) runs daily except Saturday. On Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday northbound, it leaves for Tsumeb (US\$7, 17½ hours) at 4.15pm, meeting a train from Windhoek at Kranzberg, where carriages are added/exchanged. For info, phone **Trans-Namib** (☎ 208504).

NAMIB-NAUKLUFT PARK

The present boundaries of Namib-Naukluft Park, one of the world's largest national parks, were established in 1978 by merging the Namib Desert Park and the Naukluft Mountain Zebra Park with parts of Diamond Area 1 and bits of surrounding government land. Today, it takes in over 23,000 sq km of desert and semidesert, including the diverse habitats of the Namib Desert Park between the Kuisieb and Swakop Rivers, the Naukluft, the dune fields around

Sossusvlei and the bird lagoon at Sandwich Harbour.

The main park transit routes, the C28, C14, D1982 and D1998, are open to all traffic, but use of the minor roads (note that some minor routes require 4WD), picnic sites or sites of interest require park permits (US\$3.50 per person plus US\$2.50 per vehicle). They're available at NWR offices in Windhoek, Swakopmund and Sesriem.

Camp sites in Namib Desert Park and Sesriem/Naukluft must be prebooked through the NWR offices in Windhoek or Swakopmund. Permits for the Naukluft 4WD Trail, the multiday Naukluft hikes and day entry to Sesriem/Sossusvlei are most successfully booked in Windhoek.

Sandwich Harbour

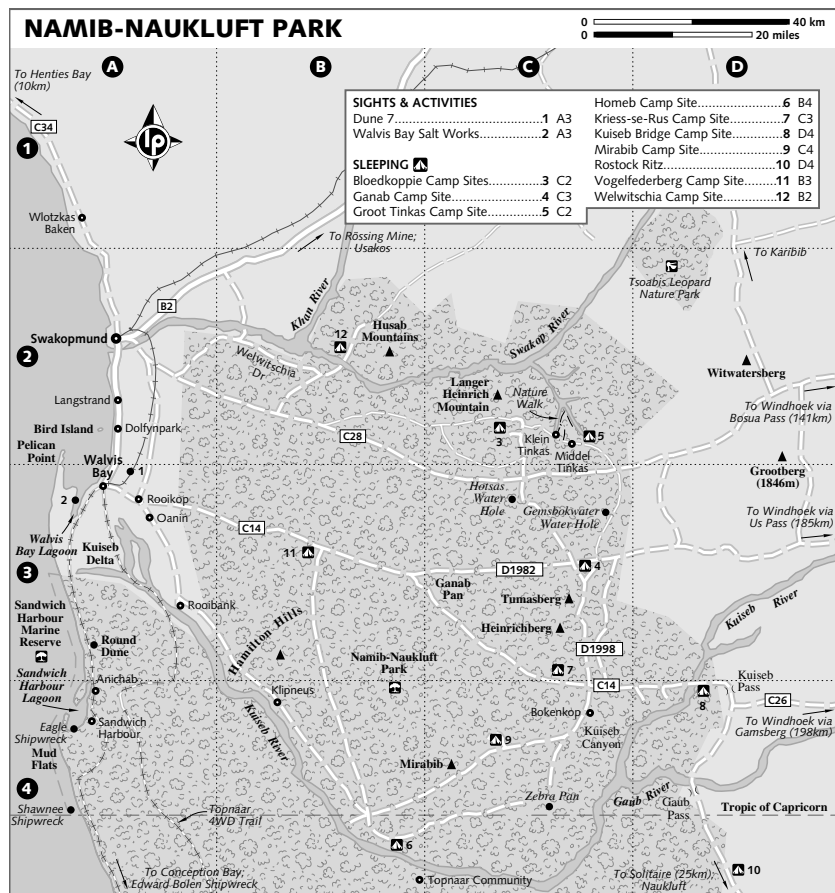
This **harbour** (☎ 6am-8pm), which is 50km south of Walvis Bay, historically served as a commercial fishing and trading port. Despite a period of silting in recent years, it seems to be recovering and the northern end of the lagoon continues to attract large numbers of migratory birds. There are no visitor facilities – not even a camp site – and it's accessible only with a sturdy 4WD high-clearance vehicle. The final 20km is tricky and, depending on dune conditions, may involve timing your arrival with low tide in order to run down to the sandy beach.

TOPNAAR 4WD TRAIL

The 4WD trail from Walvis Bay through the sand sea to Sandwich Harbour, Conception Bay and the renowned *Edward Bolen* shipwreck creates a challenge for 4WD enthusiasts. Only guided trips are available and while you can use a private vehicle, it's probably better to rent a Uri – a desert-adapted vehicle that is produced in Namibia. Currently, a six-day camping trip covering the entire route costs US\$700 per person in your own vehicle and US\$950 in a rented Uri. Other options that cover parts of the route start at US\$350/570 in a private/rented vehicle. Book through **Tourist Junction** (☎ 061-231246; www.touristjunction.com.na; PO Box 1591, Windhoek).

Namib Desert Park

The relatively accessible Namib Desert Park lies between the canyons of the Kuisieb River in the south and the Swakop River in the north. Although it has a small area of linear dunes,



it's characterised mostly by broad gravel plains punctuated by abrupt and imposing ranges of hills.

Although this area doesn't support a lot of large mammals, you may see chacma baboons, as well as dassies, which like to bask on the kopjes (small rocky hills).

The **Kuiseb Canyon**, on the Gamsberg Route between Windhoek and Walvis Bay, is also home to klipspringers and even leopards. Spotted hyenas are often heard at night and jackals make a good living from the springbok herds on the plains.

SLEEPING

The following camp sites must be booked through NWR in Windhoek (p315).

Bloedkoppie Camp Site (Map p368), or 'Blood Hill', has among the most beautiful and popular sites in the park. If you're coming from Swakopmund, they lie 55km northeast of the C28, along a signposted track. The northern sites may be accessed with a 2WD, but they tend to attract ne'er-do-wells who drink themselves silly and get obnoxious. The southern sites are quieter and more secluded, but can be reached only by 4WD.

Groot Tinkas Camp Site (Map p368) must be accessed with 4WD, and rarely sees much traffic. It enjoys a lovely setting beneath shady rocks and the surroundings are super for nature walks. During rainy periods, the brackish water in the nearby dam attracts a variety of bird life.

Vogelfederberg Camp Site (Map p368) is a small facility 2km south of the C14 and makes a convenient overnight camp just 51km from Walvis Bay, but it's more popular for picnics or short walks.

Ganab Camp Site (Map p368), 'Camelthorn Acacia', is a dusty, exposed facility that sits beside a shallow stream bed on the gravel plains. It's shaded by hardy acacia trees, and a nearby borehole provides water for antelopes.

Kriess-se-Rus Camp Site (Map p368) is a rather ordinary site in a dry stream bank on the gravel plains, 107km east of Walvis Bay on the Gamsberg Pass Route. It is shaded, but isn't terribly prepossessing and is best used simply as a convenient stop en route between Windhoek and Walvis Bay.

Kuiseb Bridge Camp Site (Map p368) is a shady site at the Kuiseb River crossing on the C14 and is handy for breaking a trip between Windhoek and Walvis Bay. The location is scenic, but dust and noise from passing vehicles makes it less appealing than other sites.

Mirabib Camp Site (Map p368) is a pleasant facility that accommodates two parties at separate sites and is comfortably placed beneath rock overhangs in a large granite inselberg. There's evidence these shelters were used by nomadic peoples as many as 9000 years ago, and also by nomadic shepherds in the 4th or 5th century.

Homeb Camp Site (Map p368), which can accommodate several groups, is located in a scenic spot upstream from the most accessible set of dunes in the Namib Desert Park. Residents of the nearby Topnaar Khoikhoi village dig wells in the riverbed to access water beneath the surface, and one of their dietary staples is the !nara melon.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There's no public transport to any of these sites, but the rare minibuses between Mariental and Walvis Bay pass within walking distance of Kuiseb Bridge, Kriess-se-Rus and Vogelfederberg Camp Sites.

Naukluft Mountains

☎ 063

The Naukluft Mountains, 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, forming 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-walks, 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 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 Ubisay 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 be three to 12 people.

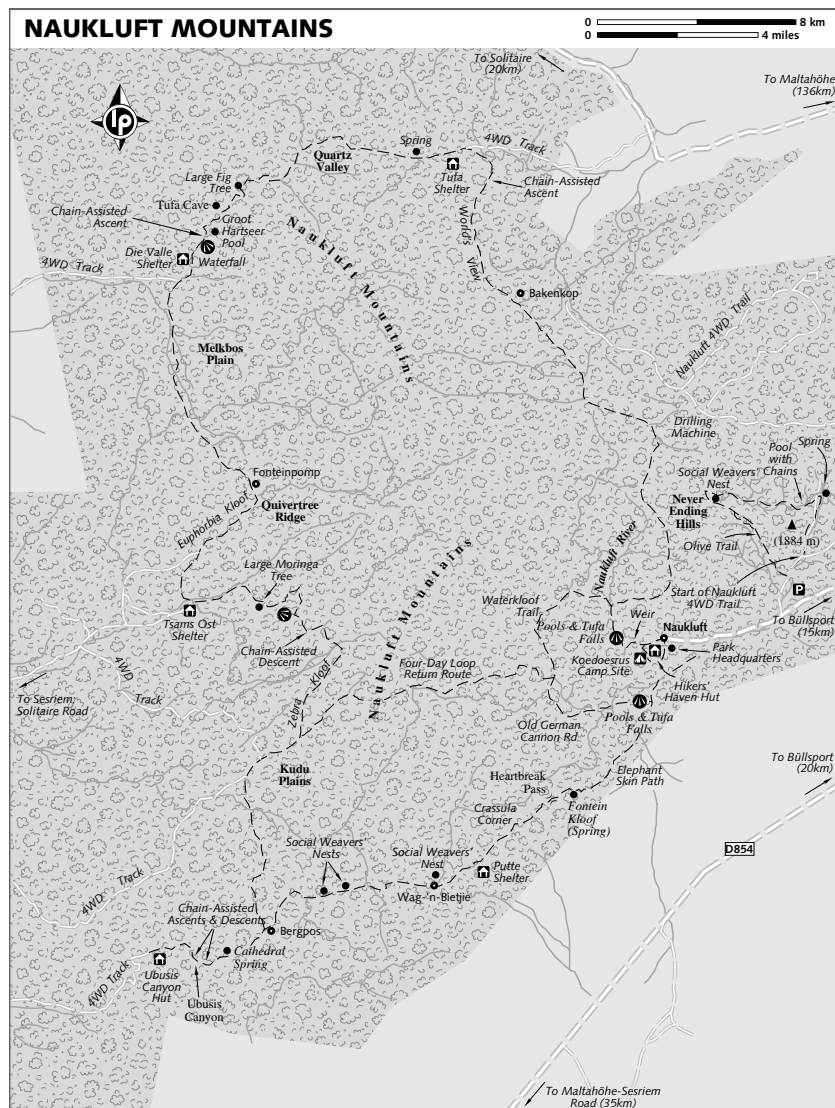
Due to the typically hot, dry conditions and lack of reliable natural water sources, you must carry at least 3L to 4L of water per person per day – and use it sparingly.

WATERKLOOF TRAIL

The lovely 17km Waterkloof Trail begins at the Koedoesrus Camp Site and follows a counter-clockwise loop that takes about seven hours to complete. It first crosses a weir on the Naukluft River and climbs past a series of pools offering refreshing swimming. After climbing out of the canyon, 6km later, the trail turns west and traverses more open country. After the halfway mark, it climbs to a broad 1910m ridge that affords fabulous desert views in all directions. It then descends steeply into several inviting pools filled with reeds and tadpoles before dropping past an impressive tufa waterfall and meeting up with the normally dry Naukluft River.

OLIVE TRAIL

The 10km Olive Trail leaves from the car park about 4km northeast of the park headquarters and follows a four- to five-hour triangular route. The route begins with a steep climb onto the plateau, affording good views of the Naukluft Valley. It then turns sharply east and descends a kloof, which becomes deeper and steeper until it reaches a point where hikers must traverse a canyon wall – past a pool – using anchored chains. Near the end of the route, the trail strikes the Naukluft 4WD route and swings sharply south, where it makes a beeline back to the car park.



FOUR-DAY & EIGHT-DAY LOOPS

The two big loops through the massif can be hiked in four and eight days. The four-day, 60km loop is actually just the first third of the eight-day 120km loop, combined with a 22km cross-country jaunt across the plateau back to park headquarters. It joins up with the Waterkloof Trail at its halfway point and follows

it the rest of the way back to park headquarters. Alternatively, you can finish the four-day route at Tsams-Ost Shelter, midway through the eight-day loop, where a road leads out to the Sesriem-Solitaire road. However, you must pre-arrange to leave a vehicle there before setting off from park headquarters. Note that hikers may not begin from Tsams-Ost

without special permission from the rangers at Naukluft.

Conditions are typically hot and dry, and water is reliably available only at overnight stops (at Putte, it's 400m from the shelter). Hikers must carry at least 4L of water per day. Eight-day hikers can lighten their packs by dropping off a re-supply cache of food and stove fuel at Tsams-Ost Shelter prior to the hike. In four places – Ubusis Canyon, above Tsams-Ost, Die Valle and just beyond Tufa Shelter – hikers must negotiate dry waterfalls, boulder-blocked kloofs and steep tufa formations with the aid of chains. Some people find this off-putting, so be sure you're up to it.

NAUKLUFT 4WD TRAIL

Off-road enthusiasts can now exercise their machines on the new National Parks 73km Naukluft 4WD Trail. The route costs US\$24 per vehicle plus US\$3.50 per person per day, including accommodation in one of the four stone-walled A-frames at the 28km point. Facilities include shared toilets, showers and braais. Up to four vehicles per 16 people are permitted at a time. Book through NWR in Windhoek.

SLEEPING

Koedoesrus Camp Site (Map p370; camping for 2 people US\$12, plus for each additional person US\$2; **P**) Pleasantly situated in a deep valley, it has running water, hot showers and flush toilets. It books out quickly and the maximum stay is three nights. Firewood is sold at the park entrance ranger office.

Tsauchab River Camping (Map p356; ☎ 293416; tsauchab@triplonline.net; camping per site US\$5, plus per person US\$5, 4WD exclusive camp US\$8 plus per person US\$6; **P**) If you're an avid hiker or just love excellent settings you're in for a treat. The shady named camp sites sit beside the Tsauchab riverbed – one occupies a huge hollow tree – and each has private ablutions, a sink and braai area.

Zebra River Lodge (Map p356; ☎ 693265; www.zebrariver.com; s/d with full board US\$115/200; **P**) Occupying a magical setting in the Tsaris Mountains, this is Rob and Marianne Field's private Grand Canyon. The surrounding wonderland of desert mountains, plateaus, valleys and natural springs is accessible on a network of hiking trails and 4WD tracks (guided drives to the springs cost US\$18).

Büllsport Guest Farm (Map p356; ☎ 693371; www.natron.net/tour/buellspt; s/d with half board US\$125/190; **P**) This scenic farm owned by Ernst and Johanna Sauber occupies a lovely, austere setting below the Naukluft Massif, and features a ruined colonial police station, the Bogenfels arch and several resident mountain zebras.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The Naukluft is accessible only with a private vehicle or an organised tour.

Sesriem & Sossusvlei

☎ 063

Despite being Namibia's number-one tourist attraction, Sossusvlei still manages to feel isolated. Hiking through the dunes, which are 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. However, the landscape here is constantly changing – wind forever alters the shape of the dunes while colours shift with the changing light. If possible, try to visit Sossusvlei at sunrise when the colours are at the peak of their brilliance.

The gateway to Sossusvlei is Sesriem (Six Thongs), named for the number of joined leather ox-wagon thongs necessary to draw water from the bottom of the nearby gorge.

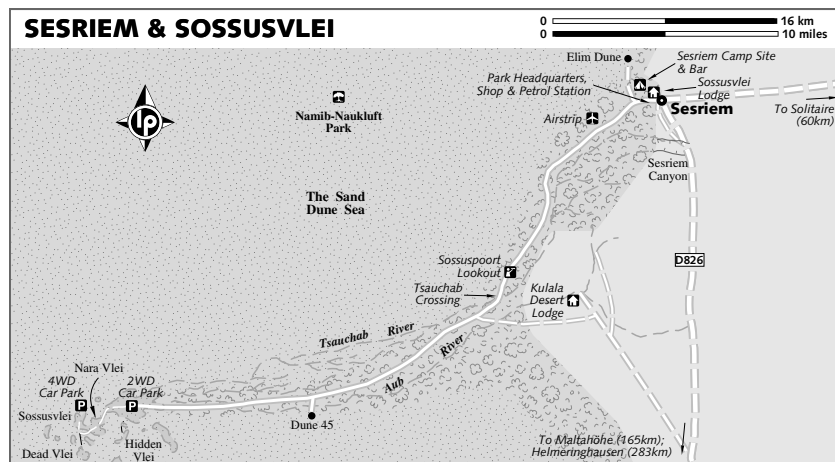
Both Sesriem Canyon and Sossusvlei are open year-round between sunrise and sunset. If you want to witness the sunrise over Sossusvlei – as most people do – you must stay at or near Sesriem. Otherwise, you can't pass the gate early enough to reach Sossusvlei before sunrise.

SIGHTS

Sesriem

The park headquarters, a small food shop, a petrol station, the camp site and the Sossusvlei Lodge are all found at Sesriem. All visitors headed for Sossusvlei must check in at the park office and secure a park entry permit (US\$3.50 per person plus US\$2.50 per vehicle).

The 2km-long and 30m-deep **Sesriem Canyon**, 4km south of the Sesriem headquarters, was carved by the Tsauchab River through the 15-million-year-old deposits of sand and gravel conglomerate. From the car park, you can hike upstream to the brackish pool at its head or downstream to the canyon mouth.



Dune 45

The most accessible of the red dunes along the Sossusvlei road is the 150m Dune 45, so called because it's 45km from Sesriem and 45 dunes from Sossusvlei. For tour groups, it's a popular sunrise and bush breakfast venue.

Sossusvlei & Around

Sossusvlei, a large ephemeral pan, is set amid red sand dunes that tower up to 200m above the valley floor and more than 300m over the underlying strata. This is the most accessible part of the 300km-long and 150km-wide sand sea that contains the world's highest, oldest and arguably most picturesque dunes. The pan rarely holds water, but when the Tsauchab River has gathered enough volume and momentum to push beyond the thirsty plains to the sand sea (as it did in 1997 and 2001), it's transformed into a verdant oasis.

A rugged 5km return walk from Sossusvlei takes you to **Dead Vlei**, which, despite its name, is even more impressive than its popular neighbour. Alternatively, from the 2WD car park, a rewarding 4km return hike marked by white-painted posts leads to **Hidden Vlei**, an unearthly dry vlei amid lonely dunes.

From Sesriem, take the 65km 2WD road to the 2WD car park; the last 4km to Sossusvlei requires 4WD, so visitors with lesser vehicles park at the 2WD car park and walk, hitch or take the Sossus 4WD Shuttle Service (US\$3.50/6 one way/return). If you're walking, carry enough water for a hot sandy slog in the sun.

TOURS

Most Namib-area lodges run day tours to Sossusvlei, and prices are generally proportional to the amount you're paying for accommodation. In addition, nearly every Namibian tour operator includes it in their itineraries; see p397.

SLEEPING & EATING

Pre-booking is mandatory at the lodges listed following.

Sesriem Camp Site (Map p372; camping for 4 people US\$20; (P)) Sesriem is the most convenient camp site for Sossusvlei, though it must be booked in advance at the NWR office in Windhoek (p315). However, you must arrive before sunset or the camp staff will reassign your site on a stand-by basis; anyone who was unable to book a site in Windhoek may get in on this nightly lottery. A small shop at the office here sells snacks and cold drinks, and the camp-site bar provides music and alcohol nightly.

Desert Homestead & Horse Trails (Map p356; ☎ 293243; www.deserthomestead-namibia.com; s/d/tr US\$115/190/250 incl breakfast; (P) (E)) This reader-recommended lodge specialises in horse riding through the Namib-Naukluft park. Whether you're keen for a sundowner or an overnight desert 'sleep-out' ride, the professional staff and exceptional horses at the Desert Homestead will make your experience a memorable one.

Sossusvlei Lodge (Map p372; ☎ 293223; www.sossusvleilodge.com; s/d US\$265/365; (P) (E)) This curious

place, which bears a strong resemblance to what happens when squabbling children topple a stack of coloured blocks, sits right at the Sesriem Camp Site fence. 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.

Kulala Desert Lodge (Map p372; ☎ 061-274500; www.wilderness-safaris.com; s/d with full board US\$345/475; (P) (E)) Located approximately 15km south of Sesriem on the banks of the Tsauchab, this refreshingly unobtrusive luxury retreat

resembles a Bedouin camp amid the dunes. The biggest perk of staying at Kulala is its private entrance to Sossusvlei, which means that guests can easily enter the park before sunrise.

Sossusvlei Wilderness Camp (Map p356; ☎ 061-274500; www.wilderness-safaris.com; s/d with full board & activities US\$600/835; (P) (E)) If money is no object, then splash out at this exclusive tented camp, which is situated on a mountainous 7000-hectare private ranch about 40km southeast of Sesriem. Accommodation is in beautiful

THE NAMIB DUNES

The Namib dunes stretch from the Orange to the Kuiseb Rivers in the south (this area is known as the 'dune sea') and from Torra Bay in Skeleton Coast Park to Angola's Croce River in the north. They're composed of colourful quartz sand, and come in varying hues – from cream to orange and red to violet.

Unlike the ancient Kalahari dunes, those of the Namib are dynamic, which means that they shift with the wind, and are continuously sculpted into a variety of distinctive shapes. The top portion of the dune, which faces the direction of migrations, is known as the slipface, and is formed as the sand spills from the crest and slips down. Various bits of plant and animal detritus also collect here and provide a meagre food source for dune-dwelling creatures, and it's here that most dune life is concentrated.

The following is a list of the major types of dunes found in the Namib:

- Parabolic dunes: along the eastern area of the dune sea, including around Sossusvlei (p371). The dunes are classified as parabolic or multicyclic, and are the result of variable wind patterns. These are the most stable dunes in the Namib, and therefore the most vegetated.
- Transverse dunes: the long, linear dunes along the coast south of Walvis Bay (p364), which lie perpendicular to the prevailing southwesterly winds. Therefore, their slipfaces are oriented towards the north and northeast.
- Seif dunes: around Homeb in the Namib Desert Park (p367), also known as linear dunes, which are enormous northwest-southeast sand ripples. With heights of up to 100m, they're spaced about 1km apart and show up plainly on satellite photographs. They're formed by seasonal winds; during the prevailing southerly winds of summer, the slipfaces lie on the northeastern face. In the winter, the wind blows in the opposite direction, which causes slipfaces to build up on the southwestern faces.
- Star dunes: in areas where individual dunes are exposed to winds from all directions, a formation known as a star dune appears. These dunes have multiple ridges, and when seen from above may appear to have a star shape.
- Barchan dunes: these dunes prevail around the northern end of the Skeleton Coast (p355) and south of Lüderitz (p379). These are the most mobile dunes as they are created by unidirectional winds. As they shift, barchan dunes take on a crescent shape, with the horns of the crescent aimed in the direction of migration. In fact, it is barchan dunes that are slowly devouring the ghost town of Kolmanskop near Lüderitz. These are also the so called 'roaring dunes' of the Skeleton Coast Wilderness area, which let out a haunting roar when air is pressed out from the interstices between the sand granules on the slipface.
- Hump dunes: typically form in clusters near water sources, and are considerably smaller than other dune types. They are formed when sand builds up around vegetation (such as a tuft of grass), and held in place by the roots of the plant, forming a sandy tussock. Generally, hump dunes rise less than 3m from the surface.

stone, timber and thatched bungalows nestled between rock outcroppings for maximum privacy – each bungalow features a private plunge pool. The camp is located 30km west of Sesriem near the junction between the C36 and D845; chartered fly-ins can also be arranged.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Sesriem is reached via a signposted turn-off from the C19. You'll find petrol at Solitaire, Namib Rest Camp, Sesriem and a bush BP station 93km south of Sesriem on the D826.

Solitaire Area

Solitaire is a lonely and aptly named settlement of just a few buildings about 79km 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.

SLEEPING

Solitaire Guest Farm (Map p356; ☎ 062-572024; www.solitaireguestfarm.com; camping US\$8.50, r incl breakfast per person US\$50; (P) (🚽)) This inviting guest farm, located 6km east of Solitaire on the C14, is a peaceful oasis situated between the Namib plains and the Naukluft Mountains.

Solitaire Country Lodge (Map p356; ☎ 061-256598; www.namibialodges.com; camping US\$8.50, s/d incl breakfast US\$60/85; (P) (🚽)) This swish new lodge, located next to the petrol station, offers 23 country-inspired rooms that surround a grassy courtyard with a spotless swimming pool.

Weltevrede Rest Camp (Map p356; ☎ 293374; camping for 3 people US\$12, s/d with half board US\$75/130; (P) (🚽)) Willie and Zanne Swarts' simple rest camp, located 30km south of Solitaire, offers shady camping and spacious bungalows amid a lonely desert setting.

Rostock Ritz (Map p368; ☎ 064-403622; kuecki@mweb.com.na; s/d chalets US\$115/180; (P) (🚽)) Established by the owner of Kücki's Pub in Swakopmund, this unique accommodation is known for its bizarre water gardens and cool, cave-like cement-domed chalets. The Ritz is situated east of the C14, just south of the C26 junction.

Swartfontein Mountain & Desert Guest Lodge (Map p356; ☎ 062-572004; info@swartfontein.com; s/d with half board US\$125/225; (P) (🚽)) This Italian-run guest farm lies at the top of the 1850m Spretshoogte Pass, and is situated on the

8100-hectare Namib-Spreetshoogte Private Nature Reserve. The lodge is in a 1900-era farmhouse constructed by a German colonial soldier, though the stylish décor is Italian all the way.

Namib-Naukluft Lodge (Map p356; ☎ 061-263082; afex@afex.com.na; s/d with half board US\$130/210; (P) (🚽)) This modernist lodge located on a 13,000-hectare farm 20km south of Solitaire occupies a boulder-strewn landscape. Rooms are designed to be functional, though they're still extremely plush.

EATING

Adjacent to the petrol station is the Solitaire Country Store, a warm and friendly spot that remains a favourite with travellers. If you're just stopping here for petrol, be sure to step inside and visit Moose, who continues to bake the best bread and *apfelstrudel* in Africa.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Solitaire is located 79km north of Sesriem along the A46.

NamibRand Nature Reserve

Abutting the Namib-Naukluft Park, the NamibRand Nature Reserve is the largest privately owned property in Southern Africa. It was formed from a collection of private farms, and protects over 200,000 hectares of dunes, desert grasslands and wild, isolated mountain ranges. Currently, several concessionaires operate on the reserve, offering a range of experiences amid one of Namibia's most stunning and colourful landscapes.

TOURS

Tok-Tokkie Trails (Map p356; ☎ 061-264668 ext 5230, 061-235454; www.namibweb.com/tok.htm; per person per day US\$300) is a company that guides one- to four-day walking tours through the desert, dunes and mountains of NamibRand. The rate includes meals, equipment and a guide; camping is under the stars and bucket showers are available.

SLEEPING

Pre-booking is mandatory at the lodges listed below. Transfer by 4WD or a fly-in is arranged in conjunction with your lodge reservations.

Camp Mwisho (Map p356; ☎ 063-293233; namibsky@mweb.com.na; s/d will full board plus hot-air balloon ride US\$465/580; (P) (🚽) (🍷)) This intimate camp consists solely of four East Africa-style luxury

canvas tents surrounding a rustic farmhouse, though the main attraction is the included hot-air balloon ride over Sossusvlei. Guests depart from Mwisho at dawn, and watch the sunrise as you glide through the air high above the dunes.

Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge (Map p356; ☎ 27-11 809 4300; www.ccafrica.com; r per person with meals & activities US\$585; (P) (🚽) (🍷)) This fashionable destination frequently appears in *Condé Nast* as one of the top lodges in the world. The property is comprise of 10 chalets, which are constructed from locally quarried stone, and which appear to blend effortlessly into the surrounding landscape.

Wolwedans Dune Lodge (Map p356; ☎ 061-230616; www.wolwedans.com; s/d with full board & activities US\$700/900; (P) (🚽) (🍷)) This elite, upmarket destination features an architecturally arresting collection of raised wooded chalets that are scattered amid towering red sand dunes.

Getting There & Away

Access to the NamibRand Nature Reserve by private vehicle is restricted.

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 primarily as commercial and market centres. This is rich cattle-ranching country, and around Mariental, citrus fruit and market vegetables are grown under irrigation. 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.

REHOBOTH

☎ 062

Rehoboth lies 85km south of Windhoek, and just a stone's throw north of the Tropic of Capricorn. The original German mission was abandoned in 1864, but the town was revived in the early 1870s by the Basters, an ethnic group of mixed Khoikhoi/Afrikaner origin who migrated north from the Cape under Her-

manus van Wyk. The **town museum** (☎ 522954; admission US\$1.50; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon Sat), which is housed in the 1903 residence of the settlement's first colonial postmaster, recounts this history.

If you're looking to rehabilitate your travel-worn body, consider spending a night at the **Reho Spa Recreation Resort** (Map p376; ☎ 522774; camping for 2 people US\$12, plus for each additional person US\$2, 4-15-16-bed self-catering bungalows US\$24/27/35; (P) (🚽)), which was originally known by its Nama name *aris* (smoke), after the steam that rose from ground. Book through NWR in Windhoek (p315).

Another relaxing retreat is the **Lake Oanob Resort** (Map p376; ☎ 522370; oanob@iafrica.com.na; km6 D1237, PO Box 3381; camping per site from US\$14-22, s/d US\$43/53, 6-bed chalets US\$78-100, 8-bed chalets US\$125-160; (P) (🚽)), which is situated next to the 2.7-sq-km lake created by the Oanab Dam just west of town.

Intercape Mainliner buses running between Windhoek and South Africa stop at Rehoboth, as does the train between Windhoek and Keetmanshoop.

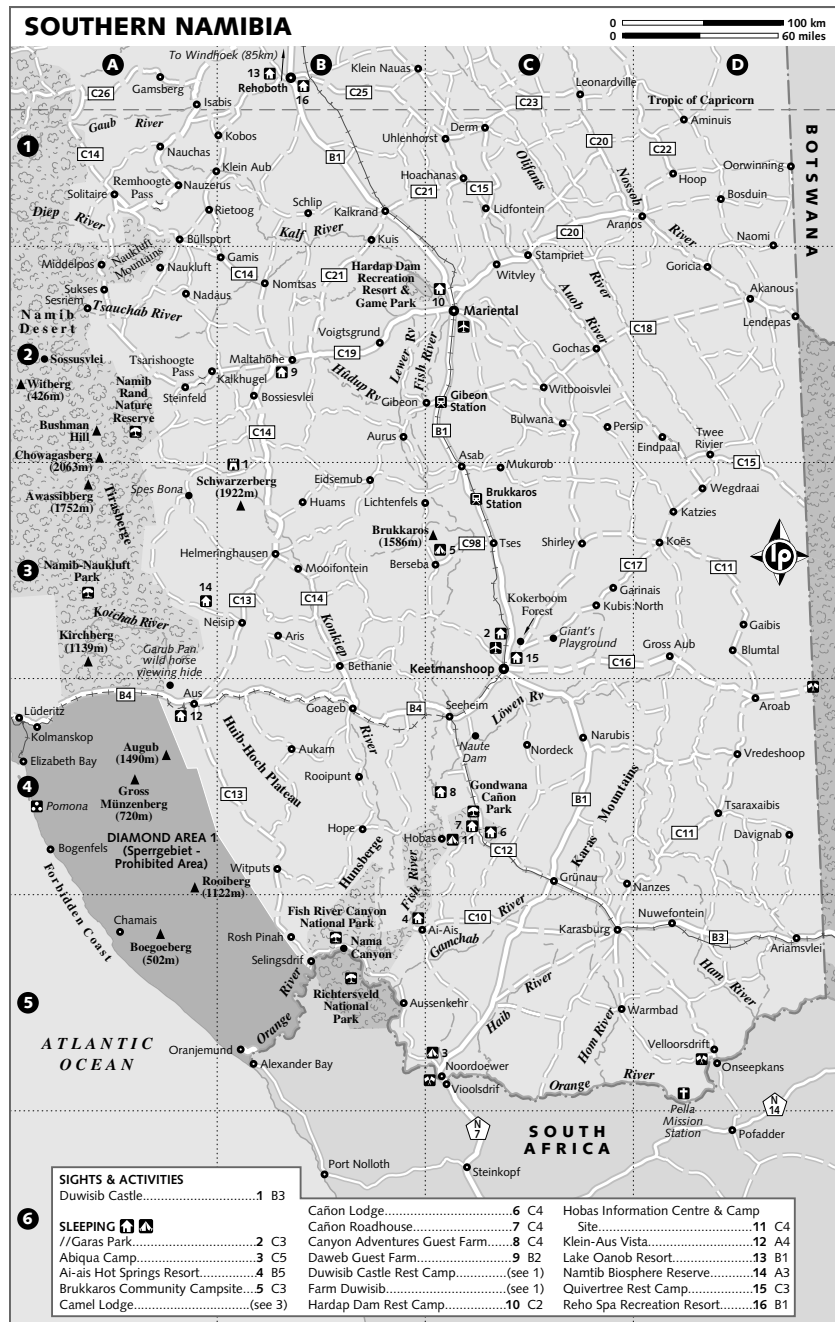
HARDAP DAM RECREATION RESORT & GAME PARK

The 25-sq-km **Hardap Dam** (per person US\$2.50 plus per vehicle US\$2.50; ☎ sunrise-6pm), 15km north-west of Mariental, offers good fishing and a 25,000-hectare wildlife park with 80km of gravel roads and a 15km hiking loop. Hardap is Nama for 'nipple', and it was named after the conical hills topped by the dolerite knobs dotting the area.

Most travellers come here for **Blue Lake**, which breaks up the arid plateau landscape and provides anglers with carp, barbel, mud-fish and blue karpers. The lake also supports countless species of water birds including flamingoes, fish eagles, pelicans, spoonbills and Goliath herons.

The **Hardap Dam Rest Camp** (Map p376; 2-bed bungalow US\$28-30, 4-bed bungalow US\$48, 5-bed bungalow US\$37-42, 4-bed luxury suite US\$59, 12-bed dormitory US\$48; (P) (🚽)) offers a variety of accommodation, plus a shop, restaurant, kiosk and swimming pool. Make reservations through NWR in Windhoek (p315).

To get to the resort and game park, take the signposted turning off the B1, 15km north of Mariental, and continue 6km to the entrance gate. For cruises on the lake, contact **Oasis Ferries** (☎ 240805, 243292).



MARIENTAL

📍 063

The small administrative and commercial centre of Mariental sits on the bus and rail lines between Windhoek and Keetmanshoop, and serves as a popular petrol stop. It's also home to the large-scale Hardap irrigation scheme, which allows citrus-growing and ostrich farming.

If you get stuck for the night, the well-established **Mariental Hotel** (📞 242466; mrlhotel@iafrica.com.na; Marie Brandt St; s/d US\$50/60; 📍 🚽) has plush rooms with modern amenities as well as a decent dining room.

All trains, buses and minibuses between Windhoek and Keetmanshoop pass through Mariental.

DUWISIB CASTLE

📍 063

This **castle** (Map p376; 📞 066-385303; admission US\$2.50; 🕒 8am-1pm & 2-5pm), a curious baroque structure 70km south of Maltahöhe, was built in 1909 by Baron Captain Hans-Heinrich von Wolf. After the German-Nama Wars, he commissioned architect Willie Sander to design a castle that would reflect his commitment to the German military cause.

Although the stone for the castle was quarried nearby, much of the raw material was imported from Germany, and required 20 ox-wagons to transport it across the 330km of desert from Lüderitz. Artesians and masons were hired from as far away as Ireland, Denmark, Sweden and Italy. The result was a U-shaped castle with 22 rooms, suitably fortified and decorated with family portraits and military paraphernalia. Rather than windows, most rooms have embrasures, which emphasise Von Wolf's apparent obsession with security.

Sleeping

Duwisib Castle Rest Camp (Map p376; camping for 4 people US\$13). This very amenable camping ground occupies one corner of the castle grounds; the adjoining kiosk sells snacks, coffee and cool drinks. Bookings are through NWR in Windhoek (p315).

Farm Duwisib (Map p376; 📞 223994; duwisib@iway.na; rper person with half board US\$35) Located 300m from the castle, this pleasant guest farm has rustic self-catering rooms for two to four people. While you're there, be sure to check out the historic blacksmith shop up the hill.

Getting There & Away

There's no public transport to Duwisib Castle. If you're coming from Helmeringhausen, head north on the C14 for 62km and turn northwest on to the D831. Continue for 27km, then turn west onto the D826 and travel a further 15km to the castle.

MALTÄHÖHE

📍 063

Maltahöhe, in the heart of a ranching area, has little to recommend it, but thanks to its convenient location along the back route between Namib-Naukluft Park and Lüderitz, the area supports a growing number of guest farms and private rest camps.

Hotel Maltahöhe (📞 293013; s/d US\$25/40; 📍 📍) has won several national awards for its amenable accommodation. It also has a restaurant and bar, and organises good-value day trips to Sossusvlei (p371).

Located 2km south of Maltahöhe, **Daweb Guest Farm** (Map p376; 📞 293088; daweb@natron.net; camping per person US\$4, s/d with half board US\$35/45; 📍 📍) is a working cattle ranch that offers accommodation in a lovely Cape Dutch-style farmhouse. Guests are invited to participate in guided walking or 4WD expeditions in the surrounding countryside.

Travel in this region typically requires a private vehicle or a well-oiled thumb (and a good measure of patience).

HELMERINGHAUSEN

📍 063

Tiny Helmeringhausen is little more than a homestead, hotel and petrol station, and has been the property of the Hester family since 1919. The highlight is the idiosyncratic **Agricultural Museum** (📞 283083; Main St; admission free; 🕒 on request), established in 1984 by the Helmeringhausen Farming Association. It displays all sorts of interesting old furniture and farming implements collected from local properties, as well as an antique fire engine from Lüderitz.

Helmeringhausen Hotel (📞 233083; s/d incl breakfast US\$40/45; 📍 📍) is a friendly and pleasant country hotel with a restaurant and bar. The food is excellent, the beer is always cold and there's a well-stocked cellar. However, even those who like game meat may feel uncomfortable being watched by all those accusing trophies.

Helmeringhausen is 130km south of Maltahöhe on the C4.

BRUKKAROS

With a 2km-wide crater, this extinct volcano dominates the skyline between Mariental and Keetmanshoop. It was formed some 80 million years ago when a magma pipe encountered ground water about 1km below the earth's surface and caused a series of volcanic explosions. From the car park, it's a 3.5km hike to the crater's southern entrance; along the way, watch for the remarkable **quartz formations** embedded in the rock. From here, you can head for the otherworldly **crater floor** or turn left and follow the southern rim up to the abandoned **sunspot research centre**, which was established by the US Smithsonian Institute in the 1930s.

Brukkaros Community Campsite (Map p376; camping per person US\$3, day visits US\$1.25; (P)) offers camping with toilets and a bush shower, but campers must supply all their own water.

Brukkaros rises 35km west of Tses, on the B1. Follow the C98 west for 40km and then turn north on to the D3904 about 1km east of Berseba. It's then 8km to the car park.

KEETMANSHOOP

(063)

Keetmanshoop (pronounced *kayt-mahns-hoo-up*) sits at the main crossroads of southern Namibia and has more petrol stations per capita than any other town in Namibia, which may hint at its main function for travellers. However, if you're looking to break up a long

drive, there is some noteworthy accommodation in the area, especially if you've yet to photograph Namibia's most famous tree, the kokerboom (quiver tree).

Sights

The most prominent example of colonial architecture is the 1910 **Kaiserliches Postamt** (Imperial Post Office; cnr 5th Ave & Fenschel St). The **town museum** (☎ 221256; admission free; ☎ 7.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri), housed in the 1895 **Rhenish Mission Church**, outlines the history of Keetmanshoop with old photos, early farming implements, an old wagon and a model of a traditional Nama home.

The area surrounding Keetmanshoop is home to large concentrations of **kokerbooms**, which belong to the aloe family and can grow to heights of 8m (see the boxed text, left).

Sleeping & Eating

//**Garas Park** (Map p376; ☎ 223217; morkel@namibnet.com; camping per person US\$3, plus per vehicle US\$1, day admission per person US\$1 plus per vehicle US\$1) Located 25km north of town, //Garas boasts 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.

Quivertree Rest Camp (Map p376; ☎ 222835; quiver@iafrica.com.na; camping per person US\$4, s/d 'igloo' bungalows US\$20/30, day admission per person US\$2 plus per vehicle US\$2) On Garaganus Farm 14km east of town, this 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.

Pension Gessert (☎ 223892; gesserts@iafrica.com.na; 138 13th St; s/d incl breakfast US\$25/35; (P) (E)) Located in the quiet Westdene neighbourhood, this quaint pension offers homely rooms, a beautiful garden, a refreshing swimming pool and country-style cooking to the weary traveller.

Schutzen-Haus (☎ 223400; 8th Ave; mains US\$2-5) This German-style pub and restaurant serves up cheap pub grub, and is also a good choice for a cold pint of Hansa or a game or two of billiards.

Getting There & Away

Intercape Mainliner buses between Windhoek (US\$24, 5¾ hours) and Cape Town (US\$32, 13¾ hours) stop at the Du Toit BP petrol station four times weekly in either direction; they also leave for Johannesburg (US\$46, 17 hours)

FERAL DESERT HORSES

On the desert plains west of Aus live some of the world's only wild desert-dwelling horses. Among the several theories about the origins of these eccentric equines is the one that suggests they're descended from German Schutztruppe cavalry horses abandoned during the South African invasion in 1915. Others claim they were brought in by Nama raiders moving north from beyond the Orange River. Another tale asserts that they're descended from a load of shipwrecked horses en route from Europe to Australia. Still others maintain they're descended from the stud stock of Baron Captain Hans-Heinrich von Wolf, the owner of Duwisib Castle, who set off for Germany in search of more horses but was killed in battle in France and never returned to Namibia.

At present, the population fluctuates between 150 and 160, but there have never been more than 280 individuals. Their only source of water is Garub Pan, which is fed by an artificial borehole.

via Upington. The Engen station, opposite, serves as the bus terminal for minibuses to and from Windhoek, Lüderitz and Noordoewer. Star Line 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 and Keetmanshoop (US\$9, 11 hours). On Wednesday and Saturday 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, phone **Trans-Namib** (☎ 292202).

AUS

(063)

After the Germans surrendered to the South African forces in 1915, Aus became one of two internment camps for German military personnel – military police and officers were sent to Okanjanje in the north while non-commissioned officers went to Aus. As the camp quickly grew to 1500 prisoners and 600 South African guards, residents were forced to seek shelter in flimsy tents. However, the resourceful inmates turned to brickmaking and constructed houses for themselves – they even sold the excess bricks to the guards for 10 shillings per 1000. The houses weren't opulent – roofs were tiled with unrolled food tins – but they did provide protection from the elements. The prisoners also built several wood stoves and even sank boreholes.

After the Treaty of Versailles, the camp was dismantled and by May 1919 it was closed. Virtually nothing remains, though several of the brick houses have been reconstructed. The former camp is 4km east of Aus village, down a gravel road, then to the right; there's now a national plaque commemorating it.

Sleeping

Klein-Aus Vista (Map p376; ☎ 258021; www.namibhorses.com; camping for 2 people US\$20, 10-person hut per person US\$30, s/d US\$75/130, s/d chalet US\$130/200; (P) (E) (A)) This 10,000-hectare ranch, located 3km west of Aus, is a hiker's paradise – the highlight of the ranch is a magical four-day trekking route, which traverses fabulous wild landscapes. Accommodation is in the main lodge or one of the two wonderful hikers' huts: the dormitory hut Geister Schlucht, in a Shangri-La-like valley, or the opulent Eagle's Nest complex, with several chalets built right into the boulders.

Namtib Biosphere Reserve (Map p376; ☎ 061-233597; namtib@iafrica.com.na; bungalows per person with full board US\$45; (P)) In the beautiful Tirasberge, this private reserve is run by ecologically conscious owners who've created a self-sustaining farm in a narrow valley, with distant views of the Namib plains and dune sea. To reach the reserve, take the C13 north of Aus for 55km, then turn west on the D707; after 48km turn east onto the 12km farm road to the lodge.

Getting There & Away

Aus is located 125km east of Lüderitz on the B4.

LÜDERITZ

(063)

Lüderitz is a surreal colonial relic sandwiched between the barren Namib Desert coast and the windswept South Atlantic. Barely 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 its town's unique heritage, and travellers often find that they're greeted in Lüderitz with warm smile and a cold pint.

KOKERBOOMS

Kokerbooms (*Aloe dichotoma*), or quiver trees, are widespread throughout southern Namibia and northwestern South Africa. They are in fact aloes and can grow to heights of 8m. The name is derived from the lightweight branches, which were formerly used as quivers by San hunters; they removed the branches' fibrous heart, leaving a strong, hollow tube.

The slow-growing plants occur mainly on rocky plains or slopes – they need rocks to anchor their shallow root systems, storing water in their succulent leaves and fibrous trunk and branches. Loss of water through transpiration is prevented by a waxy coating on the leaves and branches. In June and July, their yellow blooms appear, lending bright spots of colour to the desert.

GRAVEL ROADS

Many of Namibia's roads – even major routes – are surfaced with unsealed gravel, and while some are well maintained, others are rutted, potholed, corrugated and unevenly surfaced. For drivers, this can be at best tricky and at worst treacherous. In fact, the price of car hire relates directly to the number of cars rolled by foreigners who are inexperienced at driving on gravel roads. The following points may help.

- Keep your tyre pressure slightly lower than you would when driving on sealed roads.
- Try to avoid travelling at night when dust and distance may create confusing mirages.
- Keep your speed down to a maximum of 100km/h.
- Maximise your control by keeping both hands on the steering wheel.
- Follow ruts made by other vehicles.
- If the road is corrugated, gradually increase your speed until you find the correct speed – it'll be obvious when the rattling stops.
- Be especially careful on bends; slow right down before attempting the turn.
- If you have a tyre blowout, *do not* hit the brakes or you'll lose control and the car will roll. Instead, steer straight ahead as best you can and let the car slow itself down before you attempt to bring it to a complete stop.
- You don't meet other cars very often, but when you do, it's like dust clouds passing in the night. When a vehicle approaches from the opposite direction, reduce your speed and keep as far left as possible. On remote roads, it's customary to wave at the other driver as you pass.
- In rainy weather, gravel roads can turn to quagmires and desert washes may fill with water. If you're uncertain about the water depth in a wash, get out to check the depth (unless it's a raging torrent, of course!) and only cross when it's safe for the type of vehicle you're driving.
- Be on the lookout for animals. Kudus, in particular, often bound onto the road unexpectedly, resulting in an unpleasant meeting.
- Avoid swerving sharply or braking suddenly on a gravel road or you risk losing control of the vehicle. If the rear wheels begin to skid, steer gently into the direction of the skid until you regain control. If the front wheels skid, take a firm hand on the wheel and steer in the opposite direction of the skid.
- Dust permeates everything on gravel roads; wrap your food, clothing and camera equipment in dust-proof plastic or keep them in sealed containers. To minimise dust inside the vehicle, pressurise the interior by closing the windows and turning on the blower.
- In dusty conditions, switch on your headlights so you can be more easily seen.
- Overtaking (passing) can be extremely dangerous because your view may be obscured by flying dust kicked up by the car ahead. Try to gain the attention of the driver in front by flashing your high beams, which will indicate that you want to overtake (this isn't considered obnoxious in Namibia). If someone behind you flashes their lights, move as far to the left as possible.

Information

Several banks, including Commercial Bank of Namibia, First National Bank and Standard Bank, will change cash and travellers cheques.

Extreme Communications I-café (☎ 204256; Waterfront Complex; per hr US\$3.50; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Provides 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) This helpful office can help with national park information.

Dangers & Annoyances

Stay well clear of the Sperrgebiet or the Diamond Area 1. The northern boundary is formed by the B4 and extends almost as far east as Aus. The Sperrgebiet boundary is patrolled by some fairly ruthless characters and trespassers will be prosecuted (or worse).

Sights

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

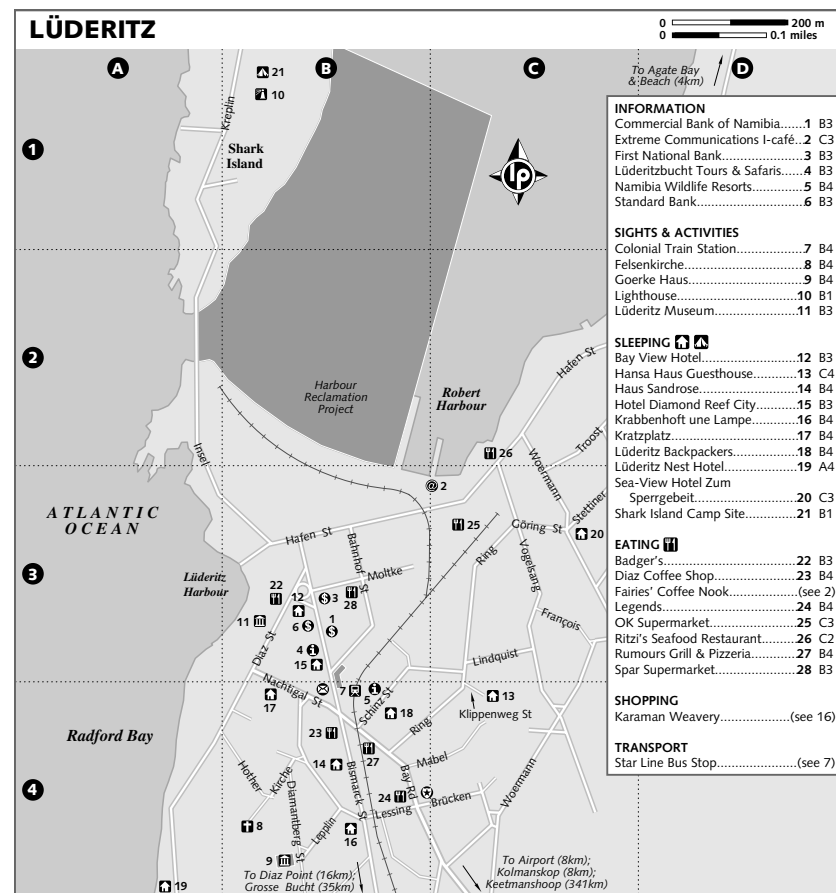
The prominent 1912 Evangelical Lutheran church, **Felsenkirche** (☎ 5.30-7pm Mon-Sat summer,

4.30-6pm Mon-Sat winter), dominates Lüderitz from high on Diamond Hill. It was designed by Albert Bause, who implemented the Victorian influences he'd seen in the Cape, and the stained-glass panel over the altar was donated by Kaiser Wilhelm II himself. 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's diamond-mining heritage and other aspects of its natural and cultural history.

Tours

Atlantic Adventure Tours (☎ 204030; sedina@iafrica.com.na) Weather permitting, it sails daily with the schooner *Sedina* 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 the tourist office.

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

Ghost Town Tours (☎ 204033; kolmans@iafrica.com.na; Goerke Haus) 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

BUDGET

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

Shark Island Camp Site (camping for 4 people US\$12, 5-bed bungalows US\$70; Ⓟ) 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 NWR (NWR) in Lüderitz (see p380), or in Windhoek (p315) – if space is available, camp sites and bungalows can also be booked at the entrance.

MIDRANGE

Hansa Haus Guesthouse (☎ 203581; mcloud@africaonline.com.na; 5 Mabel St; s/d with shared bathroom US\$30/35; Ⓟ) This imposing hilltop home boasts dramatic sea views and quiet surroundings. Rooms feature high ceilings and picture windows, while amenities include a TV lounge and a communal kitchen.

Krabbenhof une Lampe (☎ 202674; taurus@ldz.namib.com; 25 Bismarck St; s/d with shared bathroom US\$30/40, flats from US\$55; Ⓟ) 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 flats upstairs from a weaver.

Kratzplatz (☎ 202458; kratzmr@iway.na; 5 Nachttigal St; s/d from US\$30/45; Ⓟ) Housed in a converted church complete with vaulted ceilings, this centrally located B&B offers a variety of homey rooms to choose from.

Haus Sandrose (☎ 202630; sandrose@ldz.namib.com; clooser@africaonline.com.na; 15 Bismarck St, PO Box 109; 2-/4-bed r US\$35/50; Ⓟ) This intimate B&B is an excellent choice if you're looking for individualised attention and service. The Sandrose features three uniquely decorated rooms that surround a sheltered garden.

Hotel Diamond Reef City (☎ 203850; fotofun@iafrica.com.na; Bismarck St; s/d US\$40/60; Ⓟ) With a popular restaurant and friendly reception, this rambling place is a good, comfortable choice right in the centre of town. All rooms have high ceilings and satellite TV. Guests can take advantage of the next-door bar and casino.

Bay View Hotel (☎ 202288; bayview@ldz.namib.com; Diaz St; s/d US\$45/75; Ⓟ) This historic complex owned by the Lüderitz family is one of the most established hotels in town. Airy rooms with satellite TV surround a courtyard and a swimming pool, and there's also an on-site bar and seafood restaurant.

TOP END

Sea-View Hotel Zum Sperrgebiet (☎ 203411; michaels@ldz.namib.com; cnr Woermann & Göring Sts; s/d US\$85/135, f US\$225; Ⓟ ☺ 🍷) 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.

Lüderitz Nest Hotel (☎ 204000; www.nesthotel.com; 820 Diaz St; s/d US\$120/175, ste US\$315; Ⓟ ☺ 🍷) Lüderitz's most upmarket hotel occupies a jutting peninsula in the southwest corner of town complete with its own private beach. Each room, which is stylishly appointed with modern furnishings, faces out towards the sea.

Eating

If you're self-catering, there are a number of supermarkets as well as small seafood merchants in town.

Diaz Coffee Shop (☎ 203147; cnr Bismarck St & Bay Rd; 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 among locals.

Fairies' Coffee Nook (☎ 0812456158; Waterfront Complex; snacks & meals US\$1-4) This waterfront café offers sea views and is the perfect spot to linger over a steaming cup of coffee and a sweet snack.

Badger's (☎ 202855; Diaz St; meals US\$3-6) Although it primarily serves as the town watering hole, Badger's also serves up cheap pub grub as well as takeaway.

Rumours Grill & Pizzeria (☎ 202655; Bismarck St; mains US\$5-9; ☺ lunch & dinner) This is a popular steak house-pizzeria, which also boasts a bustling sports bar and German-style beer garden.

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; Hafen St, Waterfront; mains US\$6-12) This long-standing 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

DIAMOND DEMENTIA

Diamonds are the best known allotrope (form) of carbon, and are characterised by their extreme hardness (they are the hardest naturally occurring mineral) and high dispersion of light (diamonds are prismatic when exposed to white light). As a result, they are valued for industrial purposes as abrasives since they can only be scratched by other diamonds, and for ornamental purposes since they retain lustre when polished. It's estimated that 130 million carats (or 26,000kg) of diamonds are mined annually, which yields a market value of over US\$9 billion.

Diamonds are formed when carbon-bearing materials are exposed to high pressures and temperatures for prolonged periods of time. With the exception of synthetically produced diamonds, favourable conditions only occur beneath the continental crust starting at depths of about 150km. Once carbon crystallises, a diamond will continue to grow in size so long as it is exposed to sufficient temperatures and pressures. However, size is limited by the fact that diamond-bearing rock is eventually expelled towards the surface through deep-origin volcanic eruptions. Eventually, they are forced to the surface by magma, and are expelled from a volcanic pipe.

Although diamonds were discovered along the Orange River in South Africa and among the guano workings on the offshore islands as early as 1866, it apparently didn't occur to anyone that the desert sands might also harbour a bit of crystal carbon. In 1908, however, railway worker Zacharias Lewala found a shiny stone along the railway line near Grasplatz, and took it to his employer August Stauch. Stauch took immediate interest and, to his elation, the state geologist confirmed that it was indeed a diamond. Stauch applied for a prospecting licence from the Deutsche Koloniale Gesellschaft (German Colonial Society), and set up his own mining company, the Deutsche Diamanten Gesellschaft (German Diamond Society), to begin exploiting the presumed windfall.

In the years to follow, hordes of prospectors descended upon Lüderitz with dreams of finding fabulous wealth buried in the sands. As a result, Lüderitz became a boomtown as service facilities sprang up to accommodate the growing population. By September 1908, however, diamond dementia was threatening to escalate out of control, which influenced the German government to intervene by establishing the Sperrgebiet. This 'forbidden area' extended from 26°S latitude southward to the Orange River mouth, and stretched inland for 100km. Independent prospecting was henceforth *verboten* (forbidden), and those who'd already staked their claims were forced to form mining companies.

In February 1909, a diamond board was created to broker all diamond sales and thereby control prices. However, after WWI ended, the world diamond market was so depressed that in 1920, Ernst Oppenheimer of the Anglo-American Corporation was able to purchase Stauch's company, along with eight other diamond-producing companies. This ambitious move led to the formation of Consolidated Diamond Mines (CDM), which was administered by De Beers South Africa and headquartered in Kolmanskop.

In 1928, rich diamond fields were discovered around the mouth of the Orange River, and in 1944, CDM relocated to the purpose-built company town of Oranjemund. Kolmanskop's last inhabitants left in 1956, and the dunes have been encroaching on the town ever since.

In 1994, CDM gave way to Namdeb Diamond Corporation Limited (Namdeb), which is owned in equal shares by the Government of Namibia and the De Beers Group. De Beers is a Johannesburg- and London-based diamond-mining and trading corporation that held a virtual monopoly over the diamond trade for much of its corporate history.

meats and beef, but there's usually a few vegetarian options on the menu.

For self-catering, see the Spar and OK supermarkets (Map p381).

Shopping

Karaman Weavery (☎ 202272; 25 Bismarck St) This shop specialises in locally woven high-quality rugs and garments in pastel desert colours, with Namibian flora and fauna the favoured designs. It accepts special orders and can post them worldwide.

Getting There & Away

AIR

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.

BUS

Star Line buses to Keetmanshoop (US\$9, five hours) go from the historic train station at 12.30pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Lüderitz and the scenery en route (see opposite) are worth the 300km trip from Keetmanshoop via the tarred B4.

AROUND LÜDERITZ

Kolmanskop Ghost Town

A popular trip from Lüderitz is the ghost town of Kolmanskop, 14km away, which was once

a substantial diamond-mining town. It was named after an early Afrikaner trekker, Jani Kolman, whose ox-wagon became bogged in the sand here. It once boasted a casino, skittle alley and theatre with fine acoustics, but the slump in diamond sales after WWI and the discovery of richer deposits at Oranjemund ended its heyday. By 1956 it was deserted. Several buildings have been restored, but many have already been invaded by the dunes.

Kolmanskop tours (adult/child US\$4/2; ☎ 9.30am & 10.45am Mon-Sat, 10am Sun) last 45 minutes; pick up a permit from the Lüderitzbucht Tours & Safaris tourist office (see p380) at least 30 minutes prior to each tour. Participants must provide their own transport from town. After the tour, you can eat a light lunch in the Ball Hall restaurant.

Lüderitz Peninsula

The Lüderitz Peninsula, much of which lies outside the Sperrgebiet prohibited area, makes an interesting half-day excursion from town. The picturesque and relatively calm bay, **Sturm-vogelbucht**, has a lovely beach and is viable for swimming, but the water temperature would only be amenable to a seal or a penguin. A Norwegian whaling station was sited there in 1914, but is now a rusty ruin.

At **Diaz Point**, 22km west of Lüderitz, is a lovely, classic lighthouse and a replica of a cross erected in July 1488 by Portuguese navigator Bartolomeu Dias on his return voyage from the Cape of Good Hope. The point is frequented by sea lions, and from the nearby car park you can observe the jackass penguin colony on **Halifax Island**. You can also observe cormorants, wading birds and even the occasional school of dolphins.

Grosse Bucht (Big Bay) at the southern end of the peninsula, is another wild and scenic beach. This normally cold, windy spot is favoured by flocks of flamingoes that feed in the tidal pools. It's also the site of a small but picturesque shipwreck on the beach. Just a few kilometres north lies the small seaside rock arch known as **Klein Bogenfels**.

FISH RIVER CANYON NATIONAL PARK

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 NWR, and all accommodation must be booked in advance through the Windhoek office (p315) or the Lüderitz office (p380). 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** (Map p376; ☎ 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.

Sights

HOBAS

From Hobas, it's 10km on a gravel road to the **Hikers' Viewpoint** (the start of the hiking route), which has picnic tables, braai pits and toilets. Just around the corner is a good overview of the northern part of the canyon. The **Main Viewpoint**, a few kilometres south, has probably the best – and most photographed – overall canyon view. Both these vistas take in the sharp river bend known as Hell's Corner.

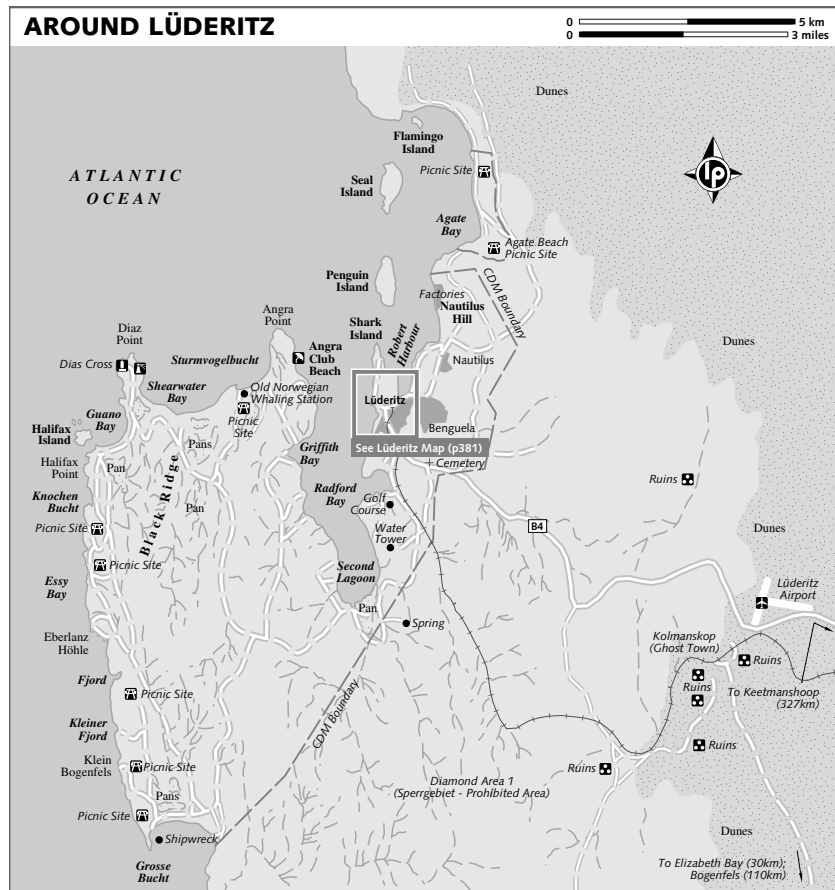
AI-AIS

The **hot springs** (admission per session US\$3; ☎ 9am-9pm) at Ai-Ais (Nama for 'scalding hot') are located beneath the towering peaks at the southern end of Fish River Canyon National Park. Although the 60°C springs have probably been known to the San for thousands of years, the legend goes that they were 'discovered' by a nomadic Nama shepherd rounding up stray sheep. They're rich in chloride, fluoride and sulphur, and are reputedly therapeutic for sufferers of rheumatism or nervous disorders. The hot water is piped to a series of baths and Jacuzzis as well as an outdoor swimming pool.

Activities

FISH RIVER HIKING TRAIL

The five-day **hike** (per person US\$11) 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 at the NWR office in Windhoek (p315) or Lüderitz (p380).

Officials sometimes require a doctor's 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 final 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

Accommodation must be prebooked through the NWR office in Windhoek (p315) or in Lüderitz (p380).

Hobas Camp Site (Map p376; camping for 4 people US\$15; (P) (C)) 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 (Map p376; camping for 4 people US\$15, 4-bed bungalows US\$30, 2-/4-bed flats US\$35/35; (P) (C)) Amenities include washing blocks, braai pits and use of the resort facilities. All flats have private baths 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 turn-

ings, 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.

AROUND FISH RIVER CANYON

Canyon Adventures Guest Farm

The friendly **Canyon Adventures Guest Farm** (Map p376; ☎ 063-266018; www.resafrica.net/fish-river-lodge; bush camping per person US\$6, dm US\$8, r per person incl breakfast from US\$32; (P) (C)) is situated on a ranch cradled in the confluence of the Löwen and Fish River Canyons amid some of the most amazing geology imaginable – don't just take our word for it! Highlights include the 4WD trip (US\$10) into the canyon to swim in the river pools, a 'garnet crawl', and the bizarre petroglyphs in the rippled black dolerite.

From April to October, there's also the wonderful five-day, 85km Löwenfish hiking trail (US\$45 per person, including two nights' accommodation at the Stable). This hike takes in the Löwen Canyon and several days along Fish River Canyon, interrupted by several ascents to the plateau and descents down scenic cliffs. Camp sites (with no facilities) are situated at water sources along the way and the last night you can stay at the **Koelkrans Camp** (per person US\$14), with cooking facilities and hot showers. On the last day, hikers climb out of the canyon for the last time and follow a scenic route back to the lodge. Stages of the trip may be done as one- to four-day hikes. Note that prebooking is essential.

To reach the guest farm, head west from Keetmanshoop and turn south on the D545; after 33km, bear left at the junction. After a further 32km, you'll see the signpost for Canyon Adventures Guest Farm on the right-hand side of the road. At this point, it's 22km west to the lodge. It's passable with a 2WD but in several places you will have to take it very easy.

Gondwana Cañon Park

Founded in 1996, the 100,000-hectare Gondwana Cañon Park was created by amalgamating several former sheep farms, and removing the fences to restore the wilderness country immediately northeast of Fish River Canyon National Park. Water holes have been established, and wildlife is now returning to this wonderful, remote corner of Namibia.

In the process, the park absorbed the former Augurabies-Steenbok Nature Reserve, which was created earlier to protect Hartmann's mountain zebras, steenboks, gemsboks and klipspringers.

SLEEPING

Funding for the park is derived from a 5% bed levy at Cañon Lodge and Cañon Roadhouse. To make bookings, contact **Cañon Travel Centre** (☎ 061-230066; www.namibiaweb.com/canyon; PO Box 80205, Windhoek).

Cañon Roadhouse (Map p376; www.natron.net/canyon; camping per site US\$6.50 plus per person US\$2.50, s/d US\$50/84; (P) (C)) This wonderfully unique place attempts to re-create a roadhouse out on the wildest stretches of Route 66 – at least as it exists in the collective imagination. Buffets are served on an antique motorcycle, the stunning window shades are made from used air filters, and the bar stools are air filters from heavy-duty vehicles – and then there's the obligatory collection of number plates (where donations from your home country are gratefully accepted).

Cañon Lodge (Map p376; www.natron.net/canyonlodge; mountain camp per person US\$15, s/d incl breakfast US\$65/100; (P) (C)) This mountain retreat, which is one of Namibia's most stunning accommodation options, consists of 26 red stone bungalows that are perfectly integrated into the boulder-strewn backdrop. The restaurant, housed in a restored 1908 farmhouse, is decorated with historic farming implements and rambling gardens.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Gondwana Cañon Park can be accessed via private vehicle along the C37.

NOORDOEWER

☎ 063

Noordoewer sits astride the Orange River, which has its headwaters in the Drakensberg Mountains of Natal, South Africa, and forms much of the boundary between Namibia and South Africa. The river was actually named not for its muddy colour, but for Prince William V of Orange, who was the Dutch monarch in the late 1770s. Although the town primarily serves as a border post and a centre for viticulture (the cultivation of grapes), it serves as a good base for organising a canoeing or rafting adventure on the Orange River.

Activities

RIVER TRIPS

Canoe and rafting trips are normally done in stages and last from three to six days. The popular trips from Noordoewer to Aussenkehr aren't treacherous by any stretch – the white water never exceeds class II – but they do provide access to some wonderfully wild canyon country. Other possible stages include Aussenkehr to the Fish River mouth, the Fish River mouth to Nama Canyon (this one has a few more serious rapids) and Nama Canyon to Selingsdrif. For more information, contact **Amanzi Trails** (☎ South Africa 21-559 1573; www.amanzitrails.co.za).

Sleeping

Abiqua Camp (Map p376; ☎ 297255; camping per person US\$3.50; (P)) This friendly and well-situated camp, 13km on the Orange River Rd, sits on the riverbank opposite some interesting sedimentary formations. Abiqua camp is also the launch site for Amanzi Trails and Rivers Incorporated river-trip operators.

Camel Lodge (Map p376; ☎ 797171; s/d incl breakfast US\$30/35; (P) (C) (S)) This affordable motel-style lodge offers recently renovated rooms complete satellite TV and air-con, as well as a refreshing swimming pool and braai pits.

NAMIBIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Namibia has an exhaustive (and growing) array of hotels, rest camps, camping grounds, caravan parks, guest farms, backpackers' hostels, B&Bs, guesthouses and safari lodges. It would take an enormous volume to mention everything that's available, so those included in this book are recommended and/or provide accommodation in areas with few options. Note, however, that the lack of a mention here doesn't mean that an establishment *isn't* recommended.

For further information, see the following annual publications, which are distributed at tourist offices: *Where to Stay – Namibia; Welcome to Namibia – Tourist Accommodation & Info Guide; Namibia Holiday & Travel* and the listings and accompanying map published by the Hospitality Association of Namibia (HAN).

Hotels and most other establishments are graded using a star system; awards are based

PRACTICALITIES

- Botswana generates electricity at 220V AC, 50Hz, though they confusingly use two types of plugs: the South African type with three round prongs, and the UK type with three square prongs.
- Most of Namibia's English-language newspapers are based in Windhoek: the *Namibian*, published weekdays; the *Windhoek Observer*, published on Saturday; and the government-owned *New Era*.
- Print and slide film, batteries and accessories as well as video cartridges are available in Windhoek and Swakopmund, though they're not cheap, and you might not find your desired brand.
- The Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) operates nine radio stations, broadcasting on different wavebands in 12 languages.
- Namibia uses the metric system for measurements.

on guidelines from the Ministry of Environment & Tourism. The accommodation rates listed in this chapter are rack rates for overseas bookings, and include 15% value-added tax (VAT). In most cases, you'll get the best rates when booking from within Namibia.

The accommodation breakdown used in this chapter is budget less than US\$25, mid-range US\$25 to US\$50, and top end above US\$50.

Camping

Most towns have caravan parks with bungalows or rondavels (round African-style huts) where you can stay for very reasonable rates. For information on camping in national parks, see right. Anyone is welcome to camp on communal lands, but if you can't get out of sight, it's polite to ask locals to direct you to an unobtrusive place to set up. On private land, you must secure permission from the landowner.

Guest Farms

A growing number of predominantly German-Namibian private farms welcome guests, and provide insight into the white rural lifestyle. Many of these farms have also established

hiking routes and set aside areas as wildlife and hunting reserves. In all cases, advance bookings are essential.

Hostels & B&Bs

Backpacker hostels now operate in Windhoek, Swakopmund, Walvis Bay, Outjo, Keetmanshoop and Lüderitz, and more are planned. They provide dorm accommodation and cooking facilities, and range from US\$5.50 to US\$8 per person. Bed-and-breakfast establishments are also emerging around the country; for listings, contact the **Bed & Home Association of Namibia** (☎ 061-222899; www.bed-breakfast-namibia.com; PO Box 90270, Klein Windhoek).

Hotels

The Namibian hotel-classification system rates everything from small guesthouses to four-star hotels. Most are locally owned and managed, and most have at least a breakfast room, if not a dining room and a bar. Any hotel with a name that includes the word *garni* lacks a full dining room, but does offer a simple breakfast. The most luxurious hotels include the Kalahari Sands and Windhoek Country Club, both in Windhoek, and the Swakopmund Hotel & Entertainment Centre.

National Parks Accommodation

Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR) oversees accommodation in the national parks and offers a range of camp sites, bungalows, chalets and 'bus quarters' (for bus tours). Most sites include access to a swimming pool, shop, kiosk, restaurant, braai (barbecue) facilities and well-maintained ablutions (amenities) blocks. During school holidays, visitors may be limited to three nights at each of the three Etosha National Park camps and 10 nights at other camps. Pets aren't permitted in any camp, but kennels are available at the gates of Daan Viljoen, Von Bach Dam, Gross-Barmen, Ai-Ais and Hardap Dam. For booking information, see p313.

Safari Lodges

Most of Namibia's lodges offer luxury accommodation and superb international cuisine. Rates are very reasonable when compared with similar places in other countries in the region and there's little mid-tier pricing. Even around the popular Etosha National Park, you'll pay a third of what you'd pay for similar lodges in the Okavango Delta. Other areas are even more reasonably priced.

ACTIVITIES

Hiking is a highlight in Namibia, and a growing number of private ranches have established wonderful hiking routes for their guests to enjoy; the finest ones include Klein-Aus Vista, near Aus, and Canyon Adventures Guest Farm, south of Keetmanshoop. You'll also find superb routes in the national parks: Daan Viljoen, Namib-Naukluft, Fish River Canyon, Waterberg Plateau and the Ugab River area of the Skeleton Coast. For more about the latter, see p313.

A burgeoning craze is sandboarding, which is commercially available in Swakopmund. In the same area, operators offer horse and camel riding, quad-biking, deep-sea fishing, sea kayaking, bird-watching and skydiving. A growing number of 4WD routes are opening up for a largely South African market, including several popular routes along remote sections of the Namib Desert. Whitewater rafting is available on the Kunene River, but it's extremely expensive; more down to earth is the whitewater canoeing along the Orange River, on the South African border.

BOOKS

Guide to Namibian Game Parks, by Willie and Sandra Olivier, has the lowdown on national parks, wildlife reserves and other conservation areas, with useful maps and advice on wildlife viewing. It's available locally.

Horns of Darkness – Rhinos on the Edge, by conservationists Carol Cunningham and Joel Berger, describes a journey through the Namibian wilds to find and protect the country's remaining desert rhinos. *The Sheltering Desert*, by Henno Martin, is a Namibian classic recounting the adventures of German geologists Henno Martin and Hermann Korn, who spent two years in the Namib Desert avoiding Allied forces during WWII.

The Colonising Camera, by Wolfram Hartmann et al (eds), is part of the new historical writings. This book is an illustrated history of the country. *To Free Namibia: The Life of the First President of Namibia*, by Sam Nujoma, is an autobiography of the president. *Herero Heroes*, written by JB Gewald, blends oral and written accounts to provide a fascinating history of Namibia's Herero people. *Namibia – The Struggle for Liberation*, by Alfred T Moleah, is an account of Swapo's independence struggle and describes the situation before success was certain.

The Burning Shore, by Wilbur Smith, is highly entertaining and is probably the best novel set in Namibia. *Kaokoveld – the Last Wilderness*, by Anthony Hall-Martin, J du P Bothma and Clive Walker, is a breathtaking compilation of beguiling photos and will have you heading for northwestern Namibia.

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. Banks, government departments and tourist offices also keep these hours, but some petrol stations, especially along highways, are open 24 hours.

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. Run-of-the-mill bars open from around 5pm until late, while nightclubs and late-night drinking spots open their doors at around 9pm (or 10pm) and keep going until 5am.

In this chapter we have only listed opening hours where they differ significantly from these broad guidelines. See above for information on business hours in the Southern Africa region.

CHILDREN

Although Namibia is a safe place for children to travel in, be advised that child-related goods and services are extremely limited, particularly in the far fringes of the country.

CUSTOMS

Any item (except vehicles) from elsewhere in the Southern African Customs Union – Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland – may be imported duty free. From elsewhere, visitors can import duty free 400 cigarettes or 250g of tobacco, 2L of wine, 1L of spirits and 250mL of eau de Cologne.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Theft isn't particularly rife in Namibia, but in Windhoek and Swakopmund, avoid walking alone at night and conceal your valuables.

Similarly, don't leave anything in sight inside a vehicle or at camp sites, and keep valuables inside your sleeping bag at night.

Kavango and Caprivi both have malarial mosquito problems, and bilharzia is present all over northern Namibia; in the eastern Caprivi, the tsetse fly is especially active at dusk, and all of northern Namibia's rivers harbour very large crocodiles.

East of Lüderitz, keep well clear of the Sperrgebiet, the prohibited diamond area, as well-armed patrols can be overly zealous. The area begins immediately south of the Lüderitz-Ketmanshoop road and continues to just west of Aus, where the off-limits boundary turns south towards the Orange River.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Namibian Embassies & Consulates

Namibia has embassies and high commissions in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (see the relevant country chapters). If you need a visa and your home country lacks a Namibian diplomatic mission, fax or post your passport details and desired length of stay to the **Ministry of Home Affairs** (Map p318; ☎ 061-292 2111; fax 292 2185; mlusepani@mha.gov.na; Private Bag 13200, Windhoek) and hope for the best.

Namibian diplomatic representatives elsewhere include the following:

Angola (☎ 02-395483; fax 333923; 95 Rua Dos Coqueiros, PO Box 953, Luanda)

France (☎ 01-44 17 32 65; fax 44 17 32 73; 80 Ave Foch, Sq de l'Ave Foch, F-75116 Paris)

Germany (☎ 0228-346021; fax 346025; Mainzerstr 47, D-53179 Bonn)

UK (☎ 020-7636 6244; fax 7637 5694; namibia-high comm@btconnect.com; 6 Chandos St, London W1G 9LU)

USA (☎ 202-986 0540; fax 986 0443; embnamibia@aol.com; www.grnnet.gov.na; 1605 New Hampshire Ave NW, Washington DC 20009)

Embassies & Consulates in Namibia

All of the following representations are in Windhoek (area code ☎ 061); opening hours are weekdays only:

Angola (Map p318; ☎ 227535; fax 221498; Angola House, 3 Ausspann St, Ausspannplatz, Private Bag 12020; ☎ 9am-1pm)

Botswana (Map p316; ☎ 221941; fax 236034; 101 Nelson Mandela Dr, PO Box 20359; ☎ 8am-12.30pm)

EU (☎ 220099; 4th fl, Sanlam Centre, 154 Independence Ave, PO Box 231; ☎ 9am-12.30pm)

France (Map p318; ☎ 229022; fax 231436; 1 Goethe St, PO Box 20484; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm)

Germany (Map p318; ☎ 223100; fax 222981; 6th fl, Sanlam Centre, 154 Independence Ave, PO Box 231; ☎ 9am-12.30pm)

Kenya (Map p318; ☎ 226836; fax 221409; Kenya House, Robert Mugabe Ave, PO Box 2889; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-5pm)

Malawi (Map p318; ☎ 221391; fax 227056; 56 Bismarck St, Windhoek West, PO Box 23547; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm)

South Africa (Map p316; ☎ 205 7111; fax 224140; RSA House, cnr Jan Jonker St & Nelson Mandela Dr, Klein Windhoek, PO Box 23100; ☎ 8.15am-12.15pm)

UK (Map p318; ☎ 223022; fax 228895; bhc@mweb.com.na; 116A Robert Mugabe Ave, PO Box 22202; ☎ 9am-noon)

USA (Map p318; ☎ 221601; fax 229792; www.usembassy.namibnet.com; 14 Lossen St, Ausspannplatz, Private Bag 12029; ☎ 8am-noon Mon, Wed & Fri)

Zambia (Map p318; ☎ 237610; fax 228162; cnr Sam Nujoma Dr & Mandume Ndemufayo Ave, PO Box 22882; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-4pm)

Zimbabwe (Map p318; ☎ 228134; fax 226859; Gamsberg Bldg, cnr Independence Ave & Grimm St, PO Box 23056; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-3pm)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

A major local event is **Maherero Day**, on the weekend nearest 26 August, when the Red Flag Herero people gather in traditional dress at Okahandja for a memorial service for the chiefs killed in the German-Nama wars. A similar event, also at Okahandja, is staged by the Mbanderu or Green Flag Herero on the weekend nearest 11 June. On the weekend nearest 10 October, the White Flag Herero gather in Omaruru to honour their chief Zeraua.

Among the ethnic European community, events include the **Windhoek Carnival** (WIKA) in late April/early May; the **Küska** (Küste Carnival) at Swakopmund in late August/early September; the **Windhoek Agricultural Show** in late September; and the **Windhoek Oktoberfest** in late October.

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

Independence Day 21 March

Good Friday March or April

Easter Sunday March or April

Easter Monday March or April

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 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.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Cardboard Box Travel Shop (www.namibian.org)

Namibia's best budget and adventure travel agency is the place for a range of travel options, excellent background information and efficient bookings.

Gorp Travel (www.gorp.com) This is another useful trip-planning site, with links to adventure outfits featuring Namibia.

Namibia Holiday & Travel (www.holidaytravel.com.na) This site provides information from the glossy publication of the same name.

Namibia Tourism (www.tourism.com.na) The national tourist office site provides a wide range of local travel information.

Namibia Wildlife Resorts (www.namibiawildliferesorts.com) Includes guidelines on booking national parks, permits and accommodation.

Namibian (www.namibian.com.na) For up-to-date news from Namibia, try the *Namibian* newspaper site.

Natron.Net (www.natron.net/etour.htm) This is a good tourism site, with useful links.

For more information, see p25.

LANGUAGE

At independence in 1990, the official language of Namibia was designated as English, but the first language of most Namibians is either a Bantu language, which would include Owambo, Kavango, Herero and Caprivian languages; or a Khoisan language, including Khoikhoi (Nama/Damara) and San dialects. In addition, Afrikaans is used as a lingua franca, and is the first language of more than 100,000 Namibians of diverse ethnic backgrounds. German is also widely spoken but is the first language of only about 2% of the population. In the far north, Portuguese is the first language of an increasing number

of Angolan immigrants. (See p772 for some useful words and phrases.)

MAPS

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

The Macmillan *Namibia Travellers' Map*, at a scale of 1:2.4 million, has clear print and colour-graded altitude representation, but minor routes aren't depicted.

Beautiful but generally outdated government survey topographic sheets and aerial photos are available from the **Office of the Surveyor General** (Map p318; ☎ 061-245055; fax 249802; Ministry of Justice, Robert Mugabe Ave, Private Bag 13267, Windhoek). The 1:250,000 series maps cost US\$4 each and the 1:50,000 maps are US\$3.

MONEY

The Namibian dollar (N\$) equals 100 cents, and in Namibia it's pegged to the South African rand (in South Africa, it fetches only about R0.70), which is also legal tender 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¢, and N\$1 and N\$5.

ATMS

ATMs are common in major cities and towns, and accept most major Western cards.

Credit Cards

Most major credit cards (especially Visa and MasterCard) are accepted at tourist hotels and restaurants in the larger cities and towns.

Moneychangers

To change cash, both Barclays and Standard Chartered banks charge 3% commission, while the former charges 3% to change travellers cheques.

Tippling

Tippling is expected only in upmarket tourist establishments, but many places add a

service charge as a matter of course. Tipping is officially prohibited in national parks and reserves, and bargaining is only acceptable when purchasing handicrafts and arts directly from the artist or artisan.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques are falling into disuse in Namibia, though they can still be changed in large cities.

POST

Domestic post generally moves slowly; for example, it can take several weeks for a letter to travel from Windhoek to Lüderitz or Katima Mulilo. Overseas airmail post is normally more efficient, and is limited only by the time it takes the letter to get from where you post it to Windhoek. Poste restante works best in Windhoek (Poste Restante, GPO, Windhoek, Namibia). Photo identification is required to collect mail.

TELEPHONE & FAX

Namibian area codes all have three digits and begin with 06. When phoning Namibia from abroad, dial the international access code (009 from South Africa, 011 from the US and 00 from most other places), then the country code (264), followed by the area code (without the leading zero) and the desired number. To phone out of Namibia, dial 00 followed by the country code, area code and number.

Telecom Namibia Flexicards (you buy only as much time as you want) are sold at post offices and some retail shops, and most internet cafés also have fax services. Some remote bush locations subscribe to a message service operated by **Walvis Bay Radio** (064-203581), which relays messages. Although mobile coverage is usually fine in major towns and cities, reception disappears as soon as you reach the open road.

TOURIST INFORMATION Local Tourist Offices

Windhoek has both city and national tourist offices, and Karibib, Usakos, Omaruru, Okahandja, Gobabis, Keetmanshoop, Lüderitz, Swakopmund, Grootfontein and Tsumeb all have private or municipal tourist information offices. Keep an eye out for the free publication *Welcome to Namibia – Tourist Accommodation & Info Guide*, which

is distributed by the **Namibia Tourism** (Map p318; 061-284 2360; www.tourism.com.na; Continental Bldg, ground fl, 272 Independence Ave, Private Bag 13346, Windhoek). Also very useful is the glossy **Namibia Holiday & Travel** (061-225665; www.holidaytravel.com.na; PO Box 21593, Windhoek), which provides background information and listings. Those with a long-term interest in the country may want to subscribe to **Travel News Namibia** (061-225665; www.travelnews.com.na; PO Box 21593, Windhoek).

Namibia Community Based Tourism Association (Map p316; Nacobta; 061-250558; www.nacobta.com.na; 3 Weber St, PO Box 86099, Windhoek) provides information on its network of community camping grounds and craft outlets around the country.

Tourist Offices Abroad

Kartagener Associates Inc (061-858 1270; kainyc@att.net; 631 Commack Rd, Suite 1A, Commack, NY 11725, USA)

Namibia Tourism South Africa Cape Town (021-419 3190; namibia@saol.com; Main Tower, Standard Bank Centre, Ground fl, Adderley St, PO Box 739, Cape Town 8000, South Africa; Sandton (011-784 80240; namtour@netdail.co.za; 11 Alice Lane, 3rd fl, East Wing, Standard Bank Bldg, PO Box 78946, Sandton 2146 South Africa)

Namibia Tourism UK (020-7636 2924; www.namibiaturism.co.uk; 6 Chandos St, London W1G 9LU)
Namibia Verkehrsbüro (069-1337 3620; www.namibia-tourism.com; Schillerstrasse 42-44, D-60313 Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany)

VISAS

All visitors require a passport that is valid for at least six months after their intended departure date from Namibia, as well as a means of leaving the region (a vehicle or an onward plane or bus ticket). No visas are required for visitors from Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Canada or the USA. Tourists receive entry for an initial 90 days, but extensions are available from the immigration offices.

Windhoek is useful for picking up visas for Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Kenya and Tanzania; for Angolan visas, your best option is the Angolan Consulate in Oshakati (see p377).

Visas for Onward Travel

You can pick up visas for several countries in Windhoek; for details about how to go about this, see p390.

Angola Visas are readily available only to Namibian citizens and residents; others must apply in their home country (usually limited to fly-in visas for arrival in Luanda) or attempt to secure an overland visa in Oshakati.

Kenya UK citizens need a visa, which costs US\$50 and takes two days to process. A multiple-entry visa costs US\$100 and can take up to six weeks to issue. Citizens of the USA and Australia can enter Kenya for 30 days without a visa; longer stays require a visa, which is issued in two days and costs US\$53.

Zambia Visas are required by US, Australian and UK citizens. In Windhoek, they take one day to process and cost US\$60/100/200 for a single-entry/double-entry/multiple-entry visa. Note that they're available at the border for considerably less (normally US\$25 for US citizens and \$65 for UK citizens). However, they're free if you're 'introduced' to Zambia by a Zambian company (such as a hotel, backpackers' hostel or tour company).

Zimbabwe Australian, New Zealand and US citizens need a visa, which can be processed at the border (US\$30/45 for single/double entry). However, you can also secure a visa in advance for the same rates; multiple-entry visas cost US\$55 and aren't available at the border.

WORK

The chances of a foreigner scoring a long-term Namibian work or residence permit are remote, but some are successful. Namibia's current policy is to accept only wealthy overseas investors starting up a business in the country or those who can provide skills and expertise that's not locally available. If you are offered a job, you (or better, your prospective employer) must secure a temporary residence permit from the **Ministry of Home Affairs** (Map p318; 061-292 2111; mlusepani@mha.gov.na; Private Bag 13200, Windhoek). While it may be relatively easy to get a three-month work permit, to extend it or secure a one-year permit is usually quite difficult. Getting a permanent residence permit may well subject you to more insanity-inspiring bureaucracy than you're prepared to face. Note that even marrying a Namibian citizen won't guarantee a permanent residence permit.

TRANSPORT IN NAMIBIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

This section covers access into Namibia from neighbouring countries. You'll find info about reaching Southern Africa from elsewhere in Africa and other continents on p752.

Entering Namibia

All visitors entering Namibia must hold a passport that is valid for at least six months. Also, allow a few empty pages for stamp-happy immigration officials, especially if you're crossing over to Zimbabwe and/or Zambia to see Victoria Falls.

Members of the EU, USA, South Africa, Scandinavia, Balkan countries and all members of the Commonwealth (with the exception of Ghana, India, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and Mauritius) will be granted a one-month entry permit on arrival (passport photos required). Other nationalities will need to obtain a visa before they arrive in the country.

Air

Most international flights into Namibia land at Windhoek's **Chief Hosea Kutako International Airport** (WDH; 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** (ERS; 051 299 6500), although this airport mainly serves internal flights and light-aircraft.

The main carrier is Air Namibia, which flies routes to and within Southern Africa as well as some international flights to London and Frankfurt. Reservations are best handled either by telephone or via the internet, rather than through agencies.

AIRLINES FLYING TO & FROM NAMIBIA

Air Namibia (code SW; 061-299 6363; www.airnamibia.com.na; hub Windhoek)

British Airways (code BA; 199 712 266; www.ba.com; hub Heathrow)

LTU (code LT; 49-211 9418 333; www.ltu.com; hub Frankfurt)

South African Airways (code SA; 020-22 96 63; www.flysaa.com; hub Johannesburg)

TAAG Angola (code DT; 244-222 333 139; http://pages.zdnet.com/taagangola; hub Luanda)

Border Crossings

Thanks to the Southern African Customs Union, you can drive through Namibia, Botswana, South Africa and Swaziland with a minimum of ado. To travel further to the north requires a carnet de passage, which can amount to heavy expenditure and serious consideration.

If you're driving a hire car into Namibia you will need to present a letter of permission from the rental company saying the

car is allowed to cross the border. For more information on taking a vehicle into Namibia see p756.

ANGOLA

To enter Namibia overland, you'll need an Angolan visa permitting overland entry. See p392 for more information on visas. The main border crossings into Namibia are at Ruacana, Oshikango and Rundu.

BOTSWANA

On Monday and Friday you can catch a very useful shuttle-bus service from Windhoek to Maun, via Ghanzi, with Audi Camp (see p109). The fare is US\$55 per person one way (10 hours). Shuttles leave Windhoek on Monday and return from Maun on Wednesday. Prebooking is essential. Contact Audi Camp to arrange a pick-up or drop-off in Ghanzi for a negotiable fare. This may also be done as a return trip, including an inexpensive Audi Camp safari in Botswana's Okavango Delta.

Other than this, the public transport options between the two countries are few and far between. The Trans-Kalahari Hwy from Windhoek to Botswana, via Gobabis, crosses the border at Buitepos/Mamuno. A supposedly weekly Trans-Namib Star Line bus leaves Gobabis at 9am Friday for Ghanzi, in Botswana (where you'll find at least one or two daily buses to Maun), but this service is highly unreliable.

Unfortunately, passengers on the Intercap Mainliner between Windhoek and Victoria Falls may not disembark in Botswana.

SOUTH AFRICA

The **Intercap Mainliner** (☎ 0861 287287; www.intercape.co.za) service from Windhoek to Cape Town (US\$70, 19½ hours) runs four times weekly. Travelling between Jo'burg and Windhoek (US\$50, 10½ hours, four times weekly) involves a connection in Upington. Students and seniors receive a 15% discount.

Bus tickets can be easily booked either by phone or via the internet.

ZAMBIA

The only crossing between Namibia and Zambia is via the Zambezi pontoon ferry at Wenela/Sesheke. The only realistic way to cross the border at this point is if you have your own car as there is no reliable public transport on the Zambian side of the border.

The cost of the ferry is US\$12 per vehicle; pedestrians ride free. It's about 4km from Katima Mulilo (Namibia), and 5km from Sesheke (Zambia). If you don't want to wait for the ferry, you can opt for the small private boats that carry passengers across the river for a negotiable fee – usually between US\$0.50 and US\$1.50. The Zambian border crossing is 500m from the ferry crossing and the Namibian border crossing is 1km away.

ZIMBABWE

There's no direct border crossing between Namibia and Zimbabwe: to get there you must take the Chobe National Park transit route from Ngoma Bridge through northern Botswana to Kasane-Kazungula, and from there to Victoria Falls.

At present, the only public transport between Namibia and Zimbabwe is the weekly **Intercap Mainliner** (www.intercape.co.za), which travels between Windhoek and Victoria Falls (US\$73/144 one way/return, 21 hours, three times weekly) via Grootfontein, Rundu and Katima Mulilo. It departs Windhoek at 5pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and arrives in Victoria Falls at 2pm the following day. In the other direction, it leaves at 11am Sunday, Wednesday and Friday and arrives in Windhoek at 5.30am the following day. Although this bus passes through Botswana en route, it's not possible to disembark there.

Bus

There is only really one main inter-regional bus service connecting cities in Namibia with Botswana and South Africa. Intercap Mainliner (see p591) runs services between Windhoek and Gaborone (Botswana) and Johannesburg and Cape Town (South Africa). It also travels west to Swakopmund and Walvis Bay.

Car & Motorcycle

Crossing land borders with your own vehicle or a hire car is generally straightforward as long as you have the necessary paperwork – the vehicle registration documents, proof of insurance and a letter from the hire company stating that you have permission to take the car over the border. You won't need a carnet de passage to drive around Namibia and other countries in the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), ie Lesotho, Botswana, South

Africa and Swaziland, although if you're planning on travelling further north you will need to obtain one.

A vehicle registered outside Namibia can be driven around the country so long as you have proof of insurance and a letter from the hire-car agency giving you permission to cross the border with the car. Everyone entering Namibia with a foreign-registered car must pay a Cross Border Charge (CBC). Passenger vehicles carrying fewer than 25 passengers are charged N\$70 (US\$10) per entry. Keep the receipt, because you may be asked to produce it at police roadblocks.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Air Namibia (www.airnamibia.com.na) has an extensive network of local flights operating out of Eros Airport in Windhoek. There are regular flights to Tsumeb; Rundu and Katima Mulilo; Lüderitz and Alexander Bay (South Africa); and Swakopmund and Oshakati/Ondangwa. Passengers are allowed a baggage limit of 20kg; additional weight is US\$2 per kilogram. For details of Air Namibia's local offices log on to the website.

Bicycle

Namibia is a desert country and totally unsuitable for a biking holiday. Distances are great and horizons are vast; the climate and landscapes are hot and very dry; and, even along major routes, water is scarce and villages are widely spaced. What's more, the sun is intense and prolonged exposure to the burning ultraviolet rays is hazardous. Also bear in mind that bicycles are not permitted in any national parks.

Bus

Namibia's bus services aren't extensive. Luxury services are limited to the **Intercap Mainliner** (☎ 061-227847; www.intercape.co.za), which has scheduled services from Windhoek to Swakopmund, Walvis Bay, Grootfontein, Rundu and Katima Mulilo. You're allowed only two items of baggage, which must not exceed a total of 30kg. Fares include meals. Reservations can be made in advance either over the phone or via the internet.

The rail service, **Trans-Namib** (☎ 061-29 22 02; www.transnamib.com.na/Starline.htm), has a system of Star Line buses that service Lüderitz, Ghanzi (Botswana), Outjo, Khorixas, Henties Bay,

Grootfontein, Oshakati, Rundu and a route across the Central Namib between Mariental and Walvis Bay. There's also a connection from Lüderitz to the border post at Noordoewer (US\$9, five hours). These buses operate on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Car & Motorcycle

The easiest way to get around Namibia is by road, and an excellent system of tarred roads runs the length of the country from the South African border at Noordoewer to Ngoma Bridge on the Botswana border and Ruacana in the northwest. Similarly, tarred 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. Most 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.

See opposite for information on the documentation required for self-drivers.

DRIVING LICENCE

Foreigners can drive in Namibia on their home driving licence for up to 90 days, and most (if not all) car-hire companies will accept foreign driving licences for car hire. If your home licence isn't written in English then you'd be better off getting yourself an International Driving Permit (IDP) before you arrive in Namibia.

FUEL & SPARE PARTS

The cost of fuel (petrol) is relatively expensive in Namibia, around US\$0.75 per litre, but prices vary according to the remoteness of the petrol station. Although the odd petrol station is occasionally open 24 hours, most are open from 7am to 7pm.

As a general rule you should never pass a service station without filling up and it is advisable to carry an additional 100L of fuel (either in long-range tanks or jerry cans) if you're planning on driving in more remote areas.

Spare parts are readily available in most major towns, but not elsewhere. If you are planning on some 4WD driving it is advisable to carry the following: two spare tyres, jump

leads, tow rope and cable, a few litres of oil, a wheel spanner and a complete tool kit.

HIRE

For a compact car, the least-expensive 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 hire period before they allow unlimited kilometres. Note that some internationally known companies, such as Avis and Budget, charge amenable daily rates but only allow 200 free kilometres per day. If one company's rates seem quite a bit higher than another's, check whether it includes VAT, which would otherwise add 15.5% to the quoted figure. Most companies also require a N\$1000 (about US\$155) deposit and won't hire to anyone under the age of 23 (although some go as low as 21).

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. Most major international car-hire companies will also allow you to take a vehicle to neighbouring South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe, but only if you have cleared it with the company beforehand so they can sort out the paperwork. Rental companies are less happy about drivers going to Zambia and will not allow you to go anywhere else in Africa.

It is probably best to deal with one of the major car-hire companies listed below.

Avis (www.avis.com) In Windhoek, Swakopmund, Tsumeb and Walvis Bay as well as at the international airport.

Budget (www.budget.co.za) Another big agency with offices in Windhoek and Walvis Bay as well as at the 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.333.com.na) A competitive local car-hire firm with offices in Swakopmund and Walvis Bay.

INSURANCE

Although insurance is not compulsory it is strongly recommended. No matter who you

hire your car from, make sure you understand what is included in the price (unlimited kilometres, tax, insurance, collision-waiver and so on) and what your liabilities are. Most local insurance policies do not include cover for damage to windshields and tyres.

Third-party motor insurance is a minimum requirement in Namibia. However, it is also advisable to take Damage (Collision) Waiver, which costs around US\$20 extra per day for a 2WD; and about US\$40 per day for a 4WD. Loss (Theft) Waiver is also an extra that is worth having. For both types of insurance, the excess liability is about US\$1500 for a 2WD and US\$3000 for a 4WD. If you're only going for a short period of time it may be worth taking out the Super Collision Waiver, which covers absolutely everything, albeit at a price.

It is nearly always advisable to pay with a 'gold level' credit card which will offer you some protection should anything go wrong and will possibly cover you for collision as well.

PURCHASE

Unless you're going to be staying in Namibia for several years, it's not worth purchasing a vehicle in-country. The best place to buy a vehicle is across the border in South Africa.

If you do buy a car with hard currency and resell it in Namibia, you can remit the same amount of hard currency to your home country without hassles – just keep the papers and inform the bank in advance.

ROAD HAZARDS

In addition to its fantastic system of tarred roads, Namibia has everything from high-speed gravel roads to badly maintained main routes, farm roads, bush tracks, sand tracks and challenging 4WD routes. Driving under these conditions requires special techniques, appropriate vehicle preparation, a bit of practice and a heavy dose of caution, see p380 for some tips.

ROAD RULES

To drive a car in Namibia, you must be at least 21 years old. Like most other Southern African countries, traffic keeps to the left side of the road. The national speed limit is 120km/h on paved roads, 80km/h on gravel roads and 40km/h in all national parks and reserves. When passing through towns and villages, assume a speed limit of 60km/h, even in the absence of any signs.

Highway police use radar and love to fine motorists (about US\$10, plus an additional US\$1 for every 10km you exceed the limit) for speeding. Sitting on the roof of a moving vehicle is illegal, and wearing seat belts (where installed) is compulsory in the front (but not back) seats. Drink-driving is also against the law, and your insurance policy will be invalid if you have an accident while drunk. Driving without a licence is also a serious offence.

If you have an accident causing injury, it must be reported to the authorities within 48 hours. If vehicles have sustained only minor damage and there are no injuries – and all parties agree – you can exchange names and addresses and sort it out later through your insurance companies.

Hitching

Hitching is possible in Namibia, but it's illegal in national parks, and even main highways see relatively little traffic. 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 wanted or offered. (For warnings about hitching, see p764.)

Tours

Namibia's public transport system will get you to population centres, but not the sites most visitors want to see: the Skeleton Coast, Damaraland, the Kaokoveld, the Kunene River, Fish River Canyon, Sossusvlei, the Naukluft and so on. Therefore, even those who'd normally spurn organised tours may want to consider joining an inexpensive participation safari, or a more luxurious option:

Afro Ventures (☎ 064-463812; www.afroventures.com; PO Box 1772, Swakopmund) Afro Ventures offers several Namibian highlights tours, focusing on fine lodges and 4WD tours. Its five- and seven-day Namib Desert tours explore the desert coast and dunes. It also runs the beautiful Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge.

Campfire Safaris (☎ 062-523946, 081 242 6116; namibia@bigfoot.com; PO Box 4500, Rehoboth) This economically priced company offers combi tours through a range of Namibian highlights. The booking agent is the Cardboard Box Travel Shop.

Cardboard Box Travel Shop (Map p318; ☎ 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 p318; ☎ /fax 061-247668; www.chameleonsafaris.com; 8 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 & Southern Highlights (US\$600); and seven-day Northern/Southern Highlights (US\$350 each).

Crazy Kudu Safaris (☎ 061-222636; fax 255074; www.crazykudu.com; 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. They'll also organise custom safaris: an Okavango Delta and Victoria Falls excursion; and Fish River or Kaokoveld extensions for the best possible price.

Enyandi Safaris (☎ 061-255103; enyandi@iafrica.com.na) This recommended company runs budget tours mainly in northwestern Namibia, starting at US\$245 per person for a seven-day trip.

Felix Unite (☎ 061-255488; fax 251400; rvanrooyen@aficansolutions.org; www.felixunite.com) This water-oriented company runs river-rafting and canoeing adventures on the Kunene (US\$700 for 10 days) and Orange Rivers (US\$160/180 for four/six days).

Kaokohimba Safaris (☎ /fax 061-222378; www.natron.net/tour/kaoko/himbae.htm; PO Box 11580, Windhoek) Kaokohimba organises cultural tours through Kaokoveld and Damaraland and wildlife-viewing trips in Etosha National Park. A highlight is Camp Syncro, in remote Marienflüß.

Magic Bus Safaris (☎ 061-259485, 0811 298093; magicbus@iafrica.com.na; 5 Grieg St, Windhoek) This small company runs budget trips from Windhoek to Sossusvlei (US\$160 to US\$190), Etosha (US\$170), a seven-day combination (US\$360) and other options.

Muramba Bushman Trails (Map p325; ☎ 067-220659; bushman@natron.net; PO Box 689, Tsumeb) This recommended company, owned by Reinhard Friedrich, provides a unique introduction to the Heikum San people. **Namib Sky** (☎ 061-293233; 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.

Okakambe Trails (☎ 064-402799/405258, 0811 246626; D1901, PO Box 1668, Swakopmund) With Okakambe, you can ride on horseback along the Swakop River to a moon landscape; it also organises longer trips.

Outside Adventures (☎ 061-245595, 0812 2470329; www.namibia-adventures.com) These folks run excellent day tours from Windhoek: brewery tours (US\$17), mountain biking in Daan Viljoen (US\$28), Arnhem Caves tours (US\$45 to US\$85), Katutura township tours (US\$17) and tours to see cheetahs, leopards and rhinos (US\$45 to US\$70).

Turnstone Tours (☎ 064-403123; www.turnstone-tours.com; PO Box 307, Swakopmund) Turnstone runs 4WD camping tours around Swakopmund, including Sandwich Harbour and Damaraland. Day tours are US\$75 and all-inclusive longer trips cost US\$300 per person per day.

West Coast Safaris (☎ /fax 061-256770) The company runs camping participation safaris, including seven-day tours through Kaokoland (US\$460); eight days in Kaokoland and Etosha (US\$447); seven-day wildlife tours to Etosha; Damaraland and Waterberg (US\$442); seven-day Bushmanland tours (US\$442); and Damaraland tours (US\$460).

Wild Dog Safaris (☎ 061-257642; www.wilddog-safaris.com; 19 Johann Albrecht St, PO Box 26188, Windhoek) This friendly operation runs seven-day Northern Namibia Adventures and Southern Swings (US\$340 each); three-day Etosha or Sossusvlei circuits (US\$160 each, or

US\$350 for both); as well as longer participation safaris and accommodated excursions.

Trains

Trans-Namib Railways (☎ 061-2982032; 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.

Windhoek is Namibia’s railway hub, with services south to Keetmanshoop and Upington (South Africa), north to Tsumeb, west to Swakopmund and Walvis Bay and east to Gobabis. Trains carry economy- and business-class seats but, although most services operate overnight, sleepers are no longer available. Bookings can be made at train stations or through the Windhoek Booking Office. The tickets must be collected before 4pm on the day of departure.