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Exploring Namibia

An uncharted territory
for intrepid explorers

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THE EDGE OF AFRICA

Far-flung otherworldly moonscapes, muscular mountains, wind-rippled sand dunes and endless horizons, Namibia is uncharted territory for intrepid explorers

Unlike its southern African siblings who have, quite literally, grabbed the lion's share of attention with their extraordinary wildlife offerings and endless photogenic landscapes of craggy mountains, powdery beaches, thundering waterfalls and picturesque wine estates, Namibia has very quietly glided under the radar. Its low-key approach has earned it a reputation as one of the world's most underrated travel destinations.

Few African countries can match Namibia's sheer natural beauty. Located along southern Africa's west coast, with Angola, Zambia, Botswana and South Africa as its neighbors, Namibia is one of the least densely inhabited countries in the world—a population of around 2.5 million spread over a vast landscape about twice the size of California. The country is defined by the Central Plateau, a spine of rugged mountain ranges and valleys that runs through its heart from north to south. This plateau is flanked by the golden grasslands of the Kalahari Desert to the east, wildlife-strewn bushveld to the north, and along the western fringe, the Namib, a narrow sand-swept coastal desert strip—said to be one of the driest and oldest in the world—stretching for some 1,200 miles down from Angola, along the country's western coast to South Africa.

At the center of the country, Windhoek, Namibia's small, bustling capital city with its Neo-Baroque cathedral spires and incongruous German castles—architectural remnants of the country's past as a German colony—is the best spot from which to begin and end your journey. And while many travelers choose to traverse the country by road, it's really only when viewed from above that the full magnitude of Namibia's wildly beautiful landscape becomes apparent; its sweep of sun-dappled rocky plains—fractured by a network of dry riverbeds—and otherworldly landscapes of bulging, reddish-brown strata-lined mountains and deep river-cut valleys, which ripple as far as the eye can see.



Sustainability and guest comfort go hand-in-hand in the redesign of andBeyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge

WORDS: Lauren Ho, IMAGE © andBeyond



To the southwest of Windhoek is the private NamibRand Nature Reserve, a sprawling 850-square-mile conservation area spread over a flat, gravel-strewn Mars-like wilderness that stretches to a dramatic frame of rugged ridges, wind-rippled sand dunes and endless horizons. Nudged against the foot of the Nubib Mountains is andBeyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge, an 11-suite camp that recently emerged from a top-to-toe overhaul.

A stylish hub from which to explore nearby sights such as Sandwich Harbour, where soaring sand dunes plunge dramatically into the Atlantic Ocean, and Sossusvlei, a salt-and-clay pan surrounded by an endless sweep of breathtaking russet wind-rippled sand dunes, the lodge is now an up-to-date more sustainable version of its former self, with enhanced environmental technology including an innovative gray water management system—the first to be used in Africa at such a scale—and a solar power set up that means each of the 10 suites and the new two-bedroom Star Dune Suite are almost completely self-powered. “I think the luxury travel experience will morph into one that is more purposeful, where making a positive impact and giving back in meaningful ways will form basic tenets of what guests seek in luxury travel adventure,” shared

Jason King, andBeyond regional director, Southern Africa.

At the southern edge of the Namib Desert, about 1.5 hours by plane from Windhoek, Zannier Hotels Sonop, one of two Namibian properties in the Zannier portfolio, is a luxury tented camp complete with its own landing strip set within the same magnificent barren expanse, studded by low-lying Camel Thorn trees and framed by a spectacular backdrop of craggy granite and limestone mountains. Here, experiences also take in its desert surroundings, from early morning yoga to horseback riding. The tents themselves take their cues from 1920s British colonialism, richly dressed in leather and timber antique furnishings from writing desks to safari chairs, and accessories like telescopes, vintage maps, binoculars and magnifying glasses. Supper is a grand five-course affair, served by black-tie, white-gloved butlers, while a postprandial tittle can be enjoyed in the club-like Cocktail & Cigar Lounge or under the stars at the lodge’s open-air cinema.

Meanwhile, over at Zannier Hotels Omaanda—the group’s original Namibian property—10 clay and thatch-roof huts, inspired by the traditional homes of the Owambo tribe, serve

Left page
At andBeyond Sossusvlei Desert Lodge, the 10 suites and the new two-bedroom Star Dune Suite are almost completely self-powered

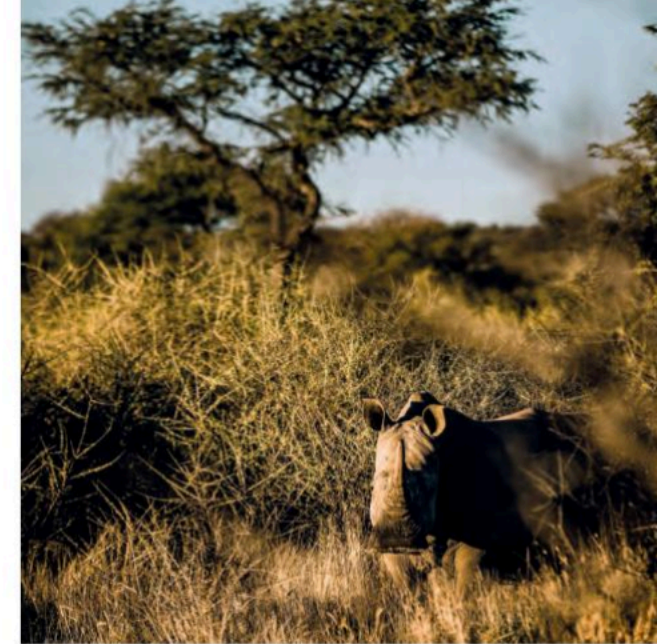
Right page (top)
The Zannier Reserve ensures the preservation of the local natural wealth and the durability of the wildlife

Right page (bottom)
Zannier Hotels Omaanda offers 10 individual Owambo-style thatch-and-clay huts for utmost privacy

IMAGES (left page) © andBeyond, (right page) © Zannier Hotels

as a base for various game drives and nature walks—from rhino tracking to marveling at meerkats at sunrise—within the sprawling grasslands of Zannier Reserve by Naankuse, a 7,500-hectare wildlife sanctuary privately owned by the Zannier family. This all comes together as part of the group’s masterplan to preserve Namibia’s pristine wild surroundings, which also includes anti-poaching initiatives and animal rehabilitation. “In less than two years, our reserve has positively impacted the lives of 41 animals; 19 of which were critically endangered, 18 were near threatened and four were vulnerable,” said Arnaud Zannier, founder and owner of Zannier Hotels. “Guests are now searching for a meaning when traveling, even more since COVID-19. Since its launch, Zannier Hotels has always adopted this approach and the last months have accelerated our desire to go even further.”

Stretching over 300 miles along the Atlantic shoreline north from Sandwich Harbour to the Angolan border, the treacherous Skeleton Coast has long been a graveyard of ill-fated ships thanks to its almost constant blanket



EMBRAER TIP

The fastest and longest-ranged single-pilot business jet, the Phenom 300E, is now capable of speeds up to Mach 0.80, getting you and five occupants to Windhoek efficiently from Cape Town.



of fog, offshore rocks and heavy surf. In this far-flung corner of the world, against a background of raw, rugged wilderness, Shipwreck Lodge, managed by Journeys Namibia, comprises 10 chalets dotted among the wind-lashed dunes, each with captivating views of the fierce Atlantic breakers barreling in. Spend your days visiting the seal colonies at Möwe Bay, journey along the Hoarusib River, where occasionally brown hyenas, lions and desert-adapted elephants roam, or simply hunker down in your cabin and drink in the mesmerizing views of the desolate wilderness. As it happens, the ideal destination for self-isolation. “Luxury travel will continue to persist in the long-run, especially in isolated, unique and remote areas,” explained Alice Rigoldi from Journeys Namibia Group. Like with each of the aforementioned properties, sustainability and minimal environmental impact are at the top of the list for Shipwreck Lodge, which also runs on solar power, has a special water filtration system and supports the local communities.

With over 42% of the country’s surface area under some form of conservation management, as well as having the world’s largest populations of cheetah and black rhinos living outside of protected areas, there is no doubt that Namibia is trailblazing its way to the forefront of conservation in Africa. ◀



BUILDING RESILIENCE

andBeyond supports the Africa Foundation with their fundraising efforts to provide clean and accessible water to vulnerable African communities. Conservation activities are also continuing to fight against high risks of poaching due to less vehicles moving through the reserves. andbeyond.com

Since 2016, **Zannier Hotels** partnered with the Naankuse Foundation, which actively contributes to the conservation and regulation of the flora and fauna, protecting biodiversity and fighting the extinction of threatened species. In the Shiloh Wildlife Sanctuary, wild animals such as rhinos or elephants are treated under optimal conditions. zannierhotels.com

The **Shipwreck Lodge** managed by Journeys Namibia, is focused on sustainable tourism and having as little impact as possible on the environment. Shipwreck Lodge partnered with the Puros and Sesfontein Conservancies, creating job opportunities for the two communities. shipwrecklodge.com.na



Left
Zannier Hotels Sonop is constructed on top of granite boulders in authentic 1920s British colonial style

Above
The so-called Skeleton Coast is a 25 mi wide and 300 mi long coastal stretch in Namibia

Right
The shipwreck-shaped chalets are nestled between the dunes with a view of the Atlantic Ocean only a few miles away

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