

Grand Namibia

with Naturalist Journeys

October 13 – 25, 2022

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Naturalist Journeys, LLC



Namibia hosts superlative scenery, a dramatic arid landscape of great beauty. Along our route we witness massive red dunes, fanciful granite outcrops, isolated, iconic inselbergs, colonial Swakopmund on the scenic coast, and world-renowned Etosha National Park. We also find a wonderful array of arid-land birds, many not found in other parts of Africa.

The Namib is the oldest desert in the world, with oases for a rich and sometimes odd array of mammal, plant, and birdlife. Elephant, Oryx, Blesbok, hornbills, Rockrunner, Herero Chat, Dune Lark, numerous birds of prey, and more await! Highlights also include time at the vivid red dunes of Sossusvlei, which contrast coastal Walvis Bay and the rugged Erongo Mountains.

For many a highlight of the tour is time at stunning and wildlife-rich Etosha National Park, where Elephant, Zebra, and other species congregate at scenic waterholes and birds abound.

Itinerary

Thurs., Oct. 13

Arrivals in Windhoek

Welcome to Namibia! Please plan to arrive at Hosea Kutako International Airport in Windhoek at your convenience today. You are met at the

airport for the transfer to our hotel. We stay the first night in Windhoek and offer some birding this afternoon for those arriving in time—if you can stay awake to shift to this time zone, birding awaits! Rocky slopes should yield Short-toed Rock-Thrush, White-tailed Shrike, Barred Warbler, and with luck, a favorite trip bird for some, the Rockrunner.

Close to Windhoek is Avis Dam, a great area to bird with easy walking. Over the water we should find aerial-feeding Bradfield's and Palm Swifts, Rock Martin, and both Greater-striped and Pearl-breasted Swallows. Wetland birds occur and South African Shelduck, Cape Shoveler, and Red-billed Teal are usually present. In the shrub-lands surrounding the dam, Desert Cisticola, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Black-chested Prinia, and a variety of seedeaters are easily seen. We keep dinner simple tonight as many feel a bit jet lagged. If you wish to arrive a day early to rest up from travel, we can help you make those plans.

Accommodations at River Crossing Lodge, Windhoek (D)

Fri., Oct. 14 Windhoek | Sossusvlei

After birding an area of dry thorn savanna habitat of the highlands near Windhoek, we proceed towards the South, birding along the scenic route we take. On such drives we share knowledge of Namibian geography,

Tour Summary

13-Day / 12-Night Namibia Wildlife Tour

\$5590, from Windhoek

Airport is Hosea Kutako International (WDH)

Tour Highlights

- Experience the Namib, the world's oldest desert, famous for massive red dunes at Sossusvlei
- Look for signature bird species such as Rockrunner, Herero Chat, Hartlaub's Spurfowl, and Dune Lark
- Walk amidst the fanciful granite outcrops of the Erongo Mountains, known for impressive wildlife, rock art, and over 200 species of birds
- Visit the base of the mighty Brandberg, Namibia's largest mountain (8450 feet), a dramatic inselberg that is home to exciting birds and mammals
- See one of the most bizarre plants on the planet, the Welwitschia
- Watch exciting raptors such as African Black (Verreaux's), Martial, and Booted Eagles, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Lanner and Peregrine Falcons, Rock Kestrel, and more
- Find arid-land specialty birds including chats, coursers, sandgrouse, numerous larks, bustards, and korhaans
- Visit Etosha National Park—wildlife splendor!
- Enjoy the colonial seaside town of Swakopmund

history, and culture as we go. A good portion of today's drive is on gravel roads that wind through changing elevations.

Species we can expect to encounter on various stops today and in the next few days include the near-endemic Rosy-faced Lovebird, White-tailed Shrike, Buffy Pipit, and a number of Southern African regional endemics such as Ashy Tit, Southern Pied Babbler, Short-toed Rock Thrush, Mountain Wheatear, Southern Ant-eating Chat, Kalahari and Karoo Scrub-Robins, Black-chested Prinia, Marico and Chat Flycatchers, Crimson-breasted Shrike, Cape Glossy and Pale-winged Starling, Dusky and Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Great Sparrow, Sociable Weaver, Scaly-feathered Finch, Lark-like Bunting, and the handsome Groundscraper Thrush.

We also have a good possibility of seeing large and impressive raptors on this route, such as Martial, Booted, Tawny, and African Hawk-Eagle. Pale-chanting Goshawk and Rock Kestrel can be abundant over the Spreetshoogte pass, a spectacular pass overlooking the vast Namib Desert plains and inselbergs. This is also a good place to scan for Mountain (Hartmann's) Zebra, Greater Kudu, and Klipspringer.

One of the impressive sights to behold is the massive nest of Sociable Weaver that often houses a pair of Pygmy Falcon. We stop regularly along the way to look for Rufous-eared Warbler, White-throated Canary, Chestnut-vented and Layard's Warbler (Tit-Babbler), and a number of lark species. We pass several extensive local farms on which we could see arid-land adapted mammals grazing, such as Oryx and Springbok.

Descending the Spreetshoogte Pass we enter the oldest desert in the world, the Namib. We look for Herero Chat, Karoo Chat, Rüppell's Korhaan, Ludwig's Bustard, Burchell's Courser, and other arid adapted species such as Yellow Canary, Cardinal Woodpecker, Pririt Batis, and with luck Karoo Long-billed Lark.

Our accommodations are very close the entrance gate of Namib Naukluft National Park. Individual cabins blend in with the stark environment and keep a light footprint on the landscape with their simple design. We are immersed in the Namib here within granite outcrops and expansive desert views. Wildlife can roam just out our doors. Our spacious, air-conditioned rooms all have private bath and patios. Enjoy a drink from the bar or a dip in the pool in view of Elim Dune, or simply take in the immense sense of peace and quiet that this vast desert brings.

Accommodations at Dead Valley Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., Oct. 15 Namib-Naukluft National Park Sossusvlei & Deadvlei

We get up by starlight to witness sunrise at the dunes at Sossusvlei. Marvel at some of the largest sand dunes in the world, all a deep orange-red color that glows with first light. We spend the day exploring this magnificent landscape with its unique natural history. A special effort is made to locate the Dune Lark, Namibia's only true endemic. Learn about desert plant adaptations, look for lizards, and study animal tracks left in the sand.

You also have the opportunity to walk into the world-renowned area called Deadvlei where you have the opportunity to photograph this magnificent landscape. Artistic skeletons of tree trunks rise from a white clay pan with massive red dunes behind—just striking! Both areas are within the larger Namib-Naukluft National Park.

Returning to camp, relax at the pool or sort through those first photographs—now your own!

Accommodations at Dead Valley Lodge (B,L,D)

Sun., Oct. 16 Sossusvlei | Swakopmund

Today we head towards the coast, stopping regularly to look for arid zone specialists such as Ludwig's Bustard, Sociable Weaver, Pygmy Flacon, Lappet-faced Vulture, and Burchell's Courser. The dry river courses

and drainage lines are relatively well wooded and we should see species such as Dusky Sunbird, Rosy-faced Lovebird, and Scaly-feathered Finch along the way.

After a lunch break in the desert we close in on the coast where the cold Benguela current from the Atlantic Ocean brings in dense coastal fogs.

Swakopmund is a popular seaside resort because of its old-world charm and relaxed atmosphere. Swakopmund exudes romance and history, which makes it a rich cultural melting pot of old and new. The town is an eclectic mixture of Bohemian and Bavaria, which make it home to artists, hippies, strait-laced descendants of German settlers, stately Herero women in Victorian dresses, and hardworking miners, game rangers, safari operators, and fishermen.

Accommodations at Pension Rapmund, Swakopmund (B,L,D)

Mon., Oct. 17 Swakopmund & Walvis Bay

We spend most of the morning birding around the Walvis Bay Lagoon and if needed, we have a second chance here to find Dune Lark, Namibia's endemic beauty. The sheer number of the birds around the lagoon is impressive. This area has the highest density of Chestnut-banded Plover, a near-threatened species, in the world. The Walvis Bay Lagoon happens to be one of Africa's most important shorebird stopovers (a RAMSAR site), where we see incredible numbers of Greater and Lesser Flamingos and some extremely localized species, such as the diminutive Damara Tern.

Resident birds of the lagoon include Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, White-fronted Plover, and Three-banded Plover, as well as the sought-after Chestnut-banded Plover. Common Greenshank, Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstone, Curlew Sandpiper, Whimbrel, and Bar-tailed Godwit are palearctic migrants that sometimes stick around in winter.

We stop in at the Swakopmund salt works to look for Gray's Lark. This pale-colored desert lark can be difficult to locate as it blends in perfectly to the expansive gravel plains that it frequents in the true Namib Desert. Another good find would be the pale form of Tractrac Chat as well as Familiar Chat, Red-capped Lark, and with luck, Rufous-eared Warbler and Karoo Eremomela. Some of the water birds encountered can be White-breasted, Bank, Cape, and Crowned Cormorants, Blue-billed (Hottentot) and Cape Teal, Red-billed and Maccoa Ducks, Cape Shoveler, Grey-headed Gull, and Little Grebe.

Return to enjoy the seaside town of Swakopmund, known for its wide-open avenues, colonial architecture, and its surrounding otherworldly desert terrain. Founded in 1892 as the main harbor for German South West Africa, Swakopmund is often described as being more German than Germany. While touristy, we have fun here and are assured of some great dining this evening.

Accommodations at Pension Rapmund, Swakopmund (B,L,D)

Tues., Oct. 18 Swakopmund | Erongo Mountains

After breakfast we depart for the Erongo Mountains via the Spitzkoppe. The Spitzkoppe is one of a series of impressive granite inselbergs that rise steeply out of the desert plains. It is at this imposing Batholith where we have our best chance of finding Herero Chat, should we have missed out on this species at the Spreetshoogte. On the way we may also encounter the rare and declining Burchell's Courser and many other sandy desert species like Stark's Lark and other strategic species like Karoo Long-billed Lark.

On the plains surrounding these hills we should see Rüppell's Korhaan, Namaqua Sandgrouse, Chat Flycatcher, and Karoo Chat, Verreaux's and Booted Eagles, Augur Buzzard, African Hawk-Eagle, and Lanner Falcon also occur in the hills as do Rosy-faced Lovebird, Carp's and Ashy Tit, White-throated Canary, Layard's Warbler (Tit-Babbler), White-tailed Shrike, Double-banded Courser, Starks, Sabota, Red-capped, Spike-

heeled, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, Mountain Wheatear, Pale-winged Starling, Bradfield's Swift, Rockrunner, Monteiro's and Damara Red-billed Hornbill.

The Erongo Mountain Range, an expanse of rugged and picturesque wilderness with fanciful geologic features, is one of Namibia's most iconic places to visit, and in addition to excellent birding we find magnificent caves and rock painting sites, and an impressive array of wildlife species. The hoofed mammals include Wildebeest, Impala, Blesbok, Kudu, Mountain Zebra, Oryx, Eland, and Springbok, and this lovely range is home to over 200 species of birds. There are also Rhino, Elephant, Warthog, and Giraffe, and with luck we even have a chance at finding predators, including Leopard and Cheetah.

We stay at The Erongo Wild, which is perched amidst the rugged granite boulders imminent to Namibia's Erongo Mountains. Its location is spectacular. Birding in this area is very rewarding and supports many of the Namibian near-endemics such as, Violet Wood-Hoopoe, Damara Red-billed Hornbill, Rüppell's Parrot, White-tailed Shrike, Carp's Tit, Rockrunner, Hartlaub's Spurfowl and other specials like Freckled Nightjar and Rosy-faced Lovebird. The whole environment is photogenic and magical.

Accommodations at The Erongo Wild, Erongo Mountains (B,L,D)

Wed., Oct. 19 Kaokoland

Starting early in the magic of morning light with high bird activity we hope to find Hartlaub's Spurfowl and other elusive species. Our travels today take us via the mighty Brandberg, Namibia's largest mountain, at 2573m above sea level. It comprises a large massive inselberg of granite and has numerous valleys and gorges which offer not only good reptiles and birding but also larger animals such as Hartmann's Mountain Zebra, Oryx (Gemsbok), Springbok, Kudu, Klipspringer, and Leopard. Desert-adapted Elephant also occur in the Ugab River at the foot of the northern section of the mountain. There is a rich diversity of reptiles, scorpions, and plant life including Welwitschia plant, the only member in the family *Welwitschiaceae* and is one of the more bizarre plants on the planet, on the western foot of the mountain. Birds are plentiful and raptors such as the African Black (Verreaux's) Eagle, Martial Eagle, Booted Eagle, Black-chested Snake Eagle as well as Lanner Falcon, Peregrine Falcon, and Rock Kestrel are also fairly common. The near-endemic Herero Chat, Benguela Long-billed Lark, and Rüppell's Korhaan can also be encountered at the foot of the mountain, other species such as Mountain Wheatear, Familiar and Karoo Chats, Pale-winged Starling, Rosy-faced Lovebird, Red-faced and White-backed Mousebirds, Bokmakierie, Grey-backed Cisticola, Black-chested Prinia, and Sabota Lark are common and after good rainfall thousands of Namaqua Sandgrouse can be found drinking at the many seeps and springs that run off the mountain.

Khowarib Lodge nestles on the banks of the Hoanib River in the magnificent Khowarib Gorge in North West Namibia. The area is not only home to many of Namibia's near-endemics such as Rüppell's Parrot, Violet Wood-hoopoe, Monteiro's Hornbill, Carp's Black Tit, Bare-cheeked Babbler, and White-tailed Shrike, but it also hosts Namibia's infamous desert-adapted elephants and other wildlife.

This evening our ears are kept open for the unmistakable grunts of the Giant Eagle Owl, Namibia's largest owl as well as the African Scops Owl, their smallest owl species, Pearl-spotted Owlet, and Southern White-faced Scops Owl also provide us with their "music".

Accommodations at Khowarib Lodge (B,L,D)

Thurs., Oct. 20 Kaokoland

Today we head into the Hoanib Riverbed where we spend the day exploring the untouched wilderness looking for desert-adapted wildlife and birds. The riverbed is lined with Albida trees, the pods of which form the staple dry-season diet of desert-adapted Elephant, Giraffe, Gemsbok, and Springbok.

Accommodations at Khowarib Lodge (B,L,D)

Fri., Oct. 21 Kaokoland | Etosha National Park

After breakfast and some morning birding around the lodge we travel to Etosha National Park, Namibia's flagship park. We arrive at the park in the early afternoon and spend the rest of the day at the waterhole.

By day's end we reach incredible Etosha National Park where we have a prime location to watch wildlife come in to a waterhole at sunset.

Accommodations at Okaukuejo Camp, Etosha National Park (B,L,D)

Sat., Oct. 22 & Sun., Oct. 23 Etosha National Park

Over the next two days we explore one of the most magnificent game parks in Africa, which teems with large game and boasts about 380 species of birds. We are based in the park at two different camps for three nights in total and spend time visiting a range of habitats. (Okaukuejo and Halali are situated inside the park—one night each; Mokuti Lodge is situated on the eastern periphery—one night, two full days) We move to a second camp to keep driving time down, not retracing our steps. Our camps provide wonderful game viewing at night as well as providing opportunities to see nightjars and owls.

Etosha is famous for its large game populations and during our stay here we should see Lion, Elephant, Burchell's Zebra, Red Hartebeest, Blue Wildebeest, Springbok, Oryx, Giraffes, Greater Kudu, and several smaller antelope. Among the rarer species regularly seen are White and Black Rhino (especially at waterholes at night), Cheetah, and Black-faced Impala, a subspecies only found in Namibia. We take time to see the various species well and there are excellent photographic opportunities.

The grassy plains north of Okaukuejo Camp are the best areas in the park to see Pink-billed Lark, Double-banded Courser, Northern Black (White-quilled) Korhaan, and Spike-heeled Lark. Raptors are abundant and we should see Martial Eagle, Secretary Bird, Bateleur, Ovambo Sparrowhawk, Tawny Eagle, and Greater Kestrel. Migrant raptors such as Western Red-footed Kestrel, Lesser Spotted Eagle, and Yellow-billed Kite can be seen in large numbers during the wet season. This is an excellent area for mammals and we keep a good eye out on the waterholes. Near the center of the park, the Halali is wooded, a great stop for us as it's the best site to see Violet Wood-hoopoe, Bare-cheeked Babbler, and Carp's Tit. Birding is great right from our lodgings, perfect for early morning birding options.

By the Von Lindequist Gate to the east we find the open grasslands are home to Namibia's isolated population of Blue Crane, Temminck's Courser, Grey-backed and Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks, and Eastern Clapper Lark. The elusive Black-faced Babbler occurs in dense Terminalia woodlands in this area.

Accommodations at Halali Camp, Mokuti Lodge, respectively (B,L,D, all days)

Oct. 24 Etosha National Park | Windhoek, River Crossing Lodge

After breakfast we do some birding in the lush gardens around the lodge before continuing to Windhoek. Depending on what species we still need for our lists we may head to Avis Dam or Gammams Water Works and see what we can find.

Accommodations at River Crossing Lodge (B,L,D)

Oct. 25 Departures

Departures today are at your convenience. (B)

Cost of the Journey

Plan Ahead!

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

Travel Information

Please plan to arrive at your convenience in Windhoek at Hosea Kutako International (WDH) on Oct. 13. Please note that flights will originate from the United States on Oct. 12. Please plan departure flights at your convenience on Oct. 25.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the 13-Day / 12-Night journey **\$5590 DBL / \$5990 SGL** from Windhoek, Namibia. This cost includes accommodations for 12 nights, all meals as specified in the itinerary, professional guide services, other park and program entrance fees and miscellaneous program expenses.

Tour cost does not include: round-trip transportation from your home city to Windhoek, optional activities, or items of a personal nature such as laundry, telephone charges, gratuities for guides, lodges and drivers, or beverages from the bar.

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