

Willis's Walkabouts 2023 Namibia

4 Weeks: September-October 2023

Second draft: 29 January 2023

This trip will be based partly on trips we've done and partly on things we've long wanted to do. The start date should be somewhere between 21 and 27 September. We will fix the date when we have enough bookings to run the trip.

Why use a Darwin-based firm for a Namibia tour?

Although this will be our fifteenth trip to Southern Africa, there is still no one else offering tours like these. Transport during the trip will be primarily by rental 4WD but may include various forms of public transportation as well and, of course, your own feet while carrying a day or overnight pack.

The Itinerary – A Work in Progress

On previous trips, hiring a vehicle in Namibia was much more expensive than hiring one in South Africa so we drove out of and back into South Africa. Prices have dropped, so we will fly into Windhoek, collect the hire car or cars and do a huge loop north to the Angolan border, then south to the South African border and back to Windhoek. A large part of the driving will be on gravel roads.

It's worth noting that the Namibian dollar (which equals the South African rand) has been dropping along with the Australian dollar so you can still get good value for your money in this part of the world. At the time these notes were written, 1 Australian dollar was worth 12.2 Namibian dollars.

The trip will begin in Windhoek, Namibia's capital and only international airport. Our first stop will be the nearby Daan Viljoen National Park where we plan to do the 9 km Rooibos Trail, https://issuu.com/travelnewsnamibia/docs/2020-3_tnn_autumn_volume_28_no_3_issuu/s/10420976 – worth noting that the author of this article is one of the authors of an excellent book on hiking in southern Africa.

Beginning with a walk so close to Windhoek will allow everyone to check out their gear and, if necessary, return to Windhoek for anything forgotten. Windhoek is by far the best place in Namibia to find anything even slightly out of the ordinary.

Waterberg

Waterberg is an amazing moderately sized park most of which is on a plateau which rises about 200 metres above the surrounding plain. There is a four day unguided walk which I did in 2003, a three day guided walk, several shorter walks and a 4WD day trip. If we are going near, it's definitely worth a stop. The two photos here were taken near the start of the long walk.



[Rest stop on the Waterberg plateau](#) [Rock dassies at Waterberg](#)

There are many websites which mention it. One of the better ones is <https://www.expertafrica.com/namibia/waterberg-plateau-national-park>

We might consider staying at The Waterberg Plateau Lodge, accom & tours, dinner bed & breakfast, <https://www.waterberg-wilderness.com/waterberg-plateau-lodge.html>

Etosha

A visit to Namibia would be almost unthinkable without a visit to Etosha, the best-known game park in Namibia. The relatively arid landscape combined with permanent waterholes make this one of the best places for game viewing in all of Africa. We'll be toward the end of the dry season so the game should be more concentrated than at other times. Depending on how much is open, we'll spend two or three days in the park.





The three photos here were taken on two of our previous visits. The one on the previous page shows a large group of animals at a waterhole. The two at left show traffic problems.

Elephants always have right of way. The leopard was less than a metre from the car – good thing the windows were closed.

For more information on Etosha, see <http://www.etoshanationalpark.org/> or, for a more comprehensive view, see the Wikipedia page, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etosha_National_Park

Epupa Falls

This is an area near the Angolan border that I've long wanted to visit. Here are some links to info about the area.

<https://www.info-namibia.com/activities-and-places-of-interest/kaokoveld/epupa-falls>

https://www.tripadvisor.com.au/Attraction_Review-g2037042-d3141240-Reviews-Epupa_Falls-Epupa_Kunene_Region.html

<http://www.alluringworld.com/epupa-falls/> Great photos

<https://epupafallsloodge.com/> Accom & tours; dinner bed & breakfast, N3850 for 2; high rating tripadvisor

Most of the photos I've seen were taken during the wet season when the river is at its best. The one I've included here was taken at a drier time of year.

The area belongs to the Himba people, an interesting minority group in Namibia. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himba_people for more information.

If we have two vehicles and if people are interested in some 'serious' four wheel driving, we can follow the track that follows the river between Ruacana Falls and Epupa. If not, we'll have to go in and out the same way.

Twyfelfontein & Rock Art



Dragon lizard



Twyfelfontein petroglyphs



On guided walk near Twyfelfontein

There are a number of interesting rock art sites that we can visit at or near a place called Twyfelfontein. Good for a number of short walks. We might stay at a place called Xaragu where I stayed back in 2007. I haven't been able to find much up to date info so can't include many links yet. There are a number of short walks in the area, some of which are accompanied by a local guide. The three photos above were taken on our 2007 trip. We saw an amazing variety of lizards. If you have no interest in the small animals and plants, this trip is not for you.

Skeleton Coast

In 2016 we stayed in Henties Bay, did a short walk or two and and visited the Cape Cross seal colony. The Henties Bay Website has good description and photos. The Henties Bay Tourism Association website has some good info about the area, <https://www.hentiesbaytourism.com/>

The NY Times had a good article about the area earlier this year, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/17/travel/namibia-skeleton-coast-road-trip.html>

<http://www.namibweb.com/skeleton.htm> is an older site with lots of info

<https://www.africanreservations.com/Skeleton-Coast-Accommodation> has info about accommodation in the area.



Cape Cross seal colony



Dessert succulent



Coastal road, lots of nothing



Welwitschia

There is a lot of 'nothing' to be seen along the road, interspersed with things like the seal colony and desert plants. The Welwitschia is particularly unusual, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welwitschia>

Namib Naukluft National Park

We'll probably do one or both of the shorter trails, <https://www.namibweb.com/nauklufttrails.htm> If we have two vehicles, we might even consider the four day through walk. The two photos at right were taken toward the beginning of the four day walk and show how chains have been placed to help you up some of the steep bits. The longer of the two day walks has something similar.

The Sossusvlei dunes are probably the best known natural feature in Namibia. I've already been there twice and couldn't let myself pass by without another visit. We'll spend two or three days in the area having a good



Sossusvlei Dunes



Climbing the dunes

look around. The two photos here were taken on our first trip here in 2003. As you can see, we do more than just look. We climb up and walk for a couple of hours so we can truly appreciate this incredible landscape. See <http://www.sossusvlei.org/>

Some of our group did a balloon trip in 2016. It was expensive but those who did it thought it was well worth the expense. If enough people are interested, we'll do it again.



The four pictures here were taken on our 2016 trip.

The Tok Tokkie Trail



If there is any way to do it, we'll include the Tok Tokkie Trail. We did this in 2016 and I've been dreaming of going back ever since. It's a two night, guided walk through the desert, surprising what you can see when you have someone to point out all the small things. All meals provided. Sleep under the stars in fixed camps. For more info see <https://toktokkietrails.com/>



On the trail



Desert bedroom at dawn



Tok Tokkie beetle



Zebra and oryx (gemsbok)



Tok tokkie guide pointing something out



Dinner on the trail

It's more than an experience for tourists. The Tok Tokkie tours help support the Namib Desert Environmental Education Trust (NaDEET), <https://nadeet.org/namib-desert-environmental-education-trust-nadeet> – a wonderful way to help the local people live sustainably with what they have.

Heading South

Having gone all the way to the Angolan border in the north, we now go all the way to the South African border in the south, we may simply reverse the route we took in 2016 or we stop to some sightseeing along the way. This part of the trip had not been fixed at the time these notes were written. Our final major destination is



Southern Namibian road. Most of the better roads we use will similar to this.

Fish River Canyon



Infinity pool, Fish River Lodge

This is one of the most famous and spectacular walks in southern Africa. Unfortunately, because of high temperatures it is now closed to hikers from mid September through April. But, while we can't hike the trail, it would be a shame to pass by without a look so we'll spend a day or two in the area. We stayed at the Fish River Lodge in 2016, <https://fishriverlodge-namibia.com/> and did one of their day walks. It was a bit expensive but well worth it. I'd like to stay there again. They offer half day and full day walks into the gorge. On our last trip, some chose to do one, some the other. The four photos below are from the half day version.



Starting the descent



Not quite as steep



On the flat before the last drop



Lunch spot overlooking final drop

The photos show how steep parts of the trail are. The full day trip gets all the way down to the river.

From Fish River Lodge, we will probably continue to the South African border, then come up along the more commonly visited east side of the gorge.

In 2003, we were there when the long walk was closed so we did a shorter, 2 night walk at another 'Fish River Lodge' (which may not be the 'Fish River Guest Farm'). As of the date these notes were written, I'd been unable to find out anything about it. Also in the area is the Fish River Slackpacking Trails, <https://gondwana-collection.com/en/fish-river-canyon-trails-luggage-free-hiking>

I'd be interested in doing one of their easier options but they close at the end of September due to the heat. I'm used to hiking in 30°+ heat and would be happy to try and argue the case, but only if everyone else was happy with the same. By that time in the trip, we should be well and truly acclimatised so they might be willing to make an exception for a group.

From Fish River, it's mostly bitumen back to Windhoek.

Other

I haven't listed every possibility but I have listed enough to give you a good idea of what to expect. Other things you need to know are that the roads aren't always as good as they may be shown on the maps and that fuel is not always available where maps and tour guides say it is. Anyone who comes on this trip will need to be prepared for changes in plans along the way.



Fish River Canyon from the rim. Photo from our 2003 trip.

Our fee will be \$2195 per person. This is based on a minimum of five bookings. If we have fewer bookings, we might be able to run it for a somewhat higher price.

What do you get for our fee?

You get expert advice on the things to bring, the probable weather, etc. You get someone who will handle the mundane details of making the travel arrangements, doing the food shopping for the walks, organising accommodation etc. You get someone who will provide all the group equipment (billies, stoves, etc) and who will cook all the evening meals on any overnight walks allowing you to relax and enjoy yourself. You also get a small, like-minded group of people with whom you can share your experiences and expenses. Hiring a vehicle as part of a group costs far less than hiring it with only two or three.

Note 1. Some of what you get for your money is not very visible. Bushwalking in southern Africa is restricted. Permits have to be arranged well in advance all trails have strict limits. Some of our walks are in national parks run by a national authority. Some are in provincial parks. Some are in other areas. In past years, making these bookings took anywhere from ten minutes to three weeks depending on the agency involved. All that paperwork has to be done well in advance or we won't be able to do the walks as planned.

As another example, prior to one of the long walks, you might spend a day relaxing or sightseeing while the guide goes out and hits the supermarkets, then spends an hour (or two or three) doing the final organising for the meals on the walk. If you can't see the value in services like these, you are unlikely to feel that you are getting real value for your fee.

Note 2. Prices are subject to change.

Note 3. A large majority of those who have taken part in our overseas tours are Australian so all prices are quoted in Australian dollars. We have had several people from other countries take part by making their own travel arrangements to and from the start and finish points.

Note 4. All bushwalks and 4WD driving routes are subject to change due to weather conditions. If we get really foul weather at the start of a walk, we may wish to abort it, at least temporarily. If we get really foul weather later on, we may have to cut a route short. If a road is impassable, we may have to do a long detour.

What you don't get?

You do not get a guide who will hold your hand and make every decision for you. **You** must be prepared to take on a much greater degree of responsibility than on most other tours. All members of the group, including the guide, are expected to work together in establishing how the group will function, who will lead on the walks, who will look after the stragglers, etc.

A trip such as this cannot work unless everyone helps out. Accepting the responsibility that goes with a trip like this is part of the experience we offer. It is one of the things that sets our trips apart from the vast majority of "adventure" trips on the market. For those prepared to accept this responsibility, it makes the experience doubly rewarding. Those who are not prepared to accept such responsibility would be better off going on a "normal" tour.

Is it for you?

This trip is not for the average tourist. We can neither control nor predict the weather, only accept it as it comes. If you do not want to take the necessary responsibility and/or you cannot obtain the necessary equipment, it is not for you. Good physical fitness and a good mental attitude are both necessary. If you have never carried a pack on an overnight walk, have never walked off trail, have never camped in cold, windy and wet conditions, it will be harder for you to cope with the likely conditions than for a person who has had the relevant experience. Past experience has shown us that a fit, experienced 70 year old may cope better than a fitter 25 year old who does not have experience in coping with adverse conditions.

A Final Caution and a suggestion

Do not expect everything to run like clockwork. Such things often fail to happen in Southern Africa. If you want to get maximum value for your money, you can go off and go sightseeing or simply relax while the guide does the food shopping or tries to organise or reconfirm hiking permits, etc. Or, if you wish, you are welcome to join him or her while (s)he does these things.

There may be occasional days between sections where you will be left to your own devices while the guide slows down and relaxes a bit and catches up on the organising. Based on past experience, things will run more smoothly if the guide does this.

Conditions

1. A deposit of \$200 is payable on booking. This will be refunded in full if five people have not booked by 1 April. Final payment is due by 1 April.
2. Our cancellation fees are \$200 before 1 April, \$500 to 1 May, \$1000 to 1 July and the full fee after that. If you cancel after we have made and paid for a booking on your behalf, you will lose whatever is non-refundable as well as our cancellation fee.
3. All participants are responsible for obtaining the necessary passport and visas and must have some form of travel insurance. **We need to see proof of your travel insurance before departure.** We need this because of our own insurance.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Russell Willis

Final Note. If you are interested in this trip and you have something else you are particularly interested in seeing, please let us know and we may be able to include it in the itinerary.

Please Remember. This is very much an early draft. **There will be changes.** Those who get in early will be able to assist with the planning if they wish to do so.

Draft Itinerary

This WILL change but the final itinerary will be similar

- Day 1 Windhoek sightseeing & organising
- Day 2 Daan Viljoen, 9 km walk. Overnight Daan Viljoen Lodge, about A\$90 per person incl breakfast
- Day 3 Drive to Waterberg. Waterberg Wilderness, tours reasonably priced, DBB begins at about A\$230 per person, twin share; safari tents from about A\$155 DBB
the accom run by parks, <https://namibianwildliferesorts.com/accommodation/waterberg-resort/>
Begins at about A\$90 per person incl breakfast
Waterberg Resort begins at about A\$90 per person incl breakfast
<https://www.info-namibia.com/accommodation/waterberg/waterberg-resort>
Afternoon tour
- Day 4 Walks and/or tours at Waterberg.
- Day 5 Drive to Buschberg near Etosha where we stayed in 2016. Reasonably priced. Good to go back.
<http://www.buschberg.com/gallery.htm>
- Day 6-7 Two nights in Etosha
- Day 8-9 On the road to Epupa, moderately serious 4WD
- Day 10 Epupa Falls area
- Day 11 Driving to Twyfelfontein, rock art site walk
- Day 12-13 To Skeleton Coast
- Day 14 Short walks & driving at Skeleton Coast
- Day 15 Overnight & resupply at Swakopmund
- Day 16 Naukluft day walk
- Day 17 To near Sossuvlei
- Day 18 Visit Sossuvlei dunes, day walks
- Day 19 Optional desert balloon ride; <https://balloon-safaris.com/ballooning-namibia/>
- Day 20-22 Tok Tokkie Trail, day pack only
- Day 23-24 To Fish River Lodge
- Day 25 Fish River Gorge day walk
- Day 25-28 Return to Windhoek, at least one day walk on the way.