

Willis's Walkabouts

2023 Namibia, Botswana 4WD & Walk

4 Weeks: September-October 2023

First draft: December 2022

This trip will be based partly on trips we've done and partly on things we've long wanted to do.

Why use a Darwin-based firm for a South African 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 Namibial 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 11.8 Namibian dollars.

Fish River Canyon

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.



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

Sossusvlei and the Namib Naukluft National Park



Sossusvlei Dunes



Climbing the dunes

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 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 the group did a balloon trip in 2016. It was expensive but those who did it thought it was well worth the expense.

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. <https://toktokkietrails.com/>

Rock Art

There are a number of interesting rock art sites that we can visit. One is done on a seriously steep overnight walk. Others are done on short day walks. They are somewhat out of the way but if people are interested, we can include some in the itinerary. If no one has a particular interest in the rock art, we'll restrict ourselves to sites near our final route.

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.

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

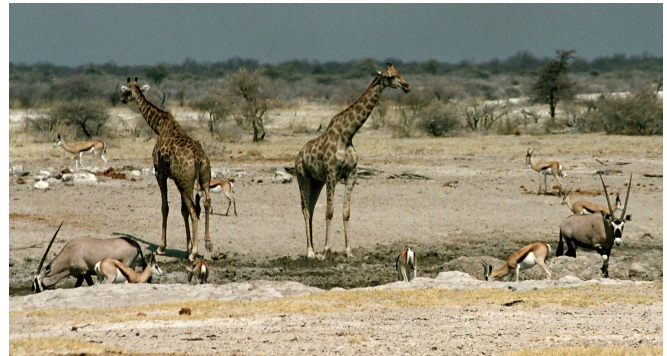
We might consider staying at The Waterberg Plateau Lodge, accom & tours, dinner bed & breakfast, <https://www.waterberg-wilderness.com/waterberg-plateau-lodge.html>



Rest stop on the Waterberg plateau

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 above 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

Skeleton Coast

In 2016 we stayed in Henties Bay, did a short walk or two 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.

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

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.

What do you get for our fee?

Note. We have not yet set the fee. I expect it to be between \$2000 and \$2500 but need to work out other costs before making the final decision.

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 the 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 mid April. Final payment is due by 1 July.
2. Our cancellation fees are \$200 before 1 April, TBA 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 a first draft. **There will be changes.** Those who get in early will be able to assist with the planning if they wish to do so.