



Brandon Presser

NAMIBIA

To Truly Experience the Scope of Namibia, Take This Road Trip

by BRANDON PRESSER

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Wind from the desolate desert to the sea on this rugged, off-road adventure.

Twice the size of California but with only two million inhabitants, Namibia is **southern Africa's Outback**—the domain of the ancient Khoi/San nomads who once followed herds of wild animals between watering holes and etched petroglyphs into sun-bleached rocks. It was here that filmmaker George Miller realized his post-apocalyptic fantasies in his bigger, badder reboot of the Mad Max film franchise. Today, Namibia adeptly blends both the past and future, honoring the cultures of long ago while fostering pockets of urbanity. This five-day road trip—your very own Fury Road—offers a glimpse at how life (humans, animals, and even plants) has adapted to the harsh conditions of the world's oldest desert.

The trip: Five days, 750 miles

What to drive

Book a Toyota Fortuner—the local vehicle of choice—with **travel specialist Teresa Sullivan of Mango Safaris**, who cut her teeth as an Africa expert by driving travelers overland through Namibia's desolation. Over the last 20 years, she's become the unofficial point person for road trips in the region. "While a 4WD is essential, it's most important to have a car with a high clearance. Pack two spare tires and make sure to have Namibian currency as small-town gas stations often don't accept credit cards," she says.

When to go

This particular circuit takes advantage of some of Namibia's best bits of pavement and can be accomplished throughout the year. However, it's most ideal to travel during the dry season (late April to early November) when the ephemeral river systems can be used as naturally formed roads for extra off-track exploring.

Day 1

The four-and-a-half-hour journey from Windhoek's international airport towards Sossusvlei—Namibia's big-ticket attraction of **oft-Instagrammed orange dunes**—follows the rugged ridge where the country's twin deserts collide; the arid Kalahari, which yawns across the border from **Botswana**, and the namesake Namib. During the drive, the landscape's palette gradually shifts from pale earth tones to singeing hues, which surround the **Nest at Sossus**. Located on a private 59,000-acre estate and staffed with butlers and a private chef, the newly opened villa is the Sossusvlei region's premiere retreat whose flamboyant architecture mimics the bulbous bird nests of the endemic sociable weaver.

Day 2

Waiting for first light at the gate to the **Namib-Naukluft National Park** in nearby Sesriem will ensure plenty of time for climbing and sliding around its sky-scraping sand mountains before the sun's heat becomes unbearable. Make sure to drive all the way to the end of the reserve (the last several miles follow an off-road track) where Sossusvlei's highest dune, Big Daddy, looms over Deadvlei, an aptly named valley of scorched tree husks and petrified branches. After filling your shoes with a beach's worth of sand, head back to the Nest for a reinvigorating dip in the plunge pool before a sunset picnic.

Day 3

Apple pie for a late breakfast is never a bad idea in the three-house town of **Solitaire**, the perfect place to break up the four-hour journey towards Walvis Bay, a major port along Africa's west coast. A thin peninsula stretches far into the bay—a haven for wading flamingos—with a lonely lighthouse at its tip surrounded by a sprawling colony of barking seals. Spend the night adjacent to the watchtower at **Pelican Point Lodge**, a 10-room inn with amazing seafood culled from the oyster farms offshore.

Day 4

Only 25 miles up the road, Swakopmund is a poignant reminder of Germany's colonial claim to the region over a hundred years ago. The city of 66,000 citizens is prim with a lattice of streets and avenues that stitches the desert to the sea. Elegant church spires and dozens of homes with Tudor Revival facades and gingerbread trim line the streets. Stop at Bavarian-styled **Brauhaus** for schnitzel and beers.

The European charm gives way to boxy warehouses on the outskirts of town, the locus of an emerging makers collective. Snag some freshly roasted java at **Two Beards Coffee**—it may just be the best latte you'll ever have in your life—then head next door to **Stillhouse Atlantic**, a gin distillery earning accolades for its infusion of local nara melon, a desert-adapted fruit that looks like the head of a mace.

Day 5

Finally, return to Windhoek, Namibia's capital and largest city—a three-hour drive from Swakopmund. It's the crucible of the country's disparate cultures where Afrikaners in soccer jerseys walk alongside topless Himba women at local shopping malls. Pick up **woven baskets** and hand-tapped jewelry for souvenirs at the **Namibia Craft Centre**; try a buttery kudu steak at **Joe's Beerhouse**, the city's beloved indoor-outdoor beerhall decorated like Crocodile Dundee's garage sale; then settle into a suite at the **Olive Exclusive**, an urban sanctuary sporting a private collection of African art and artifacts, and views of the city. ♦