



**Stewart
McPherson** 
Natural History Tours

WILDLIFE OF NAMIBIA EXPEDITION

Namibia is a rich and vibrant country whose historical struggles for autonomy have overshadowed its incredible geography, rich cultural heritage and remarkable assemblages of wildlife. The country is home to the oldest and driest desert on the planet, yet even here, unique forms of life have found a way to survive the challenging conditions. Elsewhere, the reliable presence of water sees some of the most impressive assemblages of wildlife, including the big cats, various hoofed animals and of course elephants and the iconic birds of the African plains.

Climb the remarkable red dunes at Sossusvlei, the tallest sand dunes in the world, and descend to the floor of the deepest canyon in Africa before seeing the whole again from the lofty vantage of a hot air balloon. Our travels take in the cultural past with a visit to one of the Africa's richest rock art sites, as well as visits to a number of different tribal communities.

During the itinerary, we enjoy the silent splendour of some of the most resilient of all plants found on Earth, including Welwitschia, the Lithops living stones and the endemic quiver tree (Aloe), used by local bushmen to produce arrows for hunting.

START POINT:	Windhoek Hosea Kutako International Airport, Namibia
END POINT:	Windhoek Hosea Kutako International Airport, Namibia
EXPEDITION LEADER:	Stewart McPherson (experienced naturalist)
DATES:	Saturday September 9th - Wednesday 20th, 2017
IDEAL GROUP SIZE:	8 to 10 tourists, plus Stewart McPherson as expedition leader.

Cost per person: \$4711.00 per person Twin share – Land only
Single Supplement on request



ITINERARY

Day 1: Meet in Windhoek in the morning (participants may choose to arrive in Windhoek a day earlier, or on early flights arriving on Day 1 for pickup at the airport). Transfer to 4WD vehicles and drive to Sesriem (ca. 5 hours) on the edge of the Namib Desert. Overnight in a Sesriem lodge.

Day 2: At 5.00 am, we drive out into the Namibia Desert to reach the extraordinary red dunes of Sossusvlei. Driving along the foot of the dunes at dawn reveals the stark, stunning beauty of the Namib, the oldest desert in the world. We climb towering Dune 45, over 170 m tall and composed of sands 5 million years old. From the dune summit, we watch the sunrise, perhaps the most amazing sunrise you will ever witness. No part of the desert is more visually stunning than Sossusvlei - the warm tints of the sand range from pale apricot to brick orange or deep red, vividly contrasting with the blue skies and also white clay pans above which they rise. We leave the dunes by midday, before the day becomes too hot, and drive back to Sesriem for lunch. Later, we visit Sesriem Canyon, a 4 km drive from town. If present, standing water will allow for swims and provide oases of desert plants. Overnight in a Sesriem lodge.

Day 3: A 5.00 am balloon ride over the spectacular Namib desert for aerial photos of the Great Sand Sea. We return to ground and depart by 10.00 am, driving up to Swakopmund (ca. 5 hours), stopping along the way for photo opportunities of landscape and wildlife (we look out for Klipspringer Antelope, Great White Pelican, Hartmann's Mountain Zebra and Giraffe herds). Swakopmund is a colourful, German-flavoured colonial seaside resort - its main street is lined with palm trees and German style colonial buildings. Overnight in a Swakopmund hotel.

Day 4: A 6.00 am drive inland on an off-road track to visit ancient Welwitschia plants. Along the way, we pass through bizarre, lunar landscapes and scrub consisting of mist lichens - surely one of the strangest landscapes and habitats on Earth. We reach the Welwitschia after some hours; only 2 or 3 plants remain, but these are some of Namibia's biggest and best, including one particularly giant and ancient specimen. Welwitschia can be up to 1,500 years old and produce only two leaves in their lifetime. These are continually growing and may reach 8 metres in length. On the return journey, we look for Namaqua Chameleons and, back in Swakopmund,

we take a tour of the bay and see Cape Fur seals and Flamingos. Overnight in a Swakopmund hotel.

Day 5: 6.00 am start to drive up the Skeleton Coast, which takes its name from a wartime book chronicling the shipwrecking of the Dunedin Star. On one side of the road lies the endless desert and dunes, and on the other side, rough, freezing water. Colonies of Cape Fur Seals attract various predators such as hyena and jackals which we look out for. Near Uis, we see the Herero people, who wear colonial style European clothing, and we look out for large Sociable Weaverbird nests in the trees. After lunch in Uis, we detour to the UNESCO nominated Brandberg, Namibia's tallest mountain. Meaning "fire mountain", its name is testament to the fiery red colour of the mountain at sunset. As we drive towards Brandberg, we see extraordinary desert flora that includes 107 Namibian endemics. We climb the lower slopes of the Brandberg. The mountain is a spiritual site of great significance to the San (Bushman) tribes. There are thousands of wonderful depictions of ancient hunting scenes, mythical stories and more, all painted thousands of years ago. The most famous rock art here is "The White Lady" which depicts a hunting scene in a cave that takes at least an hour to scramble up to. It is thought to be around 2000 years old. Overnight in a lodge near Uis.

Day 6: 7.00 am start, to explore the wilderness surrounding Khorixas, home to desert elephants and the incredibly rare black rhino. We pass Burnt Mountain, with spectacular views of orange grass and silver plants, the bizarre Organ Pipes (giant basaltic rock formations), different ancient rock paintings, 200 year old Acacia trees, and the Petrified Forest. The latter is an assemblage of decumbent petrified trees. They are largely broken up giant coniferous trees that were washed down from Angola and covered by silt, enabling the wood to be slowly replaced by minerals.

Day 7: 8.00 am start to drive towards Khorixas. Along the way, we pass more Welwitschia plants, although none are as massive and ancient as those seen previously. During the morning, we meet the Himba people, and visit their 'kraal'. The Himba tribe are semi-nomadic pastoralists who still live and dress according to ancient traditions. They are tall, slender and statuesque people, characterised by their proud, yet friendly bearing and an amazing language that incorporates clicks. Their women are noted for their



unusual sculptural beauty, enhanced by intricate hairstyles and traditional adornments. The Himba rub their bodies with red ochre and fat to protect their skin against the intense sun, and often style their hair with mud. The Himba tribe are settled, but continue to live a traditional lifestyle. Stay at Gelbingen Lodge with the Himba People.

Days 8 and 9: We journey into the Etosha National Park - Namibia's premier wildlife viewing destination – a 20,000 km portion of unspoiled Africa and one of the best reserves in the world. Large herds of plains animals are concentrated around the waterholes for exciting viewing and amazing photographic opportunities. Species that we are likely to see include elephant, lion, leopard, cheetah, giraffe, Burchell's zebra, wildebeest, springbock, spotted hyena, oryx, warthogs, kudu, the diminutive Damara dik-dik, and if we are lucky, the black rhino. Interestingly, Etosha is home to the tallest elephants in Africa, rather different to the desert elephants seen previously, and at least 92 other species of mammals. Both nights, we stay at lodges within the Etosha National Park.



Day 10: Having focused on mammals for days 9 and 10, we now explore Etosha National Park's incredible birdlife. We move to Okaukuejo Camp to look for ostrich, southern masked weavers, helmeted Guinea fowl, marabou stork, tawny eagle, blue crane, whitebacked vulture, yellowbilled hornbill, the grey lourie, short-toed rockthrush, Haulaub's francolin, rockrunner, Ruppell's parrot, white-tailed shrike, chestnut weaver and more. We overnight in Okaukuejo Camp.

Day 11: 7.00 am start. We leave Etosha National Park and drive to the Naankuse wildlife sanctuary. On route, we visit Okahandja - one of the best places to buy intricate local wooden carvings. At Naankuse, we meet cheetahs and aardvark that are being rehabilitated for release into the wild and have the opportunity to meet a tame cheetah up close. If time permits, we visit Okonjima to view large cats, including leopards and cheetahs.

Day 12: After a final breakfast in the bush, we leave Okahandja and return back to Windhoek in time for departing afternoon flights.



WILDLIFE OF NAMIBIA EXPEDITION

EASY/MODERATE: anyone with a normal level of health and stamina, capable of walking two or three kilometres across flat terrain will be able to complete this expedition. Most activities involve following well laid out, marked trails within national parks with guides, however the itinerary does include an optional trek up sand dunes which can be regarded as strenuous by some. Alternate activities are available in the lowlands that do not involve climbing for those who do not wish to ascend the sand dunes. The overwhelming majority of healthy adults succeed in climbing the sand dunes. This expedition does involve long journeys in 4 * 4 vehicles on several day of the itinerary (the only way to transfer between locations).

ACCOMMODATION: a mixture of hotels and resorts – many of which are very luxurious. Most accommodation during this trip is the equivalent of 3 to 4 STAR accommodation by international ratings standards