



Expect great scenery and a wide variety of birds – including pelicans, flamingos and cormorants – on a trip to Sandwich Harbour

## SWAKOPMUND & WALVIS BAY

Swakopmund is a small, quaintly Germanic town, surrounded by the desert and the ocean. It may be Namibia's main seaside 'resort', but it isn't really commercial by Western standards. We regard it as a convenient stop for a few days, with plenty of good hotels, great seafood, many historic buildings and a relaxed atmosphere. Among the shops you'll find a fascinating museum of crystals and Africa's best source of African artefacts and antique books. Just to the south, Walvis Bay's lagoon and its 'bird paradise' attract large flocks of flamingos, Cape pelicans and other migrant water birds.

In and around these small towns there's a wide range of things to do, including dune-boarding, birdwatching, fishing, sea-kayaking, scenic flights and even sky-diving.

Amongst the places to stay in Swakopmund, one of our favourites is the comfortable **Sam's Giardino**. Run by its enthusiastic owner, Sam, with a little canine help, it's slightly offbeat and our guests invariably love it. There are nine spacious rooms, extensive breakfasts and, if you eat in, an optional wine-tasting to accompany the evening meal. Many of Sam's helpful staff are women from a nearby township who have been trained here; the result is a great atmosphere.

**The Stiltz** overlooks the small estuary of the Swakop River and has spectacular views over the dunes, Atlantic Ocean or reedbeds. It's a unique place, with 10 high-quality wooden bungalows built on stilts, and linked to a main dining area by raised walkways.

Right on the beach, the quirky **Beach Lodge** is about 5km north of town. Each of its 15, well-appointed rooms has a nautical theme and a private patio or balcony. It is relaxed yet efficient; and recently opened one of the town's best restaurants.

Two very promising guesthouses were new during 2008. Each barely a five-minute walk from the centre of town, the **Cornerstone** has five rooms and the **Central** has six.

Both offer smart rooms with good facilities and clean, modern lines – and so far we've had great reports about both!

For Swakopmund's best traditional hotel, with a mature, reserved atmosphere, choose the **Hansa** – with its central location, formal restaurant and German colonial style. Other possibilities in town include the historic **Eberwein Hotel** and the imposing **Swakopmund Hotel**.

A few miles out of town are the friendly **Sea Breeze** guesthouse and the bright, cheerful **Intermezzo**. Alternatively, **Brigadoon** has seven tasteful rooms set in the well-established gardens of the owner's house. For more details of any of these, call us or see our website.

In Walvis Bay, the French-owned **Lagoon Lodge** is an obvious place for keen birdwatchers. It has a lovely garden, a swimming pool and eight tastefully decorated rooms – each with a private balcony overlooking the lagoon.

### KAYAKING IN WALVIS BAY

Kayaking is a superb way to get close to birdlife and marine mammals. You might expect a muscle-bound, juvenile guide, but instead you will be guided by the delightful Jeanne Meintjes – a relaxed, mature local woman whose hobby is now a small business. Jeanne's trips run in the early morning, when the water is flat. No kayaking experience is necessary, and you don't need to be athletic: just meet Jeanne in Walvis Bay, and she will supply all the equipment.

Trips start with a 4WD drive through working salt pans to launch the kayaks beside the seal colony, at Pelican Point. The kayaking is usually gentle, lasting two to three hours before you pause on the beach for sandwiches and a drink. On the water, inquisitive seals often come close, playing and splashing around, whilst further out you've a chance of spotting dolphins and whales. This is a blissful way to spend a morning.

### EXPLORING THE COAST

Most visitors come to Namibia for its wild areas, not its towns, but both Swakopmund and Walvis Bay make ideal bases from which to explore little-visited parts of this coastal desert. You can drive yourself to some, but to access the best and to really learn about them, spend a day with an expert guide.

Swakopmund is home to some of Namibia's best guides who have a wealth of in-depth knowledge on the area's flora, fauna and geology. Join a small group, typically no more than eight people, to explore by 4WD and on foot – on trips that can bring Namibia's coastal desert alive for you.

The **Sandwich Harbour** trip is by far the most popular, and includes historic sites in the Kuiseb Delta, bird-rich lagoons at Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour (tide permitting), and some of the desert's more unusual flora and fauna.

The **Namib** trip explores the Swakop and Khan River valleys, including some historical sites from World War I, considerable desert wildlife and the Moon Landscape – with *Welwitschia* plants.

Both trips start at about 8.30am at your hotel, and end around 5pm; a delicious lunch is included, usually served at a magnificent spot in the desert. Private trips, tailored to guests' interests, are easily arranged.



Sandboarding near Swakopmund



A room at the Stiltz