



Fish River Canyon – the world's second largest canyon

SOUTHERN NAMIBIA

THE SOUTHERN KALAHARI

You can learn a great deal about deserts in Namibia, and visiting both the Namib and Kalahari you'll realise how different they are. For example, the deep-red dunes of the Kalahari are covered in trees, bushes, grasses and, at the start of the year, carpets of flowers. This vegetation supports a wide range of larger mammals, from springbok, oryx and giraffe to aardwolf, bat-eared fox and delightful meerkats.

Although the Kalahari isn't as big an attraction as the Namib, there are lovely places to stay here and often game to be seen. **Eningu Clayhouse Lodge** is built from clay in a style reminiscent of Mexico. It's one of Namibia's more unusual and arty lodges, and it's one of our favourites.

Expect beautiful, hand-painted rooms and innovative cuisine. Eningu is deep in the Kalahari, yet only about an hour's drive from Windhoek's main airport. It has a swimming pool, a whirlpool/jacuzzi, archery, badminton and a world-class telescope for star-gazing. It's perfect for a quick start or end to a trip.

Far to the east of Eningu, **Kalahari Bush Breaks** is a small game lodge about 26km from the Botswana border, which is very convenient as a stop on the Trans-Kalahari Highway.

Just north of Mariental, **Anib Lodge** is a useful stopover near the main north-south road, but has grown in recent years, and now has 55 rooms. If you want more than just an overnight stop here, then a little further north is **Bagatelle Kalahari Game Ranch**. Run by Fred and Onie Jacobs, this lodge has 10 chalets: four set on the crest of a red Kalahari sand dune, with lovely views over the dunes, and a further six lower down. The walls in the latter incorporate straw bales to regulate their temperature. Tastefully furnished rooms, a warm atmosphere and often a family of relaxed meerkats make this a wonderful place to spend a night or two.

FISH RIVER CANYON

Approaching the Fish River Canyon from the north is like driving across Mars. The vast rocky landscape breaks up into a series of spectacular cliffs that tower over the world's second-largest canyon, formed by the Fish River as it meanders between boulders over half a kilometre below.

Ai-Ais Restcamp lies at the bottom of the canyon, beside natural hot springs. At time of writing, it is shut for extensive renovations and upgrading; it's likely that it will re-open during 2009 – see our website for the latest news.



The bungalows at Cañon Lodge are built amongst granite boulders



Flowering aloe in the Namib-Naukluft

Hiking the Fish River Canyon

Keen hikers will know that the Fish River Canyon is the venue for one of Africa's toughest hiking trails. From May to September, a five-day, self-guided hike through the national park is possible for groups of three or more people. We can arrange the permits and transport and a top professional guide who can accompany you. You can build this into a longer fly-drive itinerary, but you must organise your own food, equipment and fitness for the hike. Once you start the hike, there's no easy way out!

For slightly less arduous hiking, with a little more support, there are new 'mule trails' running in this area, which are assisted by pack-animals and last several days. Alternatively, we can arrange 4WD/hiking trips from Vogelstrausskluft into the upper reaches of the canyon, sleeping in bushcamps. Ask us for details.



Up close with meerkats at Bagatelle

There are also several comfortable private lodges in the area, all of which are closer to the main viewpoints over the canyon. The original of these was **Cañon Lodge**, near the lip of the canyon, which has 30 separate stone bungalows dotted around between spectacular granite kopjies, often including natural stone features in their design.

Slightly further away, **Cañon Roadhouse** is a comfortable roadside retreat which has nine simple en-suite rooms. All are set around a cactus-planted courtyard, and their colours carefully blend with the surrounding area. Owned by the same team, the larger **Cañon Village** has 42 semi-detached stone cottages (decorated by local artists), set around the main thatched dining area.

In the town of Keetmanshoop, **Central Lodge** is modern and elegant with 19 bright and airy guest rooms. There's a grassy courtyard with fountains and a swimming pool. Not far away the larger **Cañon Hotel** has been there for years. Both are convenient bases for excursions to the Kokerboom Forest and the majestic volcanic crater at Brukkaros.

On the northwest side of the Canyon, just south of the main tar road to Lüderitz, **Vogelstrausskluft** is a substantial lodge built on a small hill. Its 24 air-conditioned en-suite rooms have comfy leather chairs, subtle earthy colours, stone-tiled floors and a private patio. There's a small infinity pool near the lodge's open-plan lounge and dining area, but the main reason to come here is to take one of their guided, full-day 4WD excursions down into their own private section of the Fish River Canyon.



Kokerboom tree on the edge of Koichab Pan – near Klein Aus Vista

LÜDERITZ

There is only one road to Lüderitz, and bulldozers battle to keep it open through the shifting sands of the Namib. Meanwhile, on the coast, the beautiful buildings of this historic German town sit unchanged. Lüderitz has an atmosphere all of its own: gentle, relaxed, some say sleepy.

If you visit, then stay for at least two nights. Take a trip to one of the deserted mining towns nearby, or drive yourself to the peninsula where Bartolomeu Diaz, the Portuguese explorer, became the first European in Southern Africa. If you have more time, don't miss the boat trip to the penguin colony on Halifax Island or the chance to explore further into the Sperrgebiet.

Some visit Lüderitz from a base in Aus; others stay in town for a few days. The accommodation in Lüderitz is fairly ordinary, although many of its restaurants offer excellent fresh and inexpensive seafood. Old stalwarts include the **Sea-View Zum Sperrgebiet** or the larger **Nest Hotel**, which overlooks the ocean. There are also two small, self-catering options: the central **Haus Sandrose**, or **Island Cottage** on the windswept peninsula of Shark Island.

AUS

If your time is short, then base yourself at Aus, a tiny outpost on the edge of the desert. Here, **Klein Aus Vista** covers 150km² of beautiful mountains and desert scenery. It's a place to be active; you can hike around the mountains on marked trails, join excursions in search of wild desert horses, drive yourself to Lüderitz for a day, or take a guided 4WD trip into a remote southern part of the Namib-Naukluft National Park.

There are two places to stay. **The Desert Horse Inn** was once the old farmstead; now it has 24 rooms and a restaurant, and tends to cater for groups. A much smaller and more secluded option, deeper into the mountains, is the delightful **Eagle's Nest**. This has just eight individual rock chalets, built around enormous granite boulders.

Each has a fireplace, a kitchenette, a small lounge, an en-suite bathroom and a private veranda. Cook for yourself here (barbecue and breakfast packs available), or take a short drive across the farm to dine at the Inn.

BOAT TRIPS FROM LÜDERITZ

The *Sedina*, a schooner, runs excellent two- to three-hour voyages to see the large colony of African penguins, off the protected Halifax Island. These leave from the harbour at around 8.00am, weather permitting. These trips are often excellent for sightings of heavyside dolphins and seabirds, whilst a nearby colony of Cape fur seals is always entertaining. The informative guide is usually full of tales of Lüderitz as well as the wildlife.

THE SPERRGEBIET

From Lüderitz to the South African border, a huge area of the Namib Desert has been off-limits for decades. The Sperrgebiet, which literally translates as 'the forbidden zone', covers an enormous 26,000km² (20% larger than Wales!). It protects endless desert plains, treacherous shifting sands and the secrets of ghost towns, abandoned relics of communities that sprang up at the turn of the century, fuelled by a diamond-rush.

The closest of these ghost towns, **Kolmanskop**, is easy to access in your own car; it's a ten-minute drive from Lüderitz (an hour's drive from Aus). Kolmanskop was abandoned almost 50 years ago and its buildings lie empty, some partially engulfed

by the shifting dunes.

Alternatively, if booked well in advance, we can arrange full-day trips deeper into the Sperrgebiet, including Bogenfels Rock Arch, the ghost town of Pomona, and the Idatel Valley – where diamonds were once famously collected by the handful in the moonlight.

SOUTH FROM SESRIEM

The drive between Lüderitz and the Namib-Naukluft Park is best done over two days, and there are good places to stop in the middle. Our favourites are the small guest farms of **Sinclair** and **Dabis**, both of which are convenient breaks on this journey.

Each is very welcoming, offering an oasis of green with comfortable, farm-style rooms and private facilities. Both offer walks and drives around their large ranches; they are very relaxed spots. Dabis also retains the accent on its farming and succeeds in giving interested visitors a real insight into living in this arid land.

Just north of these, you'll find the enigmatic Duwisib Castle – a beautiful, if bizarre, fortress built and furnished at the turn of the century by an unconventional aristocrat, and now open to the public. Nearby is the quirky hamlet of Helmeringhausen where you'll find the delightfully eccentric (and surprisingly good) **Hotel Helmeringhausen**. This has just 22 clean, simple rooms and bags of character. If you need a stop further south, then consider **La Vallée Tranquille** – a simple, French-run guest farm.



Boarding the Sedina at Lüderitz



Buildings in Lüderitz are painted in improbable pastel shades, giving it the feeling of a delightful town