



Lion have always been rare in Damaraland – but in recent years sightings of them in the Palmwag area have increased notably



Desert-adapted elephant in Damaraland

DAMARALAND

Outside of any national park, the huge tracts of Damaraland's semi-desert wilderness are spectacular. This is home to the country's famous desert-adapted elephants and black rhino, and also to a few small communities who are benefiting from the visitors who come here.

In the south, bare granite domes spring up from gravel plains like sentinels; walk amongst them to find caves and shelters adorned by a wealth of Bushman rock art. Further north, in the rugged mountains of Damaraland, private reserves protect the rare desert-adapted wildlife that thrives there.

SOUTHERN DAMARALAND

The Brandberg rock massif and its famous 'White Lady' rock painting are an essential stop if you're driving yourself. A visit is easily arranged; simply stop your car at the small, community-run visitors' centre, at the base of Brandberg. Local guides are always on hand here to take you up to the rock art.

Little more than an hour's drive away, the green land rises into flat-topped mountains. Thousands of ancient paintings and engravings are hidden on the hillside at Twyfelfontein, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Nearby, fossilised tree trunks litter the ground in a petrified forest, and strange rock formations resemble organ pipes.

Most of these attractions are best visited with your own car. However, one of the most engaging activities here is tracking desert-adapted elephants. To do this, leave your car behind and hop onto a guided 4WD trip, organised from your lodge.

There's a choice of places to stay here. **Twyfelfontein Country Lodge** is a large, comfortable lodge with 56 stone-and-thatch rooms, all with en-suite facilities and air-con. There's a sizeable pool, an open-air dining room, a cosy lounge and a bar; it's a convenient base for a night or two.

Close by, **Mowani Mountain Camp** has a

stylish design and a fantastic location, perched amongst huge granite boulders. Each of the 12 smart tents (plus a suite) has a unique design – some incorporating the rocks in their design, others with spectacular views across the gravel plains below. The optional activities here include guided walks amongst the distinctive 'whaleback' hills that surround the camp.

Doro !Nawas stands on a rugged, rocky hill close to Twyfelfontein. (The '!' mark indicated a 'click' in the local Damara language.) It's a joint-venture between a safari company and the Doro !Nawas community. The 16 huge chalets have been built from stone, canvas and thatch, and house beds on wheels which can be rolled out under the stars. Doro !Nawas is perfect for a two-night stop; it's not only very good, it's also very good value.



Bathroom in the honeymoon suite at Mowani

Damaraland Camp is famous as a 'model' camp for ecological sensitivity and development; it's partially owned by the local communities, whose members make up most of its friendly team of staff. The whole of D-Camp (as it's known) was rebuilt in 2008, including its 10 chalets. All are now built on wooden platforms, shaded and open to the breeze. At the heart of each is a central bedroom, enclosed by canvas, beneath a cool thatched roof. Around the sides are a large dressing area, a lovely en-suite bathroom and a wrap-around veranda.

South of the places noted above, the economic **Brandberg White Lady Lodge** makes a good stop between Damaraland and Swakopmund. It has 29 rooms in a beautiful setting beside Brandberg, Namibia's highest mountain.

NORTHERN DAMARALAND

If you visit one of the wildlife reserves in Northern Damaraland, then stay for at least two nights, and preferably three. Park your car and relax as local experts guide you across the rugged terrain on foot and in 4WDs. The wildlife is unique, but not prolific, though with excellent guiding, most visitors will at least have good sightings of desert-adapted elephant or black rhino.

The area's original small camp, **Etendeka**, is still owner-run and a firm favourite, especially with walkers. It's an eco-sensitive camp, which has long been closely involved with local communities, and welcomes up to 16 people in traditional, rustic tents with private bathrooms. Activities focus on walks and drives, with expert guides to interpret and explain the area's ecosystems.

Beside a spring in the Uniab River, **Palmwag** is this region's oldest lodge. It has been extensively renovated and now takes about 50 visitors (plus campers). It's quite a meeting place, with a mix of people at the bar, a big restaurant and two swimming pools. Use Palmwag as a stopover, or choose from activities including walking and 4WD safaris.



Damaraland is home to thriving populations of solitary wild black rhino

For a real taste of remoteness, try a one-night **Palmwag** sleep-out. You'll eat around a camp fire with your guide, sleep in a small dome tent and get an even closer feel for the wilderness. (See the *Expeditions through Damaraland* section, box on the right, for longer trips in a similar style.) Alternatively, **Hoanib Camp** is a great little camp in an extremely remote location, northwest of Palmwag, with four simple en-suite tents. It offers good food and a fantastic wilderness experience with game drives and walks.

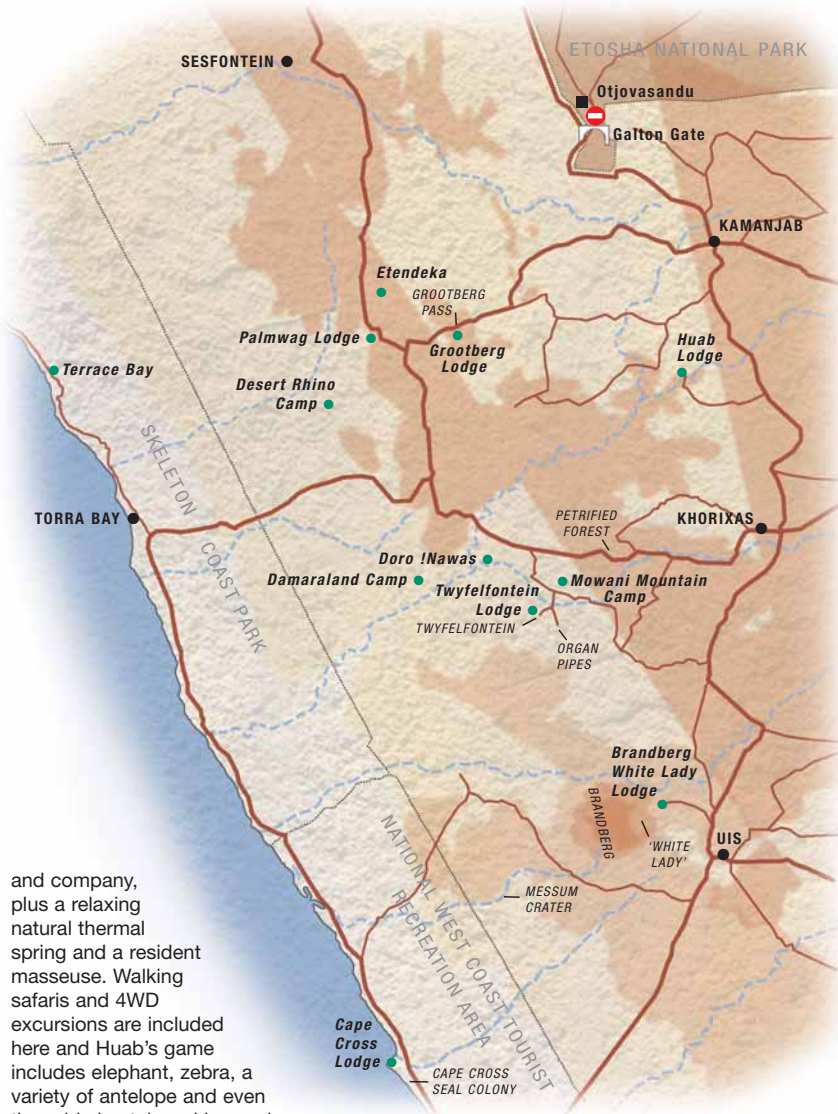
It's a two-hour transfer by 4WD from Palmwag to reach the remote and exclusive **Desert Rhino Camp** (formerly known as Palmwag Rhino Camp), so stay here for at least two nights. Set up with the help of Namibia's *Save the Rhino Trust* (one of the charities which *Expert Africa* supports), this superb little camp has been recently renovated and takes a maximum of 16 guests. Run by a committed team, activities concentrate on tracking black rhino on foot. It's a great experience – but not for the faint-hearted.

Further north, **Grootberg Lodge** has been built in conjunction with the local #Khoadi //Hoas community, in an impressive location on the edge of the Grootberg Plateau. Each of its 12 rock-and-thatch chalets has a private deck with endless views; you can even spot the odd Verreaux's (black) eagle soaring below! Grootberg has proved a real favourite; its walks, drives, pristine environment and especially its team of staff have won great accolades from our travellers.

EASTERN DAMARALAND

On the eastern side of Damaraland, some lodges are attractions in their own right; others are used more as stopovers en route from Damaraland to Etosha.

Well off the main roads, **Huab Lodge** stands in the hills between Damaraland and Namibia's Central Highlands. It is a very hospitable lodge with eight large, comfortable bungalows – best visited for two or three nights. Run by its owners, Jan and Suzi, Huab features good food, wine



and company, plus a relaxing natural thermal spring and a resident masseuse. Walking safaris and 4WD excursions are included here and Huab's game includes elephant, zebra, a variety of antelope and even the odd cheetah and leopard – but come for the wilderness and let the animals be a bonus.

Standing in a lovely position near the famous Vingerklip rock pinnacle, **Vingerklip Lodge** makes a good base for short walking trails, and an convenient stopover

on the way to or from Etosha.

Although located in Eastern Damaraland, **Hobaterre Lodge** feels more like an Etosha lodge in many ways – so see page 27 for details.

Expeditions in Damaraland

Adventurous travellers should consider an off-road expedition through Damaraland. These are usually led by an expert guide, and they're often a real highlight for those who take them. Few of these trips are luxurious – you'll often stay in remote, temporary camps under the stars with simple tents and delicious food – but they offer an unforgettable view of some Namibia's wildest areas. Examples of the possibilities include:

Elephant and Rhino Safari is a 3-night/4-day trip which starts/ends in Swakopmund, and might include rhino tracking, specialist rock-art sites, geological sorties, birdwatching, and time just spent exploring.

Kaokoland to the Kunene This 6-night/7-day trip starts/ends in Palmwag, and journeys through Sesfontein to the Kunene River via the Hartmann's Valley. You'll explore this remote region, including visits to Ovahimba communities and tracking elephants. Most nights are spent camping, but for two you stay at the luxurious Serra Cafema (see page 34).

Desert Rhino Expedition is a specialist 7-night/8-day trip spent largely accompanying a *Save The Rhino* camel team as they trek through the Damaraland Wilderness, monitoring and researching the black rhino. Travel is on foot, by camel and by 4WD.

If you'd like an expedition in this area, call us to discuss the options.