



A herd of Etosha elephants drinking behind a feathered curtain of red-billed queleas

ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK



Even the locals take heed of Etosha's clear signposts

One of Africa's best game reserves, Etosha protects a vast shallow bowl of silvery sand the size of Holland and its surrounding bush. During the dry season, herds converge to drink at the waterholes beside this pan. For most of the year, these are ideal places just to sit quietly, observing and photographing game from your own car. Follow the rhythm of the animals: rise at dawn to watch them feed in the cool morning; relax during the midday heat; and venture out again in the late afternoon.

Much of Etosha's landscape is very open, with huge vistas over the pan, so with patience game can be easy to spot. Most of Africa's big-game species are found here, often in large numbers; you have a chance of seeing a high concentration of lion as well as leopard, cheetah, elephant, black and white rhino, giraffe, zebra (Burchell's and Hartmann's mountain) and many other antelope. Etosha also has over 300 species of birds.

Etosha was designed for visitors to drive themselves around; that's how most people visit here, helped by the park's good roads and signposts. If you prefer to be guided around by a professional guide, then it's usually better to stay in one of the private camps.



A watchful lioness enjoying the morning sun

CAMPS INSIDE THE PARK

There are four camps inside the park, all run by the government-owned Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR). Three are newly renovated 'restcamps'; the fourth is a brand new, shiny 'private camp'.

These three 'restcamps' – Namutoni, Halali and Okaukuejo – are all decades old. They were originally designed with self-drive visitors in mind, each like a little village, with a shop with very basic supplies, a restaurant, a bar, various types of basic rooms, a campsite, a large swimming pool and – the real attraction – a floodlit waterhole.

All were extensively renovated in 2007; their rooms and facilities are now generally well designed and well equipped. However, service and catering standards are taking longer to improve; visitors should be aware of this and moderate their expectations!

When booking a place here, we aim for the 'bush chalets', which are lovely en-suite rooms. All these restcamps now offer optional game drives (morning and afternoon), plus night drives (when you are not allowed to drive yourself).

Namutoni is the most picturesque of the camps, built around an improbably beautiful Beau Geste-style fort at the eastern side of the park. It's the closest to the lovely Fischer's Pan, although Namutoni's waterhole normally has fewer visiting animals than the waterholes at the other restcamps. Expect great concentrations of water birds around here when it's wet – including a breeding colony of flamingos.

In the west of the accessible area of Etosha, north of Andersson's Gate, **Okaukuejo** is the largest camp and the centre for the park's rangers and

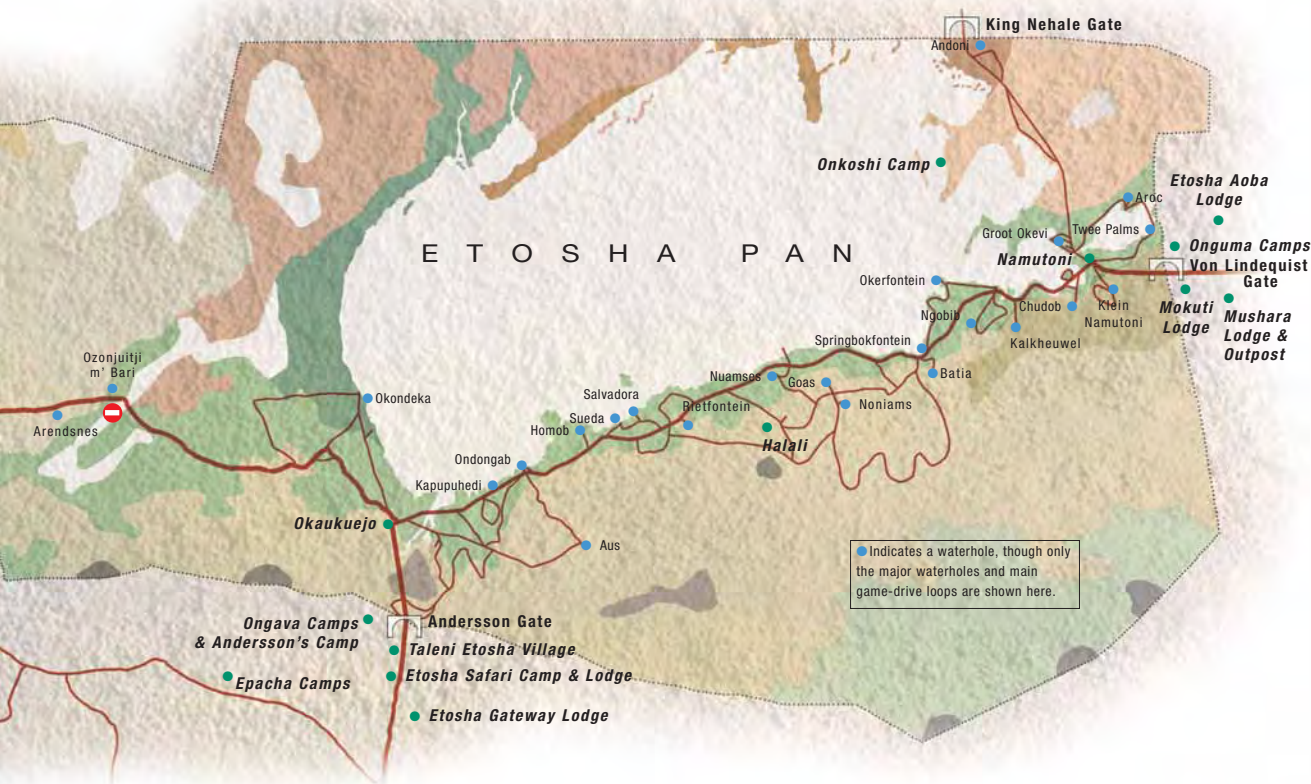


researchers. Okaukuejo's floodlit waterhole has the most amazing game, often receiving daily visits from black rhino and elephants in the dry season. It's a good place to sit back after dinner with a bottle of wine, watching nocturnal visitors and their interactions.

Between the other two restcamps is **Halali**, probably our favourite. It's the smallest and quietest of the three (generally a positive!), and stands beside one of the few hills in Etosha. Here the evening sightings at the waterhole aren't so predictable, but it's set away from the camp in a quiet spot, so it usually has a more peaceful ambience and



Zebra visiting one of a string of waterholes – with the great Etosha salt pan in the background



Elephants drinking

wildlife sightings can be excellent.

The NWR's new, flagship **Onkoshi Camp** opened in September 2008: the first new camp in Etosha National Park since Halali opened in 1967. It has 15 chalets built on elevated wooden decks which overlook the Etosha's great saltpan from the Stinkwater Peninsula. It's the only camp with such views! Onkoshi's smart, en-suite chalets have thatched roofs, canvas walls, large glass doors and spectacular views. Game activities include 4WD drives (day and night) with access to an exclusive area of the park, guided walks, and moonlight walks on the pan.

PRIVATE CAMPS WEST OF ETOSHA

Slightly off the obvious driving route between Damaraland and Etosha, beside the southwestern corner of Etosha, **Hobater** is owned by one of Namibia's leading naturalists, Steve Braine. It has 12 comfortable recently renovated cottages, set within the well-tended gardens, as well as a rustic tree house in the 'bush' for the more adventurous, and a pool. Hobater's environment and game densities are similar to Etosha; it has a good, floodlit waterhole with a hide, and offers 4WD safaris (day

and night) and walking safaris with good guides.

Nearby, **Kavita Lion Lodge** is a private game ranch owned by Tammy and Uwe, who are closely involved in lion conservation. Kavita has eight traditional stone, thatched bungalows, all overlooking a floodlit waterhole. Activities include game drives, guided nature trails and visits to their environmental education centre, with its sanctuary for rescued lions.

NB: Self-driving visitors are not allowed through the western part of Etosha National Park, or the Galton Entrance Gate.



White rhino on an open plain in Etosha – black rhino are more often seen at night, visiting the floodlit waterholes at Okaukuejo and Halali

PRIVATE CAMPS EAST OF ETOSHA

Just to the east side of the park are several private lodges which are convenient bases from which to visit the park, and many offer more luxury than the park's original restcamps. **Mushara Lodge**, 8km from the eastern gate, has a large pool and 13 spacious chalets, each with air conditioning and en-suite bathrooms. Nearby **Villa Mushara** has two large, luxurious villas, each with its own private terrace, plunge pool and outside shower. The stylish **Mushara Outpost** opened in 2008, but is already proving a good option. It's a bushcamp with eight canvas-and-glass tents built on raised decks, plus a stunningly converted 'farmhouse' and a refreshing pool.

Just 25 minutes' drive from Etosha's entrance gate, **Etosha Aoba Lodge** is also small, intimate and very friendly. A delightful base for exploring the park, it has ten beautiful rondavels dotted around a Tamboti forest. There's game around, as well as endless birds, and a small bush hide from which to observe the action.

The small **Onguma Game Reserve** borders Fischer's Pan, on the eastern side of Etosha National Park. Here **Onguma Bush Camp** has nine fairly rustic rooms and serves dinner in an open boma. Overlooking a waterhole, the nearby **Onguma Tented Camp** uses an innovative triple layered tent design, combined with stone and thatch, for its seven large, stylish tents. It is a very chic camp with good service and food to match.

Built in grand style, like the fort at Namutoni, the ultra-luxurious **Onguma Plains Camp – The Fort** has 13 luxury suites, a pool and various viewing decks overlooking the waterhole below. Raised up on stilts, as its name suggests, and overlooking a waterhole, **Onguma Tree Top Camp** is small and very special; with just four thatched, canvas-walled rooms, it has a real bush-camp feel.

Also on the east side of the park, the renovated and re-branded **Kempinski Mokuji Lodge** is much larger; with 131 rooms, it's really a hotel in the bush!

PRIVATE CAMPS SOUTH OF ETOSHA

On the south side of Etosha, a handful of safari lodges are sited on their own wildlife areas, whilst also acting as bases for trips into Etosha.

Ongava Reserve adjoins Etosha, and here **Ongava Tented Camp** has a swimming pool and eight large, comfortable tents, all with en-suite facilities, built beside a good floodlit waterhole. On a hill, the more substantial **Ongava Lodge** has 14 large, air-conditioned stone chalets; this was the original 'luxury lodge' outside Etosha. Its super-luxurious sibling is the adjacent **Little Ongava**, which has just three large suites, each with indoor and outdoor showers and a private plunge pool. For a simpler but comfortable base from which to self-drive, consider **Andersson's Camp**, which has 20 tented rooms set around an old farmstead. All of the lodges on Ongava Reserve will organise activities for you, including guided walks, 4WD safaris into Etosha, and drives around their own reserve.

West of Ongava, the extensive Epacha Reserve covers about 270km². Here **Epacha Game Lodge & Spa** has 18 smart chalets in a complex which includes a billiard room and a cigar lounge. There's an endless choice of spa treatments, clay-pigeon shooting, horse-riding and quad bikes. Also on the Epacha Reserve, **Eagle**

Tented Lodge & Spa has eight luxurious tents and more of a 'bush' feel, but offers the same activities and treatments.

Several less-opulent places stand on smaller properties, offering good value at economic prices. They are perfect if you want to drive yourself around Etosha, but also offer guided game drives if you feel like sitting back and relaxing. Talk to us for guidance, but there are three obvious candidates. The convenient **Etosha Safari Camp** stands amidst mopane woodland. It has 50 simple twin-bedded 'chalets', each with an en-suite bathroom and a small veranda. At the end of 2008, this gained a smarter sister-camp, **Etosha Safari Lodge**, which has 55 bungalows atop a small hill. In the same vein **Taleni Etosha Village** is also new and makes a good base. It has 40 self-catering shaded tents, each with twin beds, a sleeper couch (free for children under 12!) and an en-suite bathroom with open air shower. There is a well-stocked on-site store and also a buffet restaurant.

Another alternative close to the park is the simple and laid-back **Etosha Gateway Lodge**. A bit further afield, in nearby Outjo, the delightful **Etosha Garden Hotel** is unusual – it's a particularly good small-town hotel with just 21 rooms. From here you can drive to Etosha easily and also explore the town and its mix of cultures, including the often traditionally dressed Damara and Herero people.



Private camp comforts: the open-sided lounge at Onguma Tented Camp