



Gemsbok bulls often fight for dominance - here at Ozonjuitji m'Bari waterhole

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'.

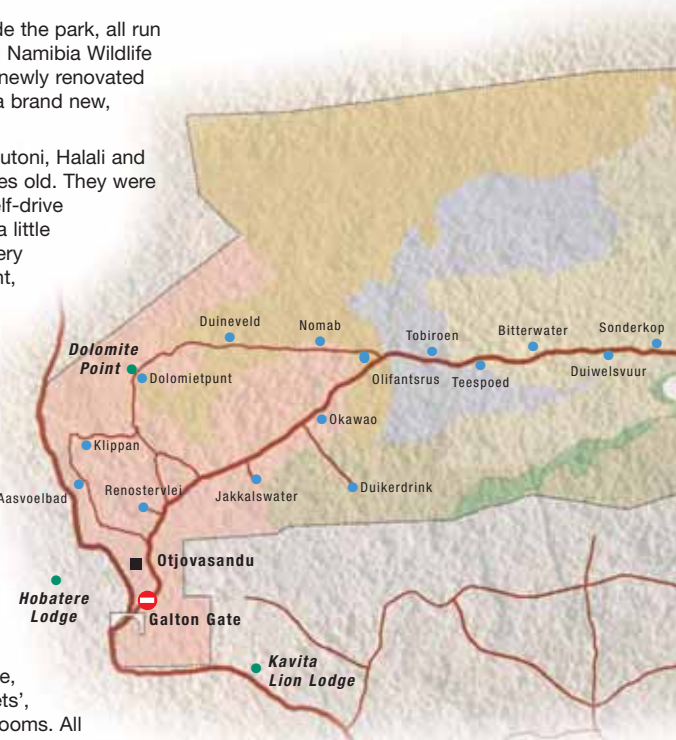
These three camps – Namutoni, Halali and Okaukuejo – are all decades old. They were originally designed with self-drive visitors in mind, each like a little village, with a shop with very basic supplies, a restaurant, a bar, various types of basic rooms, a campsite, a large swimming pool and – the real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

Their rooms and facilities are generally well designed and well equipped. However, service and catering standards aren't always as impressive; so visitors should be aware of this and moderate their expectations accordingly!

When booking a place here, we aim for the 'bush chalets', which are lovely en-suite rooms. All these camps 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 camps. 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 of 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 camps 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 wildlife sightings can be excellent.



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



Onkoshi Camp at night

The NWR's flagship **Onkoshi Camp** opened in 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 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. This is the only place inside Etosha that offers guided walks and moonlight walks on the pan (when conditions allow); as well as 4WD drives (day and night). Onkoshi is one of the more costly camps in the area.

PRIVATE CAMPS WEST OF ETOSHA

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

New camp for 2010

Run by Namibian Wildlife Resorts, **Dolomite Point** is a new lodge in the 'restricted access' area of western Etosha. Overlooking Dolomietpunt waterhole, this sister-camp of Onkoshi is scheduled to open in August 2010. We are also told that the 'Galton Gate', Etosha's western gate, will open to the public at the same time; call us for the latest news!



The roads in Etosha are shared equally by vehicles and game

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** has eight canvas-and-glass tents built on raised decks, plus a stunningly converted 'farmhouse' and a refreshing pool. New for 2009, **Mushara Bush Camp** has 16 spacious tents, including four family tents, plus a swimming pool and a kiddies' play area.

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 12 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 impressive 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 Mokuti 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 stand in their own wildlife areas, whilst also acting as bases for trips into Etosha.

Ongava Reserve, which covers about 320km², adjoins Etosha and contains four lodges. **Ongava Tented Camp** has 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. Both of these have swimming pools, whilst unique attractions of Ongava Lodge are its rhino tracking activities and game hide access. Adjacent is the opulent **Little Ongava**, which has just three large suites, each with indoor and outdoor showers and a private plunge pool. All of these organise activities, including guided walks and 4WD safaris into Etosha National Park and around the Ongava Reserve.

For a simple and comfortable base on Ongava Reserve, **Andersson's Camp** has 20 tented rooms set around an old farmstead. Andersson's offers game drives into the national park, but not around

Ongava Reserve; most visitors use it simply as a base for driving themselves around Etosha.

Several nearby properties also make perfect bases to explore Etosha in your own car, and offer good value and economic prices. 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. Its smarter sister-camp, **Etosha Safari Lodge**, has 55 air-conditioned chalets atop a small hill. In the same vein **Taleni Etosha Village** also 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. Taleni also has a well-stocked store and a buffet restaurant. Another possibility is the simple and very laid-back **Etosha Gateway Lodge**.

Further afield, several places can be useful if the places closer to the park are full. In nearby Outjo, **Etosha Garden Hotel**, means an eye-opening stop in a small local town. Quite a distance west of the park, the extensive Epacha Reserve covers about 270km² - and includes **Epacha Game Lodge & Spa** and the **Eagle Tented Lodge & Spa**. We can discuss all of these options with you if you ask us.



Floodlit waterholes can offer great sightings at night