

SOUTHERN NAMIBIA

Less visited than the north, this is Namibia at its most quirky and diverse! To the east, the southern Kalahari's gently rolling dunes are the best place to seek endearing mobs of meerkats and other offbeat wildlife, from solitary aardwolves to families of bat-eared foxes. Equally intriguing are the Namib Desert's ghost towns and the idiosyncratic coastal outpost of Lüderitz, complete with a nearby penguin colony. To the south, the world's second-largest canyon was incised into a rocky landscape over millennia; but who knows the origin of the nearby wild desert horses?

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, after heavy rain, carpets of flowers. This vegetation supports a wide range of larger mammals, from springbok, gemsbok 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 hand-painted rooms and innovative local 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 well-tended garden decorated with sculptures by a local artist. It's perfect for a quick start or end to a trip.

Far to the east of Eningu, **Kalahari Bush Breaks** is a small, personal 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. Its smaller, more intimate sister, the **Kalahari Farmhouse** near Stampriet, has a 1950s' farmhouse at its heart and 12 comfortable 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 12 chalets: four set on the crest of a red Kalahari sand dune, with lovely views over the dunes; and eight lower down. The walls in some of the



The mainly nocturnal bat-eared fox in the Kalahari

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.

KEETMANSHOOP

Driving further south you arrive in the sleepy town of Keetmanshoop. Here, **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 **Canyon Hotel** has been there for years. Both are convenient bases for excursions to the Quiver Tree Forest and the majestic volcanic crater at Brukkaros.



Up close with meerkats at Bagatelle



Boarding the Sedina at Lüderitz

FISH RIVER CANYON

Approaching the Fish River Canyon from the east 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, through which the Fish River meanders between boulders over half a kilometre below. Whether admiring the panorama from various view points along the rim, or experiencing the thrill of hiking along the bottom, you are sure to find solitude and stunning vistas.

Ai-Ais Hot Springs Spa lies at the bottom of the canyon at its western end, beside natural hot springs. Now looking shiny and new, after extensive renovations, this government-owned camp offers an economic base for exploring the Fish River area.

To the east, closer to the main canyon viewpoints, are several comfortable private lodges. The original of these, **Cañon Lodge**, has 30 separate stone bungalows dotted between spectacular granite kopjies, often incorporating natural stone features in their design.

Its sister lodge, the **Cañon Roadhouse**, is a comfortable roadside retreat which has 24 simple en-suite rooms and a uniquely

designed restaurant. All rooms are set around two courtyards, and their colours carefully blend with the surrounding area. Also 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.

On the northwest side of the canyon, just south of the main tar road to Lüderitz, **Vogelstrausskluff** is 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 (or overnight) 4WD/walking excursions down into their own private section of the Fish River Canyon.

Situated on the western rim of the canyon, **Fish River Lodge** lies in the privately owned Canyon Nature Park. All of its 20 stone chalets are minimalist in design and have stunning views across the canyon. Stay here for opportunities to do walks (including a full five-day hiking trail into the canyon between April and September), and 4WD excursions into the canyon.

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 colourful buildings of this historic German town sit unchanged. Lüderitz has an atmosphere all of its own: unhurried, 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, made landfall as one of the first Europeans 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 seafood (especially oysters and crayfish). 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** and **Island Cottage** on the windswept peninsula of Shark Island.

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, 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! Alternatively, we can organise a fully guided and catered hike from Fish River Lodge for you. 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. We can also arrange 4WD/hiking trips from Vogelstrausskluff into the upper reaches of the canyon, sleeping in bushcamps; ask us for details.



Panorama from a viewpoint overlooking Fish River Canyon - the world's second largest canyon

AUS

If your time is short, then base yourself at Aus, a tiny outpost on the edge of the desert. Here, Klein Aus Vista is set in 150km² of beautiful mountain and desert scenery. It's a place to be active: you can hike around the mountains on marked trails, search for wild desert horses or drive yourself to Lüderitz for a day.

There are two possible 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, more secluded and more imaginative option, deeper into the mountains, is the delightful **Eagle's Nest**. This has just nine 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 a large colony of African penguins, off the protected Halifax Island. Trips leave from the harbour at around 8.00am, weather permitting. These are often great for sightings of heaviside 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 largely off limits for decades. The Sperrgebiet, which literally translates as 'the forbidden zone', covers an enormous 26,000km² (20% larger than Wales!) – and has recently been designated as a national park. 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 over 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, to include Bogenfels Rock Arch, the ghost town of Pomona, and the Idatel Valley – where diamonds were once famously collected by the handful in the moonlight. There are plans to open this area up further; please talk to us for the latest update.



Ludertiz's Nest Hotel is a popular choice

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 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 20 clean, simple rooms and bags of character.

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



Felsen church - the church on the rock - Lüderitz