

SWAKOPMUND AND WALVIS BAY

Swakopmund is a small, quaintly Germanic town, surrounded by the desert and the ocean. It may be Namibia's main seaside 'resort', but it isn't really commercial by Western standards. We regard it as a convenient stop for a few days, with plenty of good hotels, great seafood, many historic buildings and a relaxed atmosphere. Among the shops you'll find a fascinating museum of crystals and Africa's best source of African artefacts and antique books. Just to the south, Walvis Bay's lagoon and its 'bird paradise' attract large flocks of flamingos, great white pelicans and other migrant water birds.

In and around these small towns there's a wide range of things to do, including sandboarding, birdwatching, fishing, sea kayaking, scenic flights and even sky-diving. Invariably the number of activities in which you want to participate will dictate the number of days that you spend here.

Amongst the places to stay in Swakopmund, one of our favourites is the charming and centrally located **Cornerstone Guesthouse**. Its seven lovely rooms and a colourful garden full of flowers give it a cosy home-away-from-home feel, while owners Peter and Margo offer a warm and friendly welcome. Just across the road, the seaside-themed **Swakopmund Guesthouse** offers minimalist rooms and pretty gardens.

Another popular choice is the comfortable **Sam's Giardino**. Run by its enthusiastic owner, Sam, with a little canine help, it's slightly offbeat and our guests invariably love it. There are nine spacious rooms, extensive breakfasts and, if you eat in, an optional wine-tasting to accompany the delicious evening five-course meals. Many

of Sam's helpful staff are women from a nearby township who have been trained here; the result is a great atmosphere.

Two other good guesthouses, both barely five minutes' walk from the town centre, offer rooms with good facilities and clean, modern lines. Both have seven bedrooms: the **Central** which also offers a small courtyard, bright and cheery rooms and a quiet location, and **Brigadoon**, which is set in the well-established gardens of its owner's house. Just north of these two is the stylish **Villa Margherita** which has eight individually crafted, art deco-style rooms and its own Italian restaurant.

The Stiltz overlooks the small estuary of the Swakop River and has spectacular views over the dunes, Atlantic Ocean or reed beds. It's a unique place, with 11 high-quality wooden chalets built on stilts, and linked to a large breakfast room.

Right on the beach, the quirky **Beach Lodge** is about 5km north of town. Each of its 19 well-appointed rooms has a nautical theme and a private patio or balcony. It is



Expect great scenery and a wide variety of birds on a trip to Sandwich Harbour



Swakopmund's landmark lighthouse

relaxed yet efficient, and also has one of the town's best restaurants on site.

Swakopmund's best traditional hotel, with a mature atmosphere, central location and German colonial style, is the **Hansa Hotel**. Other classic possibilities in town include the historic **Eberwein Hotel** and the imposing **Swakopmund Hotel**.

A few miles out of town are the friendly **Sea Breeze Guesthouse** and the cheerful, welcoming **Sandfields Guesthouse**, a great choice for families. For more details of any of these, call us or see www.expertafrica.com.

In Walvis Bay, the French-owned **Lagoon Loge** (sic) is an obvious place for keen birdwatchers. It has a lovely garden, a swimming pool and eight tastefully decorated rooms – each with a private balcony overlooking the lagoon.

KAYAKING IN WALVIS BAY

Kayaking is a superb way to get close to birdlife and marine mammals. You might expect a muscle-bound, juvenile guide, but instead you will be guided by the delightful Jeanne Meintjes – a relaxed, mature local woman whose hobby is now a small business. Jeanne's trips run in the early morning, when the water is generally flat. No kayaking experience is necessary, and you don't need to be athletic: just meet Jeanne in Walvis Bay, and she will supply all the equipment.

Trips start with a 4WD drive through working salt pans to launch the kayaks beside the seal colony at Pelican Point. The kayaking is usually gentle, lasting two to three hours before you pause on the beach for sandwiches and a drink. On the water, inquisitive seals often come close, playing and splashing around, whilst further out you have a chance of spotting dolphins and whales. This is a blissful way to spend a morning.



Pelican crossing at Sandwich Harbour

EXPLORING THE COAST

Most visitors come to Namibia for its wild areas, not its towns, but both Swakopmund and Walvis Bay make ideal bases from which to explore little-visited parts of this coastal desert. You can drive yourself to some, but to access the best and to really learn about them, spend a day with an expert guide.

Swakopmund is home to some of Namibia's best guides who have a wealth of in-depth knowledge on the area's flora, fauna and geology. Join a small group, typically no more than eight people, to explore by 4WD and on foot – on trips that can really bring Namibia's coastal desert alive for you.

The **Sandwich Harbour** trip is by far the most popular, and includes historic sites in the Kuiseb Delta, bird-rich lagoons at Walvis Bay and Sandwich Harbour (tide permitting), and some of the desert's more unusual flora and fauna.

The **Namib** trip explores the Swakop and Khan river valleys, including some historical sites from World War I, considerable desert wildlife and the Moon Landscape – with its ancient *Welwitschia* plants.

Both trips start from your hotel at about 8.30am, and end at around 5.00pm; a delicious lunch is included, usually served at a magnificent spot in the desert. Private trips, tailored to guests' interests, are also easily arranged.



Sandboarding near Swakopmund

Kayaking on Walvis Bay Lagoon with a group of Cape fur seals

