

ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK

One of Africa's best game reserves, Etosha protects a vast shallow bowl of silvery clay 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. It's how most people visit here, helped by the park's good roads and signposts, but if you prefer to be guided around by a professional guide, then it's usually better to stay in one of the private camps.

CAMPS INSIDE THE PARK

There are five camps inside the park, all run by the government-owned Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR). The three original camps – Namutoni, Halali and Okaukuejo – are all decades old. They were designed with self-drive visitors in mind, each like a little village, with a shop selling very basic supplies, a restaurant, bar, various types of basic rooms, a campsite, 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); these are always paid for locally.

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.

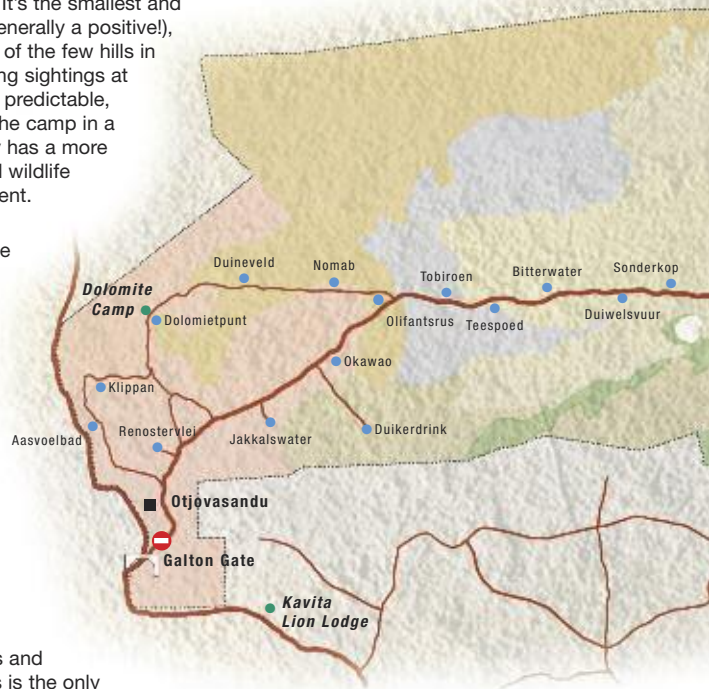
In the west of Etosha's publically accessible area, north of Andersson's Gate, **Okaukuejo** is the largest camp and the centre for the park's rangers and researchers. Okaukuejo's floodlit waterhole has the most amazing game, often receiving daily visits from black rhino and elephant in the dry season. It's a good place to sit back after dinner with a bottle of wine, watching nocturnal visitors and their interactions.

Between these 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.

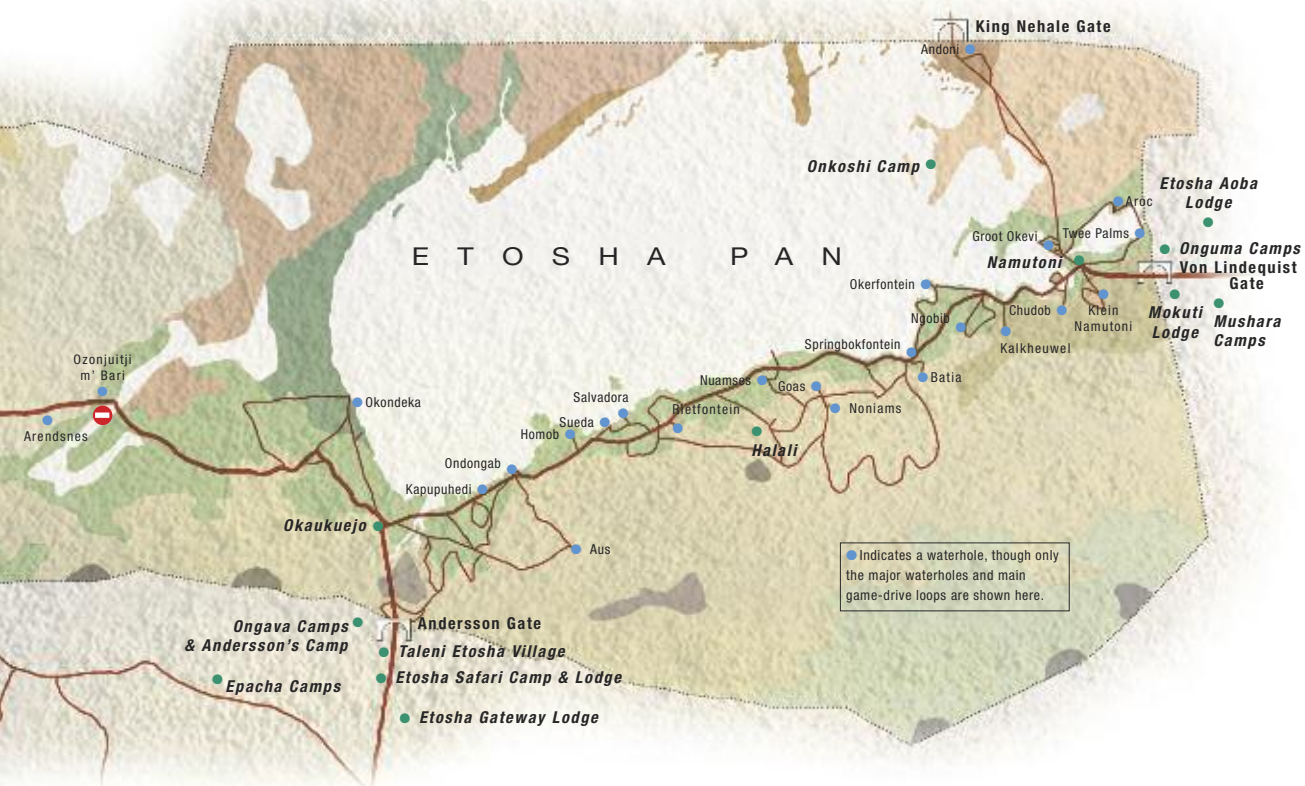
The NWR's flagship **Onkoshi Camp** was the first new camp in Etosha National Park since Halali opened in 1967. Built on elevated wooden decks, it has 15 chalets overlooking Etosha's great saltpan from the Stinkwater Peninsula; it's the only camp with such views! Onkoshi's smart, en-suite chalets have 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). Given its location and perks, Onkoshi is one of the more costly camps in the area.

The newest of the five, **Dolomite Camp**, is the first to be built in the 'restricted access' area of western Etosha. Overlooking Dolomite Point ('*Dolomietpunt*') waterhole, this shiny new sister camp of Onkoshi opened in June 2011. Built on the dolomite outcrops of this region, the camp consists of 20 spacious hillside chalets, some of which have their own plunge pool. Etosha's western entrance, the 'Galton Gate', is accessible to those staying here; this opens up a whole new area of the park for the first time, and the possibility of driving east-west through the park. There is talk of opening this gate to the general public in the not-too-distant future – call us for the latest news!



A watchful lioness enjoying the morning sun



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

Even the locals take heed of Etosha's clear signposts





On the run!

PRIVATE CAMPS WEST OF ETOSHA

Slightly off the obvious driving route, **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.

Note, however, that self-drive visitors are at present not allowed through the western part of Etosha National Park or the Galton Entrance Gate unless they are staying at Dolomite Camp (see page 44).

PRIVATE CAMPS SOUTH OF ETOSHA

On the south side of Etosha, several safari lodges stand in their own wildlife areas, whilst also acting as bases for trips into Etosha.

White rhino on Etosha's open plains; black rhino are more usually spotted at the floodlit waterholes

Ongava Reserve, which covers about 300km², 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. 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 camps organise activities, including rhino-tracking, guided walks and 4WD safaris into Etosha National Park and around the game-rich Ongava Reserve.

For a simple and comfortable base on the Ongava Reserve, **Andersson's Camp** has 20 tented rooms and in some ways is a model of eco-sensitive lodging. Although activities include day trips into Etosha, together with nature walks and night drives on the 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, as

well as offering good value and economical 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 is **Taleni Etosha Village**, which 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, there are several useful options if places closer to the park are full. In nearby Outjo, a stay at **Etosha Garden Hotel** affords an eye-opening stop in a small local town, whilst the extensive Epacha Reserve covers about 270km² and includes both **Epacha Game Lodge & Spa** and the **Eagle Tented Lodge & Spa**. Not far from these a warm welcome awaits you amongst the lush gardens of the delightful **Vreugde Guest Farm**. See www.expertafrica.com for more details of all of the places mentioned here.





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 Etosha. Many offer more luxury than the park's original 'restcamps', but not all cost much more. Mushara Lodge, 8km from the eastern gate, has a large pool and 13 spacious chalets including a family house, each with air conditioning and en-suite bathrooms. Just next door, the more exclusive **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' reminiscent of colonial times, and a refreshing pool. The newest addition, and proving to be exceedingly popular with our travellers, is **Mushara Bush Camp**, with 16 spacious tents, including four family tents, plus a swimming pool and a children's play area.

Just 20 minutes' drive from Etosha's entrance gate, **Etosha Aoba Lodge** is

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 **Onguma Game Reserve** borders Fischer's Pan, on the eastern side of Etosha National Park. Here **Onguma Bush Camp** has 19 fairly rustic rooms and serves dinner overlooking the waterhole. The nearby **Onguma Tented Camp** uses an innovative triple-layered canvas design, combined with stone and thatch, for its seven large, stylish tents. With its tasteful infinity pool, 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 Moroccan-influenced **Onguma Plains – The Fort** has 13 impressive suites, a uniquely designed pool and various viewing decks overlooking the waterhole below. For the more adventurous, **Onguma Tree Top Camp** is raised up on stilts, as its name suggests, and overlooks a waterhole. It's small and very special: its four thatched, canvas-walled rooms lending it a real bushcamp feel.

Also on the east side of the park, **Emanya Lodge**, which opened in 2011, offers 20 well-appointed chalets with relaxing surroundings. Nearby, the international hotel chain, Kempinski, has renovated and re-branded an old lodge. The resulting **Kempinski Mokuti Lodge** has 106 rooms and is very much a hotel in the bush!

The roads in Etosha are shared equally by vehicles and game



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