

THE NORTHERN KALAHARI

In the remote northeast of Namibia, Bushmanland is covered by low vegetated dunes which are typical of the Kalahari. Small, isolated clans of Bushmen or San people, famous for their culture's knowledge of the bush and their survival skills, are widely dotted around. Don't come here for the scenery, or looking for luxury, but do come if you're serious about experiencing one of Africa's most sensitive and positive cultural interactions.

To delve deeper into this exceedingly wild corner of the Kalahari, venture to Khaudum National Park; the shallow, seasonally flooded Nyae Nyae Pans; or the enigmatic Aha Hills.

VISITING THE BUSHMEN

East of Etosha, four hours' drive from the outpost town of Grootfontein, is a remote region known as Bushmanland. Here the !Kung people live in small, scattered villages surrounded by fossil dunes covered in sparse bush. These are the Bushmen of the Kalahari, also known as the San. They have an understanding of their natural environment that is amazing to witness and survival skills that are beyond belief for many Westerners.

This is a very rural, remote part of Africa, where we have worked for over ten years with Arno and Estelle Oosthuysen. They live here and are committed to the sustainability of the area and the wellbeing of its people. (Inadvertently, Arno has also become something of a celebrity, having guided many high-profile visitors in recent years.)

For most of this last decade or so, we have been sending visitors to Nhoma – where the rustic, tented **Nhoma Safari Camp** was set up by Arno and Estelle, in partnership with the local community. With this as your base, you'll be sensitively introduced to the village community and, through them, to the area. It can be a truly remarkable experience.

Nhoma Camp now has 10 tents, all on decks with private bathrooms, and is two minutes' walk from the community's village. Stay for at least three nights, preferably more; you can't do it justice in less time.

Your day-to-day activities will depend on what is decided between you, your guide and the Bushmen you are visiting. You'll have the chance to spend time with them, joining in with their daily activities: setting traps, gathering wild foods or tracking and hunting game. This is not contrived or artificial; it is very authentic. You'll always have a guide/translator with you, but how much you enjoy it will depend upon the

relationship that you strike up with the villagers. It's not a place to stand back and observe; it's somewhere to get involved.

Most of our travellers love this experience. Some have returned with us for much longer trips – spending weeks with the villagers. We find visiting here one of the most fascinating and humbling experiences in Africa, but you must talk to us before putting Nhoma in your itinerary. It's not a place that everyone will enjoy.

(Note that *Tsumkwe Lodge*, which our past travellers may remember, was bought a few years ago by a lodge 'chain' – and renamed **Tsumkwe Country Lodge**.)

KHAUDUM NATIONAL PARK

North of Tsumkwe, bordering Botswana, the remote Khaudum National Park protects an area of the northern Kalahari that is sustained by underground waters called 'omurambas' – dry, sandy riverbeds holding subterranean water.

Khaudum's game is wild and the atmosphere magical. This isn't like Etosha – it's not wall-to-wall animals – but if you look there are large herds of elephant, plus tsessebe, red hartebeest, blue wildebeest, kudu, gemsbok, giraffe and good numbers of the uncommon roan antelope. Khaudum's main predators are spotted hyena, lion, leopard and wild dog (Namibia's population of wild dogs is centred here).

You cannot drive yourself here in a normal car; instead we'll arrange a small, overnight expedition: camping under the stars can be magical! Khaudum is at its best during the dry season, from May to October, but even then it's best viewed as a Kalahari wilderness experience with the bonus of some game viewing.



Grocery shopping in the bush!

AROUND BUSHMANLAND

Southeast of Tsumkwe, a series of shallow pans fill with water during the rains, overshadowed by the ancient baobabs that dominate the landscape. Herds of springbok, gemsbok, blue wildebeest and (less frequently) hartebeest are sometimes seen here, and the pans often attract migrant waders, flamingos, pelicans, and large numbers of wattled cranes. We can usually arrange a day at Nyae Nyae, the largest of these pans, for enthusiastic birdwatchers – although even our expert guides find driving here a challenge when it's wet!

Close by, the remote and mysterious Aha Hills straddle the Botswana border. Their jagged rocks make climbing arduous, but one hill, Kremetartkop, is worth the climb for its amazing Kalahari views.

Culturally Sensitive Travel

Looking through the rest of this brochure, you'll see that we don't offer many trips that focus on local people and cultures. In principle, we'd prefer to avoid them rather than risk interactions that aren't sensitively handled, and thus become potentially damaging for the local cultures. Whilst researching, we've seen many cultural trips that we have refused to support because of this.

However, in Nhoma we have confidence; tourism has significantly helped Nhoma Village. We know that the money earned by the villagers from our travellers' visits has, over the years, made hugely positive impacts on their lives. Specifically, and quite apart from their significant material gain, it has increased the importance that the people place on their own traditional skills and cultural heritage – as they now see these as passports to earning money, rather than as anachronisms.



Tracking hyena with the bushmen



Lighting fires in the Kalahari