

CENTRAL NAMIBIAN HIGHLANDS

Between Windhoek and Etosha lies a region of gentle rolling hills, where many of Namibia's larger farms and ranches can be found. (To put this in perspective, a 'farm' in Namibia usually means about 100km² of apparently wild bush.) A few have nurtured wildlife for a decade or so, but many more are now being turned into lodges, to look after guests and wild game, instead of cattle or sheep. It's a positive change for Namibia's wildlife, and is sustained largely by income from visitors.

These lodges are all different, reflecting their individual hosts and locations. All offer comfortable accommodation with en-suite facilities, and most organise activities too. You can sometimes dine with your hosts and get really personal views of Namibia from them.

Just south of Otjiwarongo is a relaxed lodge owned by the Hanssen family. A stay at **Okonjima Main Camp**, or their luxurious **Bush Camp**, includes all your meals and activities. Activities within the recently enlarged reserve focus on guided drives, tracking rehabilitated carnivores on foot, and trails illustrating the lifestyle of some of the region's original people.

That said, big cats are the main attraction here. Namibia has over 20% of the world's cheetah population – the largest concentration in the world – and Okonjima is the base for the **AfriCat Foundation**, which is devoted to environmental education, research and rehabilitating some

of the country's big predators: cheetah, leopard, lion, caracal and wild dog. A stay of one or two nights here will usually give you the chance to see some of them at close range. (For safety, these activities are not suitable for children under 12.)

Okonjima also has a magnificent **Bush Suite**, ideal for four people travelling together and accepts children as part of family groups. Even more opulent, **Okonjima Villa** is 10km from the main lodge, and sleeps up to 12 guests.

Thirty minutes' drive northeast of Otjiwarongo, **Frans Indongo Lodge** has 14 comfortable rooms, a lovely pool and an elevated deck overlooking a waterhole. As well as the usual indigenous wildlife, a variety of interesting species has been introduced, including roan antelope, black springbok, blesbok and rhino. The lodge offers walks and 4WD nature drives with low-key game-viewing, and is also convenient for day trips to both the



Chalet at Okonjima Bush Camp

Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), a local wildlife charity, and the Waterberg Plateau. If your budget allows, then for a closer experience of the CCF, base yourself at their exclusive little two-room retreat, **The Babson House**.

Erongo Wilderness Lodge, just west of Omaruru, is perched amidst rugged granite kopjes and makes a perfect stop between Swakopmund and Etosha or Etosha and Windhoek. Its ten comfortable, tented chalets have superb views and the area is ideal for both birdwatching and walking. Nature walks with a lodge guide are included and experienced walkers are free to explore the terrain for themselves.

For those wanting a rural alternative to Windhoek, **The Elegant Farmstead** has a warm welcome and 11 tasteful rooms; it is only a couple of hours' drive from Windhoek Airport.

MUNDULEA NATURE RESERVE

Mundulea is owned and run by Kate and Bruno Nebe. Although not widely known, Bruno is one of the best guides in Africa. His intimate knowledge of Namibia's flora and fauna is mixed with an almost implausibly detailed understanding of geology, geography, archaeology and a wide spectrum of Namibia's political and economic issues. Yet all this expertise is carried very lightly by his relaxed, unpretentious guiding style. It's earned Bruno a loyal following of repeat visitors and, in the 16 years since we started working with him, much praise from our travellers – including a significant number of families.

Mundulea is a private 120km² nature reserve in the Otavi Mountains. This beautiful Karstveld landscape has rugged



Cheetah on the lookout at Okonjima

hills, steep gorges and a vast network of caves and underground lakes. It is some of the most fertile land in Namibia, with huge spreading trees and a particularly rich biodiversity. Bruno and his wife Kate started rehabilitating this reserve some ten years ago – and they now work with a few hand-picked guides (we know them all personally) who share their passion for understanding the wilderness.

The bush camp at Mundulea has four large, tented rooms, each with a private en-suite bathroom and spacious veranda. The accommodation is private and distinct, connected to the main dining/sitting area by a series of wooded pathways. Great care has been taken to create an ecologically sustainable camp that blends attractively into the surrounding bush, which is peaceful, quiet, and close to an

intriguing waterhole. Notably good meals are cooked for you on an open fire and are eaten outdoors at one of the most stunning wooden dining tables you are likely to see!

Come to Mundulea for a varied three or four days' walking with an excellent guide. There's absolutely no set trail – everything depends on what you want to see, and what you find. These aren't route marches; you'll go at your own pace with time to explore the landscapes and observe the wildlife – both large and small. There are over 260 species of birds here and it's one of the best places in Namibia to see both Africa's largest antelope, the eland, and one of its smallest, the dik dik. You'll also find many of Namibia's more common antelope, as well as giraffe, tsessebe, mountain zebra, bat-eared foxes, leopard, cheetah and hyena.

In addition, Mundulea is quietly pursuing its commitment to 'restoration ecology' through the resettlement of rare, indigenous species such as black rhino, black-faced impala and roan antelope, and as a centre for environmental research. Current fields of investigation include a study of pangolins, the reintroduction of oxpeckers and a botanical survey in conjunction with London's Kew Gardens.

Call us for the latest on Mundulea. It's not inexpensive (adding a three-night stay at Mundulea into a Namibia self-drive trip will typically cost around £1,167 per person for a couple or three people, including all meals, drinks and activities, or £990 for each of four or more people), but the guides' enthusiasm and depth of knowledge makes this a real highlight of any Namibian trip.

Tents at Erongo Wilderness Lodge perch amongst smooth boulders

