



*The clay castles of the Skeleton Coast*

## THE SKELETON COAST & KAOKOLAND

Walking along a windswept beach, surrounded by swirling fog, it is hard to believe that you are in Africa. The sand is littered with flotsam and jetsam – old whale carcasses and occasional shipwrecks, all cast up on this Atlantic shore. This eerie coast was aptly named; its isolation and harsh landscapes can be daunting, but those who explore often find it captivating. There are two ways to access this protected area: by driving yourself, or by flying in.

### DRIVING YOURSELF

Driving north from Swakopmund, the first extraordinary sight is an enormous breeding colony of Cape fur seals at Cape Cross. You can make a short detour here, en route to Damaraland, or stay for a night at the comfortable **Cape Cross Lodge**, which has 18 en-suite rooms, plus two suites, with balconies and sea views.

Much further north, deep within the Skeleton Coast National Park, **Terrace Bay** is a long (six-hour) drive from Swakopmund, and the most northerly point accessible by vehicle. It's the only place to

stay for a very long way. Recently renovated, the 20 bungalows are now more up to date and all have private bathrooms.

### FLYING IN

There are three first-class operations which can help you to explore the remote wilderness areas of the Skeleton Coast and adjacent Kaokoland. Serra Cafema Camp in the extreme north, on the river border with Angola; and the Skeleton Coast Camp and Skeleton Coast Fly-in Safaris which both concentrate on remote and spectacular areas between the desert and the great



*The unusual lithop resembles a pebble and so is sometimes called a living rock*

escarpment. They're amongst the best trips in Africa, but none are cheap. The latter two usually start and end at Eros Airport (Windhoek), but are easy to combine into a longer fly-in or self-drive trip. See the *Goshawk Itinerary* as an example (page 65), then talk to us for a comparison; we'll help to choose the right trip for you.

**Skeleton Coast Fly-in Safaris** is a small, family-run operation that has organised trips here for over 30 years. They take up to

eight passengers, using light aircraft to hop between remote beaches and private airstrips. Trips are usually escorted by members of the Schoeman family, who are expert pilots and guides.

You spend every night in a different area, sleeping in permanent tents at exclusive camps. You'll have proper beds, hot bucket showers and a flush toilet. Dinner is usually by candlelight under the stars – invariably with excellent food, fine wine and lively conversation.

These trips are led by some of the best guides in Namibia, who can open your eyes to this unique wilderness – its history, geography, flora and fauna. From their spectacular flights you often see shipwrecks, seal colonies and flamingos, whilst on the ground, you'll explore in modified Land Rovers and on foot. On a typical trip you'll track some of the area's desert-adapted wildlife, slide down roaring

dunes, and marvel at a landscape littered with semi-precious stones. These can be real journeys of discovery – described by some as 'life changing'. Ask us for more details.

For a more permanent base, consider the high-quality **Skeleton Coast Camp**. Each of its six comfortable en-suite tents is built on a wooden platform above the dry Khumib River. It's been designed for minimal water usage and with innovative solar power to have the least possible impact on the fragile environment.

There is a lot to see and do in this fascinating wilderness, so excursions often last the whole day. You'll explore the area with a professional guide in custom-made Land Rovers, journeying through varied dune-belts to the coast, or inland to visit a Himba community. Then there are natural clay castles, lichen fields and seal colonies to see, ancient stone circles to explore and

desert-adapted wildlife to track. In the evening, excellent food is served – followed by drinks around a roaring fire.

Namibia's most remote camp is the beautiful **Serra Cafema**, which stands in a remarkable belt of lush palm forest that lines the Kunene River. This is a magical and secluded place; staying here in comfort is a real privilege.

Serra Cafema has eight, vast en-suite rooms. All are modern and quite decadent – each has two private lounge areas – with great views. The camp also has a swimming pool and a smart lounge/dining area which opens onto decks over the river. It's a great place just to relax, but activities are available that include seasonal boating along the Kunene, exploring the remote Hartmann's Valley and Marienfluss with enthusiastic guides (on foot and by 4WD), or even eco-sensitive quadbiking through breathtaking landscapes.



Daily life of a Himba woman

#### Skeleton Coast Costs

As a rough guide:

A three-night/four-day trip with **Skeleton Coast Safaris** costs from £3,902 per person sharing.

Three-night/four-day trips to the **Skeleton Coast Camp** depart on Wednesday, returning Saturday, and cost £3,215 per person sharing from 7 January 2012 until 10 January 2013.

Four-night/five-day trips depart on Saturday and return on Wednesday, and cost £3,398 per person sharing from 7 January 2012 until 10 January 2013.

Flights to/from **Serra Cafema Camp** can be arranged from most places, for stays of any duration. However, the camp usually works best either after a stay at the Skeleton Coast Camp, or as a stop on a fly-in trip between Damaraland and Ongava (southern Etosha). A typical add-on stay for three nights at Serra Cafema costs £1,731 per person sharing from 7 January to 31 March, £2,221 from 1 April to 14 June and from 1 November to 19 December, and £2,846 from 15 June to 31 October.