

## 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 outside the park.

### 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 waterbirds around here when it's wet, including a breeding colony of flamingos.

In the centre of Etosha, north of Andersson's Gate, **Okaukuejo** is the largest camp and the base 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, and is thus a favourite amongst our team and travellers alike. It's a good place to chill after dinner with a bottle of wine, watching nocturnal visitors and their interactions. Book early – in dry season this camp is often fully booked

Between these two camps is **Halali**. 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.

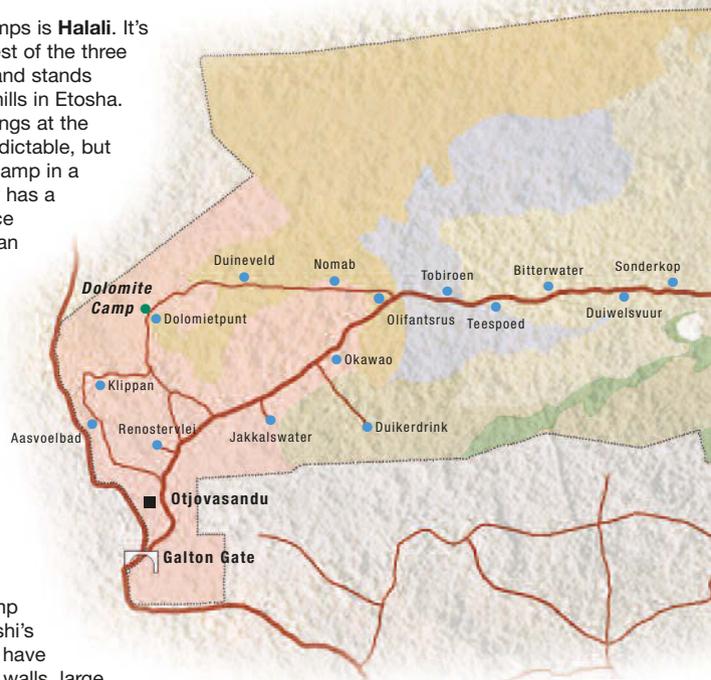
The NWR's flagship **Onkoshi Camp**, which opened in 2008, was the first new camp in Etosha National Park since Halali opened in 1967. Built on elevated wooden decks, it has 15 chalets overlooking Etosha's great saltpan from the Stinkwater Peninsula, the only camp with such views. Onkoshi's smart, en-suite chalets have thatched roofs, canvas walls, large glass doors and spectacular views.



Damara dik-dik - the smallest antelope in Namibia

Given its location and perks, Onkoshi is one of the area's more costly camps.

The newest of the five, **Dolomite Camp**, lies in the former 'restricted access' area of western Etosha. Overlooking Dolomite Point ('Dolomietpunt') waterhole, this sister camp of Onkoshi opened in June 2011. Built on dolomite outcrops, the camp has 20 spacious hillside chalets, two with private plunge pools. These chalets are very secluded and widely spaced; hence the camp has long walkways unsuitable for the less agile. Etosha's western entrance, the 'Galton Gate', opened to the general public in 2014, making this area of the park accessible to all.



A male ostrich is called a rooster and a female is called a hen





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

In Etosha's dry season, elephants coat their skin in white clay dust to keep cool





Even the locals take heed of Etosha's clear signposts

## PRIVATE CAMPS WEST OF ETOSHA

Slightly off the obvious driving route from Damaraland, beside the southwestern corner of Etosha, **Hobatere** has reopened after a five-year closure. Now owned by the #Khoadi//Hoas Conservancy and operated by the same people as Grootberg Lodge, we have high hopes for it – this was a firm favourite of ours. Its 14 comfortable, recently renovated rooms and chalets, are set in well-tended gardens with a pool. Hobatere's environment and game densities are similar to Etosha; it has a good waterhole with a hide, and offers 4WD safaris (day and night) and walking safaris.

The nine-room **Sheya Shushona Lodge** is an exciting new lodge overlooking a natural saltpan. Due to open in May 2016, it borders the park, having access to an exclusive area of Etosha via a private gate affording guests the opportunity to watch wildlife at private waterholes. Call us for the latest update.

The roads in Etosha are shared equally by vehicles and game

## PRIVATE CAMPS SOUTH OF ETOSHA

On the park's south side, several lodges act as bases for trips into Etosha, some in their own wildlife areas.

Offering good value, economical prices and air-conditioned rooms, the following camps are worth considering for easy access to the park. **Etosha Safari Camp** has an eclectically furnished main area and 50 simple, twin-bedded, en-suite chalets with small verandas. Laid back and friendly, it's ideal for families. Its smarter, more conventional sister camp, **Etosha Safari Lodge**, has 55 chalets atop a small hill with stunning views from its sundeck. **Taleni Etosha Village**, 2km from Andersson gate, has 40 tented rooms each with twin beds, a sleeper couch (free for children under 12) and semi open-air bathroom. The lodge also has a well-stocked store for self-caterers and a buffet restaurant. All offer guided game drives into Etosha and sundowner drives. Another possibility is the



Gemsbok (oryx) bulls often fight for dominance

simple and very laid-back **Etosha Gateway Lodge**.

The 300km<sup>2</sup> **Ongava Reserve** adjoins Etosha and contains four lodges. For a simple and comfortable base, the eco-sensitive **Andersson's Camp** has 20 tented rooms, and an eye-level hide at its waterhole. Although activities include day trips into Etosha, nature walks and night drives on the Ongava Reserve, most visitors simply use it as a base for driving themselves around Etosha. **Ongava Tented Camp** has eight large en-suite tents, beside a good floodlit waterhole – it has a real safari feel. On a hill, the more substantial **Ongava Lodge** has 14 spacious 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 wildlife enthusiasts wanting great guiding, comfort and good food, the Ongava camps should not disappoint.

Further afield, there are several useful options if places closer to the park are full. In Outjo, a stay at **Etosha Garden Hotel** affords an eye-opening stop in a small local town. Only 30 minutes from the park a warm welcome awaits you amongst the lush gardens of the delightful **Vreugde Guest Farm**. Bordering the park, but a longer drive, **Epacha Reserve** covers about 270km<sup>2</sup> and houses both **Epacha Game Lodge & Spa** and the **Eagle Tented Lodge & Spa**. See [www.expertafrika.com](http://www.expertafrika.com) for more details of these places.





## PRIVATE CAMPS EAST OF ETOSHA

Just to the east 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 more. Exceedingly popular with our travellers, the excellent value **Mushara Bush Camp** has 16 spacious tents, including four family tents, plus a swimming pool and a children's play area. **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 bathroom. The stylish **Mushara Outpost** has eight canvas-and-glass tents built on raised decks, plus a stunningly converted colonial-style farmhouse, and a refreshing pool. Next door, the more exclusive **Villa Mushara** has two large, luxurious villas, each with private terrace, plunge pool and outside shower.

The Onguma Game Reserve borders Fischer's Pan, on the eastern side of Etosha. Here the family-friendly **Onguma Bush Camp** has 16 comfortable rooms and

serves dinner overlooking the waterhole. **Onguma Etosha Aoba Lodge** is a small, intimate and relaxed lodge with 11 cosy bungalows 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.

**Onguma Tree Top Camp** is raised up on stilts, as its name suggests, and has a fantastic setting overlooking a waterhole. It's small and very special; with five thatched, canvas-walled rooms lending it a real bush camp feel. Also overlooking a waterhole, **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, the ultra-luxurious Moroccan-influenced **Onguma The Fort** has 13 impressive suites, a unique pool and various viewing decks overlooking the waterhole. All Onguma properties offer bush walks, nature drives and night drives on the reserve.

Also on the east side of the park is **Emanya Lodge** with 20 well-appointed chalets in relaxing surroundings. Nearby, **Mokuti Lodge** has 106 rooms and is very much a hotel in the bush.

*Etosha waterholes attract a huge diversity of game during the dry season*



Onguma Plains Camp - The Fort