

A travel series every Tuesday.  
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**BON VOYAGE**



# Safari

## of a lifetime

**Sheldon Trollope** recommends Namibia as the perfect place for first-time visitors to Africa

For wildlife buffs who grew up on a steady diet of David Attenborough and Discovery Channel documentaries, going on an African safari is definitely one for the bucket list.

While popular destinations in Africa include South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania for example, I would recommend Namibia, especially if it is your first visit to the continent.

For starters, the weather is surprisingly pleasant if you visit between March to May or September to November when humidity is low. Temperatures rarely get beyond 30 deg C during the day, but they can plunge to less than 10 deg C at night and in the early morning, so dressing in layers is the way to go. Summer comes at the end of the year while the winter season is between June to August.



**Main:** A tower of giraffes graze lazily on new shoots of acacia trees.  
**From top:** The Burchell's zebra has light brown stripes on its black and white coat pattern; a lioness waits for nightfall to hunt; an oryx approaches near the safari track, lured by a block of salt that it licks to supplement its diet with the necessary minerals.  
PHOTOS: SHELDON TROLLOPE

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Right: Namib Desert is where you will find Sahara-style sand dunes on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. Far right: A venue of vultures keep a lookout for carrion.



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Safari of a lifetime

Next, the country is about twice as big as Germany, and nearly the same size as its southern neighbour, South Africa, that has a population of around 50 million — far exceeding Namibia's two million or so.

This means that there is plenty of space for nature and wildlife to roam about and the landscapes are not sullied by man-made influence. If you want to know what Africa must have looked like in its most natural state, it would likely look like this place.

The few people that my group did meet were warm and friendly. English is essentially spoken by everyone, so we had no communication issues nor problems getting around.

Perhaps most crucially however, Namibia offers a range of terrains and attractions that encapsulate what most of us might define Africa as — savannah plains, sand dunes, desert oases, giant rock formations, wild animals, native bushmen (left) and even rich marine life. All of these can be experienced within a span of a week on a self-drive tour like I did.



Rev up your engines

Although guided package tours are available, a self-drive itinerary is fairly easy to plan as rental cars are available from companies such as BMW, Avis and Hertz. This said, a four-wheel drive Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) is highly recommended.

For my self-drive tour, I opted for a BMW X5 xDrive30d. Some car manufacturers such as BMW offer experiential tours that take care of everything, so you can expect arrangements for your vehicle, accommodations, meals and itinerary all planned, by the time you arrive at the airport. Even technical support, insurance and off-road training are provided by professional instructors that double as guides throughout the trip.

Have a wild time

The most popular type of accommodations in Namibia are ranch stays where guests put in chalets within the premises of game reserves ranging from 10,000 sq km to over 70,000 sq km.

The larger ones offer a chance to see the "Big Five" — lions, leopards, elephants, rhinos and buffalo — in addition to smaller or more common wild life such as springboks, impalas, wildebeests, zebras and wot hogs.

The sunrise safaris that set out in the pre-dawn hours were exciting enough for me to wake up early for without too much difficulty. An African sunrise is like no other and the way the light shines on the terrain and wild life makes for a shutterbug's dream.

Don't miss a drive out to the Namib Desert — the only place in the world where you will find Sahara-style sand dunes on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. Driving on the powdery sand dunes with the direction of local guides is a must as is a marine tour by boat that lets you get close to a diverse range of aquatic life such as dolphins, seals and pelicans.

Tribal charm

The Orongo mountain range could pass for a movie set with rock formations and terrain that look a

landscape from the American Old West. Indeed, Namibia has been a favourite location shoot for many Hollywood blockbusters.

The real stars of this incredible place however, are the San, a small colony of indigenous people who have lived in the area and kept the same way of life for thousands of years.

I had the chance to meet these wonderfully friendly people at The San Living Museum where they shared how they hunt with primitive weapons, make tribal jewellery, perform special dances to bring the rain, and tell stories that have been passed down for millennia.

While donations and proceeds from the sales of their handmade crafts are appreciated, I felt that the children preferred the roasted nuts I shared. My driving partner who is a doctor explained that their distended bellies are likely caused by a lack of protein and my nutrient-rich treats were much needed. Seeing the smiles on their faces was a real highlight for me.

An implausibility of wildebeests causes a stampede in the distance. PHOTOS: SHELDON TROLLOPE

GETTING THERE

There are no direct flights to Namibia from Singapore. I flew to Johannesburg, South Africa with Singapore Airlines, then took a connecting flight to Windhoek, Namibia's capital.

Other options include flying in from Doha on Qatar Airways or British Airways and KLM Royal Dutch airlines via the usual European hubs. Choosing Singapore Airlines however, usually means an early wake-up call around 3am if you want to make the departing flight out of Johannesburg the same morning.

TRAVELLER'S TIPS

Many ranches offer accommodations on site where guests stay in chalets or bungalows. This is usually the most practical option as safari tours take place very early in the morning, and from late afternoon to sunset, when the animals are most active.

For a more upscale experience, go for glamping options that make for unforgettable experiences with barbecue dinners under the stars and breakfasts with elephants.

Singapore citizens are exempt from visa for stays of up to 90 days. As Namibia falls below the infamous "yellow fever belt", vaccinations against the virus or malaria are not necessary.

Taiwan travel advertisement for Nam Ho Travel, featuring various tour packages like 'Enchanting Taiwan', 'Fabulous Love in Taiwan', and 'Dazzling Eastern Taiwan'.

807N Highlights Of Okinawa + Free 2N Hong Kong advertisement, including details on flights, on-board services, and pricing.

8D Enjoy Sydney - Melbourne City & Wildlife advertisement, featuring a Qantas flight and on-ground activities.

ASIA GLOBAL VACATION TRAVEL REVOLUTION advertisement, featuring a 5-7 Apr (Fri-Sun) ENCORE SALE with various tour packages.

ASIA citi advertisement for various Asian routes, including 8D Korea, 7D Central Japan Golden Route, and 7D Alaska & Seattle City Tour.

PRINCESS CRUISES advertisement for 17D Alaska & Canadian Rockies Tour, 8D Alaska Cruise to Glacier Bay National Park, and 8D Canadian Rockies Tour.

English-Guided Tripping Tour advertisement, listing various international tours such as 8D Central Japan, 7D Hokkaido, 7D Korea & Jeju, and 7D Southern Beauty of Korea.

Worldwide Cruises advertisement for PRINCESS CRUISES, DREAM CRUISES, and ROYAL CARIBBEAN, featuring various cruise packages and pricing.

Japan and Vietnam travel advertisement, featuring self-drive holidays, private tours, and various travel packages.

ROYAL CARIBBEAN advertisement for SOUTHEAST ASIA CRUISE ESCAPADES, featuring various cruise packages and pricing.