

# TRAVEL + LEISURE

DESTINATION OF THE YEAR

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# Namibia's New Frontiers

For otherworldly landscapes and unique species, nowhere beats this rugged corner of southern Africa. Now, with first-rate lodge launches and improved access, even less-visited parts of the country are opening up.

BY SARAH KHAN

An observation deck at Sorris Lodge, in the Brandberg area of Namibia. Local owner Namibia Exclusive also has two soon-to-launch properties in the north of the country.

For years now, seasoned safari-goers have equated Namibia's wildlife offerings with the northern Etosha National Park—a sprawling 8,500-square-mile reserve populated by massive herds of black rhinos, elephants, lions, and wildebeests. But a clutch of upscale new lodgings elsewhere in the north are a good reason to consider exploring the less-visited swaths of this spectacular nation—and observing the creatures that inhabit them. Some properties are already taking bookings, while others will be in the coming months.

In the Caprivi Strip, a panhandle-shaped area near the place where Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia converge, **Chobe Water Villas** ([chobewatervillas.com](http://chobewatervillas.com); from \$493 per

person, all-inclusive) opened just over a year ago with 16 suites built on stilts over the Chobe River. The lodge is only accessible by boat, which means you'll probably spot elephants and hippos along the riverside before you even check in.

Another new accommodation in the Caprivi region: Gondwana Collection's **Zambezi Mubala** ([gondwana-collection.com](http://gondwana-collection.com); from \$115 per person), a 20-suite lodge on the banks of the Zambezi River. The location makes a great jumping-off point for day trips to Victoria Falls, and bird-watchers will be in bliss: this part of the river is home to one of the biggest colonies of carmine bee-eaters on the continent.

Local company **Namibia Exclusive** ([namibia-exclusive.com](http://namibia-exclusive.com)) made waves when it opened **Sorris Lodge** (doubles from \$2,050, all-inclusive) →

in the mountainous Brandberg area of western Namibia in 2015, which may explain why there's such a buzz about its two forthcoming properties in the north—both expected to debut next spring. Xaudum Lodge will sit in the dunes of Khaudum National Park, which teems with lions, African wild dogs, and leopards. Omatendeka Lodge will feature five luxe tents near the source of the Hoanib River in the Damaraland, a hotbed for big cats and desert elephants—found only here and in Mali.

Don't be put off by the Skeleton Coast's foreboding name, which refers to the whale bones scattered along its dramatic shoreline—also known for its many shipwrecks. Large herds of desert elephants, giraffes, zebras, and lions thrive in this landscape, and recent additions like Wilderness Safaris' **Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp** ([wilderness-safaris.com](http://wilderness-safaris.com); from \$700 per person, all-inclusive) are almost always full. That popularity may well be what inspired Wilderness to revamp its eight-villa Serra Cafema camp at the Angolan border; it reopens next June. Meanwhile, **Shipwreck Lodge** ([skeletoncoastlodge.com](http://skeletoncoastlodge.com); rates not available at press time), when it's up and running in early 2018, will be the only camp on the shore, with 10 striking suites built to resemble the ships embedded in the dunes.

And Natural Selection, a new lodge company from Africa travel experts including Wilderness Safaris cofounder Colin Bell, kicked off this year with properties across southern Africa—among them **Hoanib Valley Camp** ([naturalselection.travel](http://naturalselection.travel); doubles from \$1,400, all-inclusive) in the striking northwestern Kaokoveld region. Come June, Natural Selection will go where no safari company has gone before: the Caprivi Strip's Nkasa Rupara National Park, a marshy reserve similar to Botswana's Okavango Delta.

Still not convinced? Getting to Namibia has become far simpler, thanks to new routes from KLM, Ethiopian Airlines, and Qatar Airways through the capital city, Windhoek. ■



## 10 DAYS IN NAMIBIA

T+L A-Lister **Chris Liebenberg**'s suggested itinerary.

**Day 1** Fly to Hosea Kutako International Airport, in Windhoek. Spend the night at Olive Grove Guesthouse.

**Day 2** Take a light aircraft to Sossus Dune Lodge for two days in Namib Naukluft Park.

**Day 3** Set out on a daylong guided trip to the legendary Sossusvlei dunes.

**Day 4** Fly by light aircraft to Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp for a three-day stay.

**Day 5** Head out into a reserve to track elephants, giraffes, lions, cheetahs, and more.

**Day 6** Drive across the Namib Sand Sea and learn about the surrounding microfauna, which includes desert chameleons, lizards, and beetles.

**Day 7** Hop on a light aircraft to Ongava Tented Camp for three days in a private reserve bordering Etosha National Park.

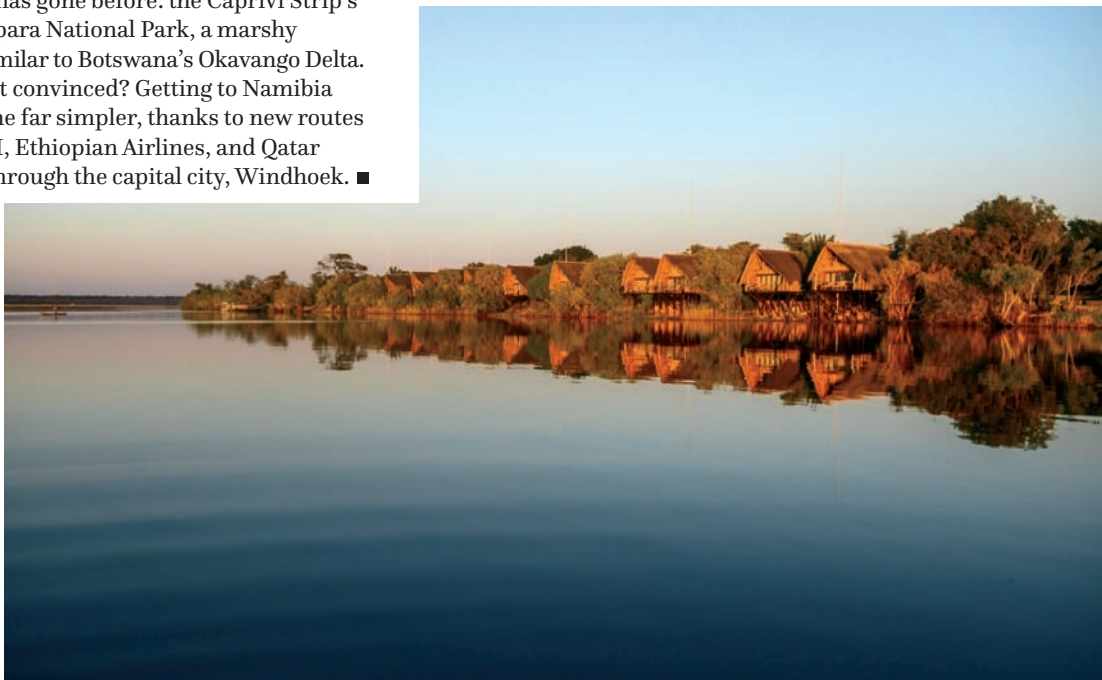
**Day 8** Take a walking safari, or track rhinos within the park.

**Day 9** Spot the area's nocturnal animals on a night drive.

**Day 10** Return by light aircraft to Hosea Kutako airport and catch your flight home.

*Piper & Heath Travel's Liebenberg can add the Caprivi Strip, the Skeleton Coast, or the Kaokoveld region to any Namibia itinerary. 858-598-5559 or [chris@piperandheath.com](mailto:chris@piperandheath.com); 10-day trips from \$7,880 per person.*

From top: A lounge at Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp; riverside accommodation at Chobe Water Villas, in the Caprivi Strip.



FROM TOP: WILDERNESS SAFARIS; COURTESY OF CHOBE WATER VILLAS