

Go2Nam Shuttle – Route 4: ETOSHA SAFARI CAMP to DAMARA MOPANE LODGE: To Damaraland . . .

After an enjoyable time exploring Etosha National Park and enjoying the relaxed atmosphere of Etosha Safari Camp, it's time to make your way to see some of the other wonders that Namibia has to offer. The 2½-hour (200km) journey to the fresh and innovative Damara Mopane Lodge takes you southwards to Outjo and then westwards towards Khorixas. Twenty kilometres before Khorixas, set in a mopane woodland, is Damara Mopane Lodge. This special lodge radiates a charm all of its own. Built in a semi-circle labyrinth design as in kingdoms of old, the lodge utilises its underground water wisely nurturing an array of small food gardens. Each free-standing chalet resembles a small home with its own veranda and food garden planted with herbs, vegetables, marigolds and sunflowers that reach their happy faces to the sun. Laze around the gigantic turquoise pool, which lies at the heart of the lodge, and make your way up the hill to the sunset deck at the end of the day to watch the sun set over the mopane woodland.

Welcome to Damaraland . . .

Although you are travelling through the Kunene Region of Namibia, one of Namibia's fourteen regions, the area you are heading towards is historically known as Damaraland, referring to the land of the Damara people. Together with the more remote Kaokoland further north, it is known as the Kaokoveld. Damaraland is home to the desert elephant, a petrified forest and the Twyfelfontein rock engravings, as well as some impressive rugged landscapes of flat-topped red-and-purple mountains.

Eighty kilometres from Outjo is the D2743 turnoff to Vingerklip Rock and the Ugab Terraces. Comprised of eroded layers of sedimentary rock, comprising deposits of calcareous sandstone and calcrete conglomerate, Vingerklip (Finger Rock) is a 30-metre-high rock finger that juts out above the Ugab terraces, standing strong long after its contemporaries have weathered away into dust.

Continuing toward Khorixas, Damara Mopane Lodge's access road appears on the right-hand side. Prepare to be charmed as you drive into this refreshing oasis of a lodge. Spend the rest of the day relaxing at the pool or enjoying your spacious chalet and garden. In the late afternoon, make your way up the hill to the sunset deck to toast to the beauty of Namibia as the sun colours the land in gold. From the sunset deck you have an impressive view of the lodge nestled between the trees and the expansive landscape. On a clear day, you can see all the way to the Brandberg Mountain, 100km away. As you make your way back down to the lodge after sunset, you are welcomed by a fire burning in the grate at the entrance to the lodge and the delicious aromas of the supper buffet, which includes the fresh fare from the garden. As most of Namibia's fresh produce is grown in South Africa and travels over vast distances, the greens are a healthy treat in the semi-arid land.

The lodge is a destination in itself and you may want to spend another day enjoying its peace and beauty, taking a break from the road before continuing to explore the intriguing country of Namibia.

More about Twyfelfontein and surrounds . . .

West of Khorixas the road becomes gravel and dips and rises for the next 100km to Twyfelfontein. Along the way small, rustic roadside craft-stalls, marked by creative mud sculptures of animals, sell seed

necklaces, wooden animal and bird mobiles, wood roses and a variety of stones.

Before you get there, 40km from Khorixas is the small Petrified Forest, where a number of trees from ancient rivers were deposited millions of years ago, eventually fossilising into stone. The trees are thought to be extinct conifers that became uprooted and floated down ancient rivers from further north, most likely from central Africa. On the short circular guided walk, a few of these ancient fossilised (or petrified) tree trunks are visible lying on the ground, with several welwitschia plants nearby, surrounded by chunks of fossilised wood.

Further on, following the D2612 turnoff to the left are the Twyfelfontein engravings. Twyfelfontein was recognised for its cultural importance and gained world heritage status in 2007. It has one of the largest concentrations of rock engravings in southern Africa, with over 2000 petroglyphs. Two to six thousand years old, the engravings, mostly of animals, were made by hunter gatherers who gathered at the springs in the mountain in the dry season. It is believed that shamans chiselled into the Etjo sandstone as a form of prayer as they beseeched the gods for healing, rain, luck for the hunt and protection for their people. Guided walks are available to visit the main sites. These include an hour-long Lion Man Route and Dancing Kudu Route.

The area was once known by its Damara name /Uis-//aes - 'Place among packed stones'. The name 'Twyfelfontein' stems from the time of farmer David Levin, who persevered with farming in the arid environment in spite of little available water. Neighbours who visited would often find him digging at the trickling spring, hoping to open it up to provide more water for his family and animals. They started to call him David Twyfelfontein (the Afrikaans words for 'Doubtful Spring') and the name stuck. At the time of the Odendaal Commission in the 1960s, the farmers in the area had to vacate their farms and the land became part of Damaraland, set aside for the Damara people. The spring is still visible at the beginning of the walk to the rock engravings, as are the ruins of the old farmhouse.

Many travellers also pay a visit to a nearby rock formation (6km east of Twyfelfontein) known as the Organ Pipes. Here, on the side of a small seasonal river, a dolerite sill has weathered to resemble the vertical columns of organ pipes. Further along the road is Burnt Mountain, a small mountain with a coating of dolerite and manganese, the reason for its burnt appearance.

Damaraland is desert elephant territory and the large pachyderms make their way along the Aba Huab River in the vicinity of Twyfelfontein in the winter time. The desert elephants are free-roaming African elephants that travel along Namibia's ephemeral rivers – from the Ugab River northwards, where they are able to find sustenance from the riverine vegetation and drink from the underground springs.