

Go2Namibia Shuttle – Route 6 SWAKOPMUND to DAMARA MOPANE LODGE/DAMARA MOPANE LODGE to SWAKOPMUND

Inland to the Damaraland oasis

From The Delight Hotel in Swakopmund the 4½-hour (326km) route north-east to Damara Mopane Lodge takes you on a fascinating route through the country. It begins with the coastal road northwards towards Henties Bay and then veers inland to pass Brandberg, Namibia's highest mountain. Continuing over the Ugab River in the heart of desert elephant territory, it passes Herero women in their flamboyant dress on the way to Damara Mopane Lodge, a welcoming destination east of Khorixas. Here, set in an oasis of mopane trees, 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 turn their happy faces to the sun. Laze around the gigantic turquoise pool 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.

After the delicious breakfast fare at The Delight, you wave goodbye to Swakopmund as you follow the C34 northwards along the coast to the town of Henties Bay, 70km away and popular with fisherfolk. On the way you will notice, at 35km north of Swakopmund, the small settlement of Wlotzkasbaken with brightly-painted holiday houses. Wlotzkasbaken translated as 'Wlotzka's beacon' was named after a member of a surveying team, who worked in the area in the 1930s and set up his fishing shack along the coast.

South of Henties Bay, you'll find the 2008 Zeila wreck well signposted. The fishing trawler, purchased by an Indian company for scrap metal, was on its way to Bombay when it broke its towline in the early hours. It now lies in the shallows. Cormorants nest in the rusting hulk of the ship and gemstone sellers ply their wares to visitors, who turn off from the road to view the wreck.

To the Burning Mountain

After Henties, the route follows the C35 inland towards Uis on the gravel. The weather warms progressively as you leave the coastal mist behind you. It's 120km to Uis and as you near the town roadside stalls begin to appear. Many are creatively decorated, their tables filled with an assortment of coloured gemstones from the area. Uis is an old tin-mining town where almost all the place names are inspired by the nearby Brandberg Mountain, the endemic tree - the Brandberg acacia - *Acacia montis-usti*, or Brandberg's famous 'White Lady' rock painting.

Turning northwards just before Uis, you soon reach the turnoff to Brandberg ('Burning Mountain' or 'Dâureb' in Damara-Nama), which appears on the left-hand side, as does the looming hulk of the mountain in the distance. It is so named for its orange-red glow in the late afternoon as the sun catches its granite rock, setting the mountain aflame in colour. Brandberg's Königstein peak, at 2573m, towers above the grassy plains and is Namibia's highest. Although Brandberg has thousands of paintings, found in open shelters and under rock overhangs eroded by wind and water, the guided walk to the famous

White Lady painting in the Tsisab Gorge is the only route easily accessible to visitors. The rock paintings are relatively younger than the 2000- to 6000-year-old Twyfelfontein rock engravings. They are considered to be about 2000-years-old and are predominantly of people involved in everyday events from dancing to hunting, unlike Twyfelfontein's engravings which mostly feature animals. They are painted from earth pigments mixed with egg albumen or animal blood, daubed onto rock with animal hair.

The 'White Lady' painting was found by Reinhardt Maack, a topographer surveying the upper slopes in 1918. At the time it was thought to be a rendering of a young Mediterranean girl. The name 'White Lady' was coined by Henri Breuil in 1955. The painting is now understood to represent a healer or medicine man holding a bow and arrow in one hand and a cup or wand in the other.

Desert elephant & colourful Herero dolls

As you continue northwards, elephant caution signs begin to dot the roadside as you enter the north-western corner of Namibia, which is desert elephant territory. The desert elephants often travel along the ephemeral river systems that remain dry until summer rainfall fills their catchment areas.

Alongside the road, eye-catching Himba people from further north have set up their stalls displaying an assortment of Himba crafts. A highlight of the route, however, are the colourful stalls of the Herero women selling their well-made Herero dolls on either side of the Ugab River. Many of the women wear the resplendent traditional dress of layered long skirts, stemming from Victorian time, and their fabric headdresses, resembling the shape of cow horns. They wave down passers-by or sit at their Singer sewing machines busily sewing their dolls.

The oasis of Damara Mopane

The route continues towards Khorixas and then turns eastward towards Damara Mopane Lodge. Here, in the midst of a green lawn and the butterfly-leaved mopane trees, the swimming pool beckons. Lie back with a book, savour lunch outdoors and in the late afternoon stroll up to the sunset deck, from where you have a splendid view over the mopane woodland. Watch the sun sink into the horizon with a drink in hand, toasting the magnificent surroundings before returning to the lodge for their mouth-watering dinner buffet.

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.