

## **Go2Namibia Shuttle – Route 7: KALAHARI ANIB LODGE to SESRIEM & NAMIB DESERT LODGE/**

### **NAMIB DESERT LODGE to SESRIEM & KALAHARI ANIB LODGE**

#### ***The Namib is calling . . .***

*It's time to be dazzled by another desert, the ancient Namib Desert, one of the oldest deserts on the planet, home to the towering dunes of Sossusvlei. The 5-hour (360km) route to Sesriem heads west, passing the towns of Mariental and Maltahöhe and onto the gravel and the meandering Tsaris Pass. From Sesriem the journey is northwards to the spectacular scenery of Namib Desert Lodge.*

From the arms of the Kalahari, the route follows the road to Mariental and after a short section turns to the west towards Maltahöhe, considered to be the gateway to the desert. From here a choice of gravel routes radiate out into the Namib. As you near Maltahöhe donkey carts and their passengers are often visible. The donkey cart is the most common form of travel in the rural areas of Namibia. The carts are often customised, bearing the names of vehicles like 'Ford', 'Toyota', 'Opel' and even 'Mercedes Benz', and sometimes include humorous inscriptions like 'Take me home' or 'King of the road'. The donkey carts provide vital and affordable transportation, carrying essentials like firewood and water, and conveying people from village to village, to wells and clinics and children to and from school.

#### **Gateway to the desert**

Houses, a few shops, a fuel station and an imposing Dutch Reformed Church flank the road through Maltahöhe before the tarmac ends and the gravel begins. The small town has a long history. It was founded in 1899 by Henning von Burgsdorf, the governor of the Gibeon district in German South West Africa, and was named Maltahöhe, 'Malta's heights', after his wife, Malta. It served as a base for a small garrison of Schutztruppe (German colonial troops) and as a trading outpost for farmers in the area. Von Burgsdorf was shot by the bodyguard of renowned Nama chief, Hendrik Witbooi, and Malta is said to have returned to Germany. Later on, the town became a centre for the karakul trade. When in the 1980s the market collapsed and a series of droughts ravaged the land, many farmers moved north, leaving Maltahöhe a sleepy gateway to the wonders of the west with a predominantly Nama population.

The gentle Tsaris Pass or Zarishoogte (with a 1:18 gradient) is a winding road, dipping and rising through the dry, rocky hills, offering vistas of the flat-topped range. The road levels out as you travel towards Sesriem with more trees present, including some camelthorn trees heavily laden with sprawling sociable weaver nests. The shuttle drops guests off at Sesriem and continues to Namib Desert Lodge.

#### **More info about Sesriem – Six strips of rawhide**

Sesriem, a Namibia Wildlife Resorts camp, is the entrance to Sossusvlei, which is a 60km drive further westward into the Namib Naukluft Park. A short drive from the camp leads to the small Sesriem Canyon, carved by the Tsauchab River over millions of years. One kilometre long and up to 30 metres deep in parts, the canyon was an important watering-point for early pioneers, travellers and explorers, who

paused at its edges to draw water from its depths tying together six 'riems', strips of rawhide, hence the name Sesriem.

### **And Sossusvlei . . .**

From Sesriem the road to Sossusvlei crosses the tree-lined - and usually dry - Tsauchab River and continues through the impressive dune landscape to the Sossusvlei parking area. It's another 5km on soft sand to the vlei itself. The word Sossusvlei refers to the 'vlei' (seasonal lake), the end of the Tsauchab River's journey from the Naukluft and Tsaris mountains to the desert. Once travelling all the way to the sea, the river's progress is now curtailed by sand dunes, ending at Sossusvlei.

Most of the time, the vlei is a large dried clay pan, encircled by apricot-coloured star dunes and accentuated by the green of camelthorn trees. In years of heavy summer rainfall, however, the Tsauchab River's catchment area fills up and the river rushes through Sesriem Canyon on its course to the dry pan. For a brief period Sossusvlei becomes an oasis. It is best viewed from a height, so walk a short distance up the dune or climb up the adjacent Big Mama dune for a prime view of the vlei and the magnificent surroundings. There are a series of smaller vleis in the vicinity - Nara Vlei, Dead Vlei and Hidden Vlei, separated from one another by small sand dunes. Dead Vlei is the most popular and picturesque. Here, dead camelthorn trees, over five hundred years old, stand like stark sentinels juxtaposed against the resplendent orange-red dunes and the chalky white pan.

Sossusvlei's star dunes are amongst the highest in the Namib. These dunes are caused by wind blowing from multiple directions. The sand in the Sossusvlei area is mostly comprised of quartz grains. It also contains mica, feldspar and heavier metals such as magnetite and garnet. The red colour, resulting from the large amount of iron oxide in the sand, covers each grain in a thin coating, giving the desert its dramatic hues of deep, rich red.

### **The fossilised dunes of Namib Desert Camp**

From Sesriem, it's a 60km drive northwards to your comfortable desert home, Namib Desert Lodge. The lodge has one of the most arresting desert backdrops - a series of fossilised sand dunes that resemble the formidable stone formations of Utah. They are the petrified dunes of an ancient desert, formed when sand compacted into sandstone in the more humid climate of the Earth's evolution that existed between twenty and ten million years ago. The fossilised dunes establish the Namib Desert as one of the oldest deserts on the planet.

Enjoy the delicious supper spread and relaxed ambience of Namib Desert Lodge before a sound and peaceful sleep under a clear and glistening desert sky. Spend the next day resting with a book by the pool, taking a ride through the desert on an e-bike, exploring the walking routes around the lodge and appreciating the spectacular view from the top of the fossilised dunes on the afternoon drive. Overnighting at the satellite camp, Dune Star Camp, on top of the dunes is also an option for those who want a more intimate desert experience. The scenery at Namib Desert Lodge is superb, providing nourishing food for the soul.