

## **Go2Namibia Shuttle – Route 9: WINDHOEK to SESRIEM & NAMIB DESERT LODGE/NAMIB DESERT LODGE & SESRIEM to WINDHOEK**

### ***To the Namib . . .***

*The 5-hour (320km) route from Windhoek to Sesriem follows the main road southwards to Rehoboth before turning onto the gravel. It heads in a south-westerly direction to Sesriem, gateway to the famed dunes of Sossuvlei, skirting the impressive Naukluft Mountains. Namib Desert Lodge is 60km to the north where you'll find some of the most spectacular scenery the Namib has to offer.*

The shuttle departs at the Weinberg Windhoek Hotel and travels southwards through the meandering Auas Mountains to Rehoboth.

### **Mountains, heroes & history . . .**

Windhoek is nestled in the arms of several mountains: the Auas Mountains to the south, the Eros Mountains to the east and the Khomas-Hochland in the west, so it's no wonder that the airport had to be built 40km to the west of the city on level terrain. In the late 1890s and early 1900s the German Schutztruppe appreciated the higher elevation as a mosquito- and midge-free area, where their horses were safe from horse sickness.

Windhoek was initially called */Ai/Gams* (in Nama) or *Otjomuise* (Otjiherero), referring to the hot spring that once existed in the settlement. We have Jonker Afrikaner, a renowned nineteenth century Oorlam leader, to thank for his road-building skills in the Auas Mountains as well as on the 'Baaiweg' from Windhoek to Walvis Bay. He constructed ox-wagon tracks to establish trade routes with the Cape.

When travelling southwards in days gone by, ox-wagons had to outspan and rest on either side of the Auas range after taking a full day to negotiate the challenging mountain track. They would leave from the Ausspannplatz in Windhoek (the traffic circle has kept its name to this day) to travel through the Auas Mountains, overnighing on the southern side in Rehoboth, then Tsumis and Kalkrand. The trip that today takes us three hours, took them five days and four nights.

On the outskirts of the city 'Heroes' Acre', a war memorial built to honour Namibia's freedom fighters, is an unmistakable landmark with its towering marble obelisk that comes into view soon after the police checkpoint. It was built after Namibia gained its independence in 1990 to honour all those who lost their lives fighting for freedom. A bronze statue on the site, known as the Unknown Soldier, bears striking resemblance to Namibia's Founding Father and first president, Dr Sam Nujoma.

The road from Windhoek meanders through the mountains, passing through the 'Window Bridge', which perfectly frames the landscape, into the valley below. The hills are tawny-coloured in the dry mid-year months and vivid green after summer rainfall.

A tree-filled expanse lines the road as you enter the town of Rehoboth. The town, 87km from Windhoek, is predominantly Baster, a proud group of people originating from the Cape of Good Hope,

descendants of Dutch colonists and indigenous Khoisan women. They moved north, crossing the Orange/Gariep River and settling in Rehoboth in 1871.

### **The Tropic of Capricorn & a memorial of hope**

Just south of Rehoboth, signs indicate that you are passing through the Tropic of Capricorn. This refers to the line of latitude at 23° south of the equator, which marks the southernmost latitude that experiences the sun directly overhead at noon in midsummer. From here southwards the sun appears at less than a 90° angle.

South of Rehoboth, the route veers off onto the gravel towards Sesriem. Along the way is the turnoff to the Sam Khubis memorial, the site where on 8 May 1915 the Basters put up fierce resistance to the German colonial forces, with 700 men entrenched in the rocky valley. The battle started before sunrise and raged the whole day. At the end of the day, when they were running out of daylight, ammunition and hope, they prayed for help from God and pledged to commemorate the day forever. Whether divinely inspired or not, the German contingent retreated the next morning. They had heard that South African troops were advancing from Walvis Bay towards Windhoek and, realising that they were in danger of being cut off from the main body of the troops, marched off at speed.

The route continues in a south-westerly direction past the small settlements of Klein Aub and Rietoog to Bullsport and the magnificent Naukluft mountains. It skirts the Naukluft Park before turning northwards towards Sesriem, the gateway to the towering dunes of Sossuvlei. Here, some guests will disembark to proceed to their destinations, while others will continue 60km to the north, past several attractive mountains and bands of burnt-orange sand to Namib Desert Lodge, your warm and relaxed base for your Namib stay.

### **Welcome to the spectacular scenery of Namib Desert Lodge**

The lodge has an impressive backdrop of fossilised dunes that were formed when the sand compacted into sandstone in the more humid climate that existed between ten and twenty million years ago. Enjoy a meal outdoors on the veranda, take a ride through the desert on an e-bike, walk along one of the desert trails or laze by the pool. One of the highlights of a stay at the lodge is the sundowner drive to the top of the dunes where you have a prime view of the magnificent desert vista, punctuated by a line of trees and fringed by mauve mountains.

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

Sesriem 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 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 dark and 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.