

Holidays at home

Grootberg Lodge at sunset.
The lodge belongs to
#Khoadi-//hoas conservancy



Namibia's communal conservancies have it all

Forget the bundu image. Five star luxury is available in areas of Namibia that used to be called remote, but in truth are just a few hours' drive away. Even if you camp, hot water and flush toilets are increasingly the order of the day in Namibia's communal areas. And with your creature comforts cared for, you can concentrate on the stunning scenery, wildlife, and the hospitality of Namibians in their home areas.

Namibia's communal conservancies stole the show at this year's Tour Expo, because what they have to offer is the real thing: vast landscapes, wildlife in a natural setting, and places to stay that can compete with the world's best. Here are just a few suggestions for the festive season and 2012.

The north-west trail is well established: Palmwag, Sesfontein - and for the adventurous, Puros and the Marienfluss. On the way consider a two night stop at Grootberg Lodge, just a few kilometres east of Palmwag on the road to Kamanjab. The lodge is perched on the rim of a plateau overlooking the Klip River. If your car won't make it up the hill, the lodge will collect you from the secure parking spot on the Grootberg Pass.

When a group of Japanese tourists arrived after dark the manager said: "They're in for a surprise in the morning;" and the view from the bungalows is glorious - right down the valley. But it's much more than a view. The lodge offers rhino tracking, and guided walks with drinks and a ride back to the top afterwards.

If you can't afford the lodge, consider Hoada campsite just another 20 kilometres down the Kamanjab road. Set among clusters of massive boulders, each site includes a sink, hot showers and flush toilets. There are plans to upgrade the facility to a tented camp in the near future.

Grootberg and Hoada are owned by the #Khoadi-//hoas Conservancy, which is a star performer in much more than tourism. Black rhino and other species have been translocated to the conservancy because of its track record in conserving wildlife. Game guards patrol the area on donkey carts, assisting farmers who have to deal with elephants damaging the water points and cheetahs taking goats. Most important, they establish a network of informants on the lookout for poachers.

For most of the year the Klip River is dry, but if white water rafting is what you're after, you don't need to drive all the way to the Orange. Just head north to Kunene River Lodge, 65 kilometres west of Ruacana. On the way you will pass the newly refurbished Ondozzo camp site, owned and run by the Kunene River Conservancy.

The Kunene River Lodge can be the starting point of short water-borne adventure, or even a four day rafting trip to Epupa Falls. The river valley is spectacular and full of bird life. The lodge has a strong working relationship with the conservancy; so much so that overseas visitors continue to support the conservancy game guards through the lodge bank account.



White water rafting at Kunene River Lodge



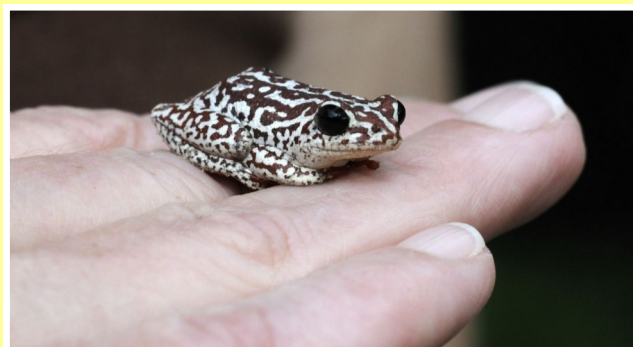
Just as wet, and just as wonderful in other ways, is the Caprivi. And again; the communal conservancies have the best spots, offering a mix of luxury and simplicity. Whichever you choose, the landscapes and wildlife are equally special.

For a taste, try Wuparo Conservancy, sandwiched between Mudumu and Mamili national parks. Nkasa Lupala tented lodge offers Namibian wildlife with guided park tours, and Italian cooking thrown in. If you want to grill boerwors over a fire, the conservancy has the place for you: Rurapa campsite on the river bank has 6 tranquil sites as well as ablution facilities.

On the way there – or back – just west of the Kwando River is Nambwa campsite, run by Mashi Conservancy. Don't try it without a 4x4, especially in the rainy season. But when it's dry, with a bit of traction and ground clearance you can easily get down the sandy track to the campsite. Nambwa offers lovely sites under a canopy of tall trees. The morning is full of bird song, and there is a wealth of wildlife to see, both on and off the river.

Behind the camp site is an elevated platform with a view across the plain, which is very often teeming with game. You can drive, or take a boat ride with the conservancy to Horseshoe, where a backwater of the Kwando opens out from the reeds, and where elephants are often seen drinking.

Wildlife – large and small



Elephants are almost everywhere in Caprivi. The frog was found at Nambwa camp site on a rainy morning, climbing up the tent.

And prices? A double room will set you back N\$2,150 at Grootberg, with meals à la carte. Kunene River Lodge is cheaper at N\$545 to N\$790 per person for B&B, and there is a restaurant for à la carte meals, as well as a camp site. Nkasa Lupala costs N\$1,400 for dinner, bed & breakfast for two. Of course camping is cheaper, if you don't count all that gear you bought!

For a full list of communal conservancy joint venture lodges and campsites, visit the award winning Community Conservation website at: www.namibiawildlifesafaris.com