

Living Desert Adventures





Discover the secret treasures of the Namib Dessert

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*This spread: Chris Nel (owner of Living Desert),
observing Namaqua chameleon.*



Above: Exploring the Namib Desert with Living Desert Adventures.



Come explore the Namib Desert and discover the many wonders of the oldest desert in the world. Namib, which means vast and empty, leaves images of total desolation to the onlooker. This is true to a certain degree, but on the contrary, the life giving fog along the coastal desert supports a wealth of fauna and flora.

"Deserts, with their vast open spaces, desolation and timeless solitude leave lasting impressions on most people after their first visit. Perhaps it is the luring contrast between the unrelenting silence and the vicious heat and dryness, which produces such impressions. Concerning all organisms, life in the desert is a challenge, but for man perhaps the greatest challenge is the solitude of this harsh wilderness. Yet for all desert organisms the challenges of survival are not self-inflicted, they are real and life-threatening, and come in a multitude of ways and guises." – Barry Lovegrove. On this note Living Desert Adventures has designed one of the most educational day tours that Swakopmund has to offer, with regards to the

sand dune deserts of the Coastal Namib. The coastal dune belt may seem a lifeless dead heap of sand to many, but in fact it is alive with a fascinating variety of specialized little animals able to survive on the life giving fog, which rolls in consistently from the cold Atlantic Ocean.

The Living Desert Tour departs from Swakopmund at 08h00 from your place of residence and explores the coastal dune belt for four to five hours, which is just sufficient for a glimpse into the fascinating world of desert creatures and sand dune biomes. The Living Desert Tour concentrates on exploring the local dune belt between Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. Taking special care not to damage the gravel plains and cause any unnecessary damage to the dune eco-system. The gravel plains are protected and home to the nesting damara terns, which are endemic to this area. Conservation, geological structure and the reason why we have a desert will be discussed in detail en route. Plenty of time is available for frequent stops to take photos of the dunes and the surrounding environment. Come see a cartwheeling spider flip over 44 turns per second down a dune to escape the enemy. Admire the transparent Namib dune gecko endemic to the Namib Desert with webbed feet equivalent to snowshoes. Learn about the different beetles and insects and how they survive ►



The Desert is Alive!... Experience It!



Have you seen a web-footed and transparent reptile before? Discover the illusive, endemic Namib dune gecko, which feeds by night. Admire this transparent amazing reptile; its vertebrae, blood vessels, large eyes and webbed feet.

Is it caterpillar tracks or a sidewinder snake? Did you know that the sidewinder snake leaves caterpillar-like tracks on the slip face of dunes? When followed these tracks normally lead to the point where it buries itself under the sand waiting for a lizard to eat.





Above: Golden wheeling spider or dancing white lady.



Above: Perringuey's adder (also know as sidewinder snake).

This spread: Namib dune gecko.

from the life giving fog. Follow in the tracks of a legless lizard (Fitsimmon's burrowing skink), observe sand diving lizards (*Meroles anchieta*), side-winding snakes (Perringuey's adder), desert chameleons and many more fascinating creatures.

This tour not only covers the little creatures of the desert but also the geology, structure and formation of the desert. The final part of this tour also includes a scenic dune drive, which is a combination of fun and adrenalin allowing you to feel, see and absorb the beauty of the sand dunes while being in the middle of it all.

Experience the little five of the Namib Desert...

Namib dune gecko (Pachydactylus rangei)

This endemic gecko is also known as the web-footed gecko and can be found throughout the Namib Desert especially on the compacted wind side of the dunes. They are nocturnal and have large fixed lens eyes without eyelids, which they keep clean by licking with long tongues. The gecko's web-feet act as sand shoes, which are equivalent to snowshoes. They come in a variety of colours and patterns with an almost transparent skin, with visible blood vessels beneath the skin. They collect their water needs from what they eat, a diet consisting of various insects such as crickets, beetles, termites, beetle larvae and crickets. In times of need they can be seen allowing fog to condense on their large eyes and licking the drops off with their long tongues.

Golden wheeling spider (dancing white lady) (Carparachne aureoflava)

This spider also known as the dancing white lady spider is endemic to the Namib dune belt. Two dancing white lady spiders occur in the Namib, but only *Carparachne* is known for its cartwheeling escape tactics.

This large desert spider makes a burrow out of silk most commonly found in the slip face of a dune, which is closed with a little silk trap door. It can be found moving by night mostly on the slip face of the dune hunting insects. If threatened by enemies such as geckos then it dives off the steep slip face and curls into a ball and rolls down the dune at 44 roles per second, this is faster than any of its predators can run. Once the rolling has ended at the bottom of the dune it stands with four legs in the air jumping around in defence should any other predators be present, thus earning the name dancing white lady. This spider has large fangs and can inflict a painful bite with mild venom.

Perringuey 's adder (dune adder or sidewinder) (Bitis peringueyi)

This little endemic snake is one of the smallest adders in the world second after the Namaqua dwarf adder. This adder reaches a length of 30 centimetres and has eyes on top of the head, this allows the snake to burrow under the ►



Excellent photographic opportunities!



Above: Reticulated desert lizard.
This photograph: Shovel-snouted lizard.



Above: Namaqua chameleon eating a tokkie beetle.

Thermal dancing lizards, also known as sand diving lizards, can be seen darting across the dunes during midday heat, displaying comical dancing behaviour in order to not burn their feet on the hot dune sand.

sand and still keep its eyes out surveying the surroundings for prey. They move in a side-winding fashion, which allows them to move along the slip face of dunes where the sand is loose. Side-winding also keeps most of the body off the sand at any given moment that allows the snake to move over hot sand without overheating. They are front fanged and have a combination of cytotoxic poison and neurotoxic poison. They give live birth namely viviparous and have up to 10 young during the summer months. A little black point on the tail is used to attract lizards closer to the snake while it lies below the surface of the sand out of sight. The sidewinder snake is mostly threatened by quad bikes driving over the dunes.

Shovel-snouted lizard (Meroles anchietae)

This lizard is endemic to the Namib and moves by day (diurnal). They can be found moving along the slip faces of the dune, where the dune sand is very soft. Should this lizard feel threatened then it dives into the soft sand thus earning another common name the sand diving lizard. During the heat of the day the sand gets very hot and this lizard can be found dancing by holding two feet in the air at a time and then alternating its feet, and by doing this keeping its feet cool and minimizing the heat transferred from the sand to the body, therefore also known as the thermal dancing lizard. It's a fast moving lizard that chases insects and even takes moths out of the air. It measures around 10 centimetres including the tail and lays one to two eggs in a burrow.



Above: Fitzsimon's burrowing skink.

Namaqua chameleon (Chamaeleo namaquensis)

Found in the western parts of Namibia and the North West of South Africa. This is a large short-tailed chameleon that spends most of its life on the ground hunting for insects. They reach a length of up to 30 centimetres and are one of the fastest moving chameleons in the world, relative to other chameleons. Their basic colour is black, but colour can be changed according to mood and wilful decisions. Normally dark coloured in the morning to attract the sun, once warm the chameleon can move faster and hunt more efficiently. When the chameleon is too hot it becomes lighter in colour to reflect the sun, when it is angry or nervous it turns black. They can see in both directions at the same time, 180 degrees on each eye independently. They need both eyes on the prey when catching it with their long tongue, which can reach the entire length of the body including the tail.

Other desert animals seen on the tour...

Reticulated desert lizard (Meroles reticulatus)

The reticulated desert lizard is often found foraging during the day for small insects. It has a long point nose and is most common on the gravel plains at the foot of the dunes, especially where little shrubs are present, this make a suitable hideaway for them when threatened.

Fitzsimon's burrowing skink (Typlacontias brevipes)

This legless lizard, which resembles a small snake, is covered in a glossy layer of wax and can swim through the sand like a snake moves through the grass. It's blind and spends most of its life below the surface of the slip face of dunes where it burrows in search of food that comprises of small insects, which it detects mostly by feeling for vibrations, which insects make when moving. ►



Have you ever held a desert chameleon?



Above: Male Namaqua chameleon sunbathing.
This photograph: Pregnant female Namaqua chameleon.



Discover the ever-changing chameleon...

Above: A young Namaqua chameleon.
This photograph: Male Namaqua chameleon.



Above: Black scorpion.



Above: Comicus dune cricket.



Above: Tok tokkie beetle.

Admire and absorb the vast and magnificent dune landscapes, which awaken new emotions and allow excellent photographic opportunities. Come explore this wealth of life and go home with a new vision of the Namib Desert.

Black scorpion (Parabuthus villosus)

This scorpion can often be seen roaming around on the gravel plains and dunes during the day, where most scorpions move mostly by night. It belongs to the family *Buthidae* that are very poisonous. Scorpions with thick tails and small pincers should be avoided at all times; scorpions rely on the poison in their tail to kill their prey. Prey consists of insects, spiders and even small reptiles.

Dune cricket (Comicus)

A small transparent nocturnal cricket that makes a burrow on the semi-compacted windward side of the dune, it has very long antennae, which it uses as sense organs to navigate by night. It has interesting feet like a gecko used for jumping and making burrows.

Tenebrionid beetles (Tok tokkies)

A large variety of tok tokkies inhabit Namibia numbering close onto 200 species. They come in all shapes, sizes and guises. The most common tok tokkie found in the dunes is the fog basking beetle (*Onymacris unguicularis*). These beetles including many others have a peculiar way of collecting drinking water from the fog. They can be found doing a headstand in the early morning allowing the fog to condense on their backs and then run down towards the mouthparts where they can then drink up to 40 percent of their body mass on a given morning. Another strange tok tokkie is the button beetle or trench-digging beetle (*Lepidochora discoidalis*), which digs a fog trench into the side of the dune. Micro droplets of water condense on the side of the trench, which then gets licked up by the beetle. The *tenebrionid* beetles live on wind blown plant material known as *detritus* or 'beetle muesli', which gets blown down the lee side of the dunes, by wind. 🐜

Living Desert Adventures take great care to share their knowledge with you on each desert animal and plant, including emphasis on special adaptations and perfect design used for survival in the desert. Time and care is taken to ensure each animal is returned safely to its environment. Don't miss this adventure, it is a lifetime opportunity to experience the desert alive and close up.

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