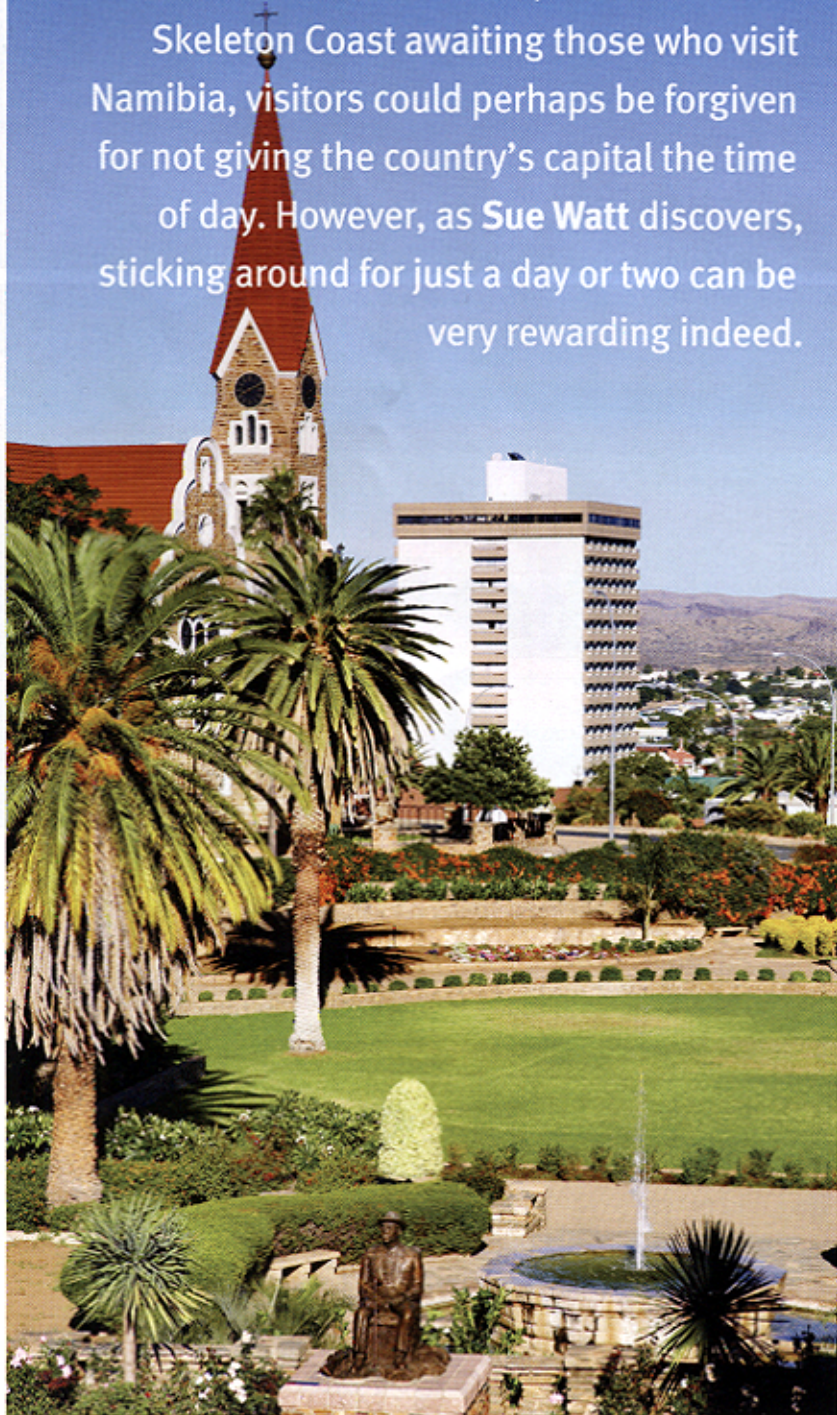


WINDHOEK

A tale of two cities

With riches like Sossusvlei, Etosha and the Skeleton Coast awaiting those who visit Namibia, visitors could perhaps be forgiven for not giving the country's capital the time of day. However, as **Sue Watt** discovers, sticking around for just a day or two can be very rewarding indeed.



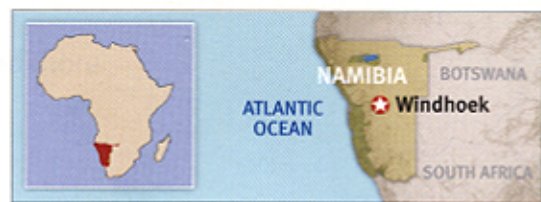
When I asked Israel how he'd celebrated Namibia's independence, he threw back his head and laughed. "We sunrised for a whole week!" he mused. Smiling, he reminisced about his all-night partying as a politically active 17-year-old witnessing the dawn of a new nation. "Sure, we had some fears," he added. "We didn't know what independence would bring. But it's been something to be proud of." Nineteen years on, he's my guide on a township tour of Windhoek.

My prior trip to the Namibian capital had given me quite a culture shock – after months of travelling around Africa, I felt like I'd suddenly landed back in Europe. Its colonial history screamed out from the German names of its sights and suburbs – the Reiterdenkmal, Christuskirche, Heinitzburg, Ludwigsdorf, with impressive Teutonic architecture around every corner. Everything seemed clean and sparkling and orderly, but somehow soulless. Now, Israel was revealing another side to the city, a side few visitors see...

Our tour focused on the suburb of Katutura, whose name means 'the place we will not settle' in the Otjiherero language. Following the First World War, South Africa assumed Germany's rule and, adhering to its policy of apartheid, forcibly relocated the city's black communities here in the 1950s. Katutura's residents are still predominantly black, the area a densely-populated microcosm of the nation's diverse cultures. Today, though, they call it 'the place we want to stay'.

The tour – and the country's struggle for independence – started at the Old Location Cemetery on Hochland Road. It was here, where tribal communities lived together before their forced resettlement to Katutura, that violent clashes with police first erupted. In rows of small headstones and wooden crosses, some marked merely by numbers rather than names, one grave stood out. Larger than the rest, its headstone reads: "In memory of our heroes and heroines of 10th December 1959 – Martyrs of the Namibian Revolution". There are no names inscribed, but Israel told me that there are ten men buried here, as well as one woman, Rosa Mungunda. Seeing her only son die during those initial clashes, Rosa poured petrol over the mayor's car and was shot instantly. Her death inspired Sam Nujoma, who later went on to become Namibia's first elected president, to join the fight for freedom.

We drove along Independence Avenue to Oshetu Market, crossing the B1 Highway that was once the city's





Opposite, left: Christuskirche (Christchurch) makes its mark on Windhoek's skyline

Opposite, right: Martyrs of Namibia's revolution are honoured at Old Location Cemetery

Top, left: All hands on, a shoemaker at Oshetu Market

Top, right: Cutting it close – a mother knows best at Oshetu Market

Middle: Haute Couture, Oshetu-style

Bottom: Getting a look in – wildlife awaits on Windhoek's outskirts

dividing line for black and white communities, and passed rows of single-storey houses that had been the unwanted new homes for those resettled here. In a deliberately divisive system, the tribes were housed separately on specific streets, with addresses on each prefixed with letters such as H for Hereros and D for Damarans. New houses built since – all brightly painted in a multitude of colours – have no such differentiation.

The Oshetu Market was more relaxed than I'd expected. Inside the huge hangar, and around its small, garish yellow workshops, people were casually going about their day's work, greeting Israel like an old friend. This typical community market has everything from electronics stalls and hair-braiders to shoemakers and grocers, and everyone seemed to have time for us.

In a dressmaker's shop, while surrounded by rails of vividly coloured outfits at various stages of completion, a slender man demonstrated a ladies' sash around his hips for me, then burst out laughing. "I need lady's buttocks to show you this properly!" Later, a shoemaker asked me to take his photo and charmed me into buying some kudu-skin sandals with soles made of old tyres. In the food section, huge slabs of red beef glistened on a wooden table dripping with blood, beneath which lay a cow's head and four hairy feet, presumably once attached to the joints on the table. Nearby, teenage lads played pool while listening to African rap music. Wafting past us all was the mouth-watering smell of meat sizzling on the braais outside.

The tour continued past Soweto, a bigger and brasher market than Oshetu, and named in solidarity with Johannesburg's township during its struggle against apartheid. On the outskirts of Katutura we

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reached the informal settlement, a seemingly haphazard collection of tin shacks that are temporary homes for the thousands of migrants who've been arriving here since independence. Israel explained how the municipality regulates the area, providing clean water, primary schools and health clinics. Although you can't ignore the poverty here, there's no feeling of squalor, the streets are clean, and, in Israel's words, "The people are proud."

On the banks of Goreangab Dam, our final stop was Penduka, a women's empowerment project meaning "Wake Up!" in Otjiherero. Here, women make beads and pottery from recycled glass, and produce colourful batiks and fabrics to sell in the adjoining craft shop. They also sell their products in the excellent Namibia Craft Centre just a short walk from the centre of Windhoek.

In fact, the town centre's main sights are all in close proximity, and a walking tour is the best way to explore them. A leisurely stroll can take in the >>



smart shops and Gibeon meteorites display on Post Street Mall, as well as the city's fondant-coloured architecture. Nearby are the Alte Feste, which houses the National Museum; Tintenpalast, Namibia's houses of parliament; and the Lutheran Christuskirche, Windhoek's most famous landmark. Near Zoo Park you'll pass traditional Himba women selling crafts. Wearing nothing but goat-skin skirts, their hair and skin smeared with ochre mud, they are a stark reminder of Windhoek's African heritage.

If you prefer walking in countryside rather than in the cityscape, then take a cab to Daan Viljoen Game Park. Only 20 minutes from town, it is an unexpected haven of African wildlife. Compared to Etosha, Daan Viljoen is tiny, covering 4000ha of the Khomas Hochland Hills to the west of Windhoek. But unlike Etosha, it has no resident predators, making it perfectly safe for walking. There are three hiking trails, which range from 3 to 32km.

The air was still cool when I started the 9km Rooibos Trail at 7am. Walking alone, I felt slightly anxious ten minutes in when I noticed several pairs of eyes watching me. They belonged to a group of blue wildebeest who stood in my path, just 20m ahead. I stayed deadly still, thinking how menacing their horns looked and wondered what to do. I felt rather stupid when they turned on their hooves and cantered away, disappearing in a cloud of dust – of course, they were more wary of me than I was of them.

The trail, which winds over desert hills and through highland savannah, was well marked, allowing my mind to wander without fear of getting lost. Although moving through the landscape was incredibly rewarding, I found that standing still was also rather marvellous. In the absence of the crunching made by my boots on the stony path, there was complete and utter silence. The occasional loud thundering of hooves echoing in the distance as I meandered proved I was not the only one hearing my delicate footsteps. In front of the distant dust clouds I could see herds of zebra striding away.

Climbing steadily, I eventually saw Windhoek in the distance, shimmering in the morning sun. An hour into the walk I reached the high point of the trail (1763m) – it was here that I realised it doesn't take long to get to the middle of nothingness in Namibia, even when leaving from the capital city. Walking along a ridge that looked down over rolling hills, I could see mountain zebra, kudu and gemsbok below, watching me with bemused curiosity. A pair of startled springbok skipped away while some fat rock dassies scurried around on a dead tree at the side of the path, totally ignoring my presence.

Continuing along the dried riverbed that marked the latter part of the route, a strange snorting noise came from the bushes on my left, about 10m ahead. Suddenly a zebra bolted across the path, then waited at the other side, seriously agitated. Instead of running away, as all the others had done that morning,

it ran back across the path in front of me. A few more snorts later and the zebra emerged again, this time with another adult and a tiny, delicate foal. Together, they finally crossed the riverbed and trotted away.

By 10.30am I was back at reception, telling my driver about all the animals I'd seen. What I hadn't observed was another human being, and it's that sense of solitude, coupled with being so close to the wildlife (and yet so close to the city) which makes Daan Viljoen so special. You won't see the Big Five here – but you'll get closer to the rest.

Smugly tired after my hike, I treated myself to lunch at Gathemann's, which overlooks Zoo Park and is one of the city's finest restaurants. I reflected on the Windhoek I'd just discovered, and I remembered Israel's answer when I'd asked him how Katutura's residents felt about the township tours creating potentially uncomfortable goldfish bowls of their lives. "At first, they found it strange," he'd admitted, "but now they're glad people come to see this side of Windhoek." I'm glad too – I'd finally found that soul I'd thought was missing, that African soul. As Israel said, it's something to be proud of. 🌿

Top: Turning heads – zebra in Daan Viljoen Game Park

Bottom: Without any predators to worry about, you can walk through Daan Viljoen's 4000ha, which cover the Khomas Hochland Hills to the west of Windhoek

■ Sue Watt's township tour was arranged by Wanderzone Tours (wanderzonetours.com)



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