



## ROAD TRAVEL REPORT: NAMIBIA



### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO...

- Namibia has a good system of paved, gravel, sand, and dirt roads, among the best in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Gravel roads are graded regularly and well maintained; however, distances involved may be prohibitive. our-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicles are recommended off of main roads.
- Drive slowly on dirt roads because they may be slippery. Many tourists have been killed or injured on dirt roads because their vehicles have overturned.
- Drivers often cannot see cars behind vehicles because of the dust their own vehicle stirs up. Use headlights at all times.
- Single-vehicle rollovers are common, in part because gravel roads are slightly higher in the middle than on



### ROAD REALITIES

#### DRIVER BEHAVIORS

- On major and coastal roads with high speed limits, road crashes involving drunk drivers have increased.
- Drivers flash their high beams to indicate intent to pass as a friendly greeting or warning.
- Dust clouds make overtaking other cars very dangerous.
- Exceeding safe speeds at intersections that recently have been damaged by rain has caused many road crashes—especially those involving tourists.
- Many motor vehicles are in poor mechanical condition.

#### GENERAL ROAD CONDITIONS

- Most roads are undivided, with one lane in each direction.
- Most towns and communities can be reached by road.
- Long distances make fatigue a prime contributing factor in road crashes.



the sides. Speeding drivers who get too close to the edge of the gravel surface and then abruptly return toward the road cause the car to turn over. Lighter 4WDs are especially vulnerable to turnovers.

- There are 9.3 fatalities per 10,000 motor vehicles compared to 2.0 in the US.
- Sand roads, called pads, may become corrugated. Speeding vehicles cause corrugations—grooves 5-10 cm deep—in the road surface. To minimize roughness while driving, maintain a speed of about 80 km/h (50 mph) so that tires will not dip as deeply into the ruts.
- International road signs are used. Both roads and turnoffs are sign posted clearly.
- The TransNamib Railway connects most major towns.
- Tared spur roads connect the main north-south arteries to Gobabis, Luderitz, Swakopmund and Walvis Bay.
- The former Owambo region in the north is inhabited by 44% of the population but has only 5% of the road network.
- As a general rule, B- and C-numbered highways are well maintained and passable for all vehicles. D-numbered roads may be a little rougher but may be passable for two-wheel-drive (2WD) vehicles.



- The B1 route is the main north-south highway in Namibia. It is an excellent road.
- In the Kaokoveld, most D-numbered roads require 4WD vehicles.
- Some gravel roads are graded so the middle of the road is higher than the shoulders.
- Most roads have no shoulders or breakdown lanes. Shoulders are often sandy. Losing control of the vehicle is highly possible if the car drifts to the shoulders.
- It is easy to get stuck on “oily” looking sand in places like Sandwich Harbor.
- In the northern part of the country, unexploded mines pose a threat while driving off main roads.
- The north-west region has extremely harsh and arid conditions. There are many small villages and some urban areas are developing. Roads to the cities are well maintained but generally are not paved. The B1 is the main paved road in the region.
- Namib-Naukluft Park has no roads in most sections.

The roads that are available are made of gravel. No public transportation or guided tours are available from Windhoek, Swakopmund or Walvis Bay. Traffic is very light.

- Border posts include:

**Border with Angola**  
Oshikango (open 0800 -1800)

**Border with Botswana**  
Buitepos (open 24 hours/day)  
Ngoma (open 0700-1800)  
Mohembo (open 0700-1800)

**Border with South Africa**  
Ariamsvlei (open 24 hours a day)  
Klein Menasse (open 0800-1630)  
Noordoewer (open 24 hours a day)  
Velloorsdrif (open 0800-1630)

**URBAN TRAVEL**

- Urban roads are well maintained.

CITY	PROBLEMS	USEFUL INFORMATION
<p><b>WINDHOEK CITY</b></p>	<p>Traffic has increased greatly in recent years. Alcohol abuse by pedestrians is a major factor in road crashes.</p> <p>Street vendors block streets and sidewalks, impede traffic, slow pedestrian travel and sometimes force pedestrians to walk in the streets.</p>	<p>Street layout and planned parking areas promote free flow of traffic and minimize rush hour congestion.</p> <p>Buses and heavy vehicles are not permitted in the city center; deliveries to this area are made after regular work hours by light trucks.</p> <p>The city center is compact and walkable. Post St. Mall is a pedestrian-only mall.</p> <p>Independence Avenue is the main north-south street. Sam Nujoma Drive (the B6) is the main east-west road.</p> <p>The B1 bypass (the Western Bypass) reduces congestion.</p> <p>Generally, roads are wide; pedestrian areas are very adequate.</p> <p>Feeder roads provide access to the suburbs and are designed to minimize congestion.</p> <p>Hosea Kutako International Airport is 36 km (22 m) to the east. Shuttle bus service available.</p> <p>The Eros Airport is near the outskirts of Windhoek.</p> <p>Many taxis run specific routes from the city center to Katutura.</p>

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CITY	PROBLEMS	USEFUL INFORMATION
<b>WINDHOEK CITY (CONTINUED)</b>		Local population relies on taxis that operate on prescribed routes. Taxis can be hailed, picked up at taxi racks, and phoned. They are less available on weekends.
<b>SWAKOPMUND</b>	Road crash rate increases during festival celebrations. Road signs are vandalized often.	

**RURAL TRAVEL**

- Rural roads are fairly well maintained.
- Driving on gravel roads can be treacherous.
- Exercise caution. Do not speed on gravel roads. The gravel reduces traction, making it easy to skid. Do not drive faster than 80 km/h (50 mph). Reduce speed considerably for curves and turns. Be especially careful on curves. Speeding around curves causes many road crashes.
- Follow the ruts made by other vehicles, and avoid braking suddenly.
- Keep tire pressure slightly lower on gravel roads than on tarred roads. Reduce speed and stay as far left as possible when a vehicle approaches from the opposite direction.
- Be alert when passing vehicles, especially slow-moving ones.
- Be alert and decrease speed in sections of road damaged by rain.
- Heed road signs warning about wandering livestock/animals, particularly kudu and especially at night when headlights blind them. Four percent of all road crashes are caused by kudu (54% happened at night, 13% during dawn and dusk, and 33% during daylight hours). Kudu are more active on moonlit nights. If vehicle's high beams are angled slightly outward, the light will reflect off the eyes of an approaching kudu, adding extra stopping time for the driver.
- Drive slowly on dirt roads, as they may be slippery. Many tourists have been killed or injured on dirt roads by overturning their vehicles. Drivers often cannot see cars behind them because of the dust their own vehicle is stirring up. Use headlights at all times.

- Hitting a sandy patch or driving around a curve too fast can cause your vehicle to roll over or spin out.
- The salt-surfaced roads in the coastal areas are dangerous when morning or evening mist makes them slick.

**NIGHT TRAVEL**

- Wildlife on the roads at night presents a major danger. Kudus particularly present a problem. (See above.)
- The game population is reduced as you travel farther north as well as along the coast.
- Game population is very active at dawn and dusk.
- Try to avoid traveling at night when dust and distance create confusing mirages.
- It is not advisable to travel in the townships at night without someone who knows the local area.

**PEDESTRIAN TRAVEL**

- A high percentage of pedestrians involved in road crashes are legally drunk.

**SEASONAL TRAVEL**

- Namibia is a vast arid country. The Namib Desert spreads inland for 80 to 129 km (50-80 m) along Namibia's western coast. The Kaokoland Mountains run along this coastline. A north-south plateau exists in the interior, which slopes down to the north and the east into the sand basin of the Kalahari Desert. The Etosha Pan, a dried-out salt lake surrounded by grasslands and bush, also lies inland.
- Heavy fog and blowing sand seriously impair visibility while driving.



- The coastal region has heavy fogs beginning in late afternoon. Fog often does not lift until mid-morning.
- When it rains, gravel roads turn to swamps, and desert washes may fill with water. If uncertain about water depth in a wash, do not cross until it drains.
- In Khaudom, deep sand makes roads difficult during the dry season, and they become mud slicks during the rainy season.
- The interior region of Namibia has two rainy seasons: (1) from October to early December, characterized by short rains, and (2) from mid-January to April, which has long rains.

- Road crashes increase during the Christmas season. Speeding and driving under the influence of alcohol are primary factors.

**POLICE ENFORCEMENT**

- Police use roadblocks and mobile blood alcohol testing units and set up temporary police stations at resort sites to reduce road crashes during holiday seasons.
- Overloaded trucks cause excessive wear on road surfaces.



**ROAD REGULATIONS**

- Traffic drives on the left.
- A valid national driver's license is sufficient for a few weeks; however, if staying longer, an International Driving Permit (IDP) is required prior to arrival.
- An IDP is a legal identification document that translates driving license information into 11 languages, including English, and can be used only as a supplement to a valid driving license. An IDP must be obtained in the country where the driver's license was obtained. Contact AAA at <http://www.aaa.com>.
- Seat belts are required.
- International road signs are used.

- Right turns on red after stopping are not permitted.
- Motorcyclists must wear protective helmets.
- Child safety seats are not required but recommended.
- If a motorcade is approaching, make way immediately and promptly follow any instructions given by the officials present.
- Maintain a safe following distance from motorcades.
- If involved in an accident that results in the death of a person, the driver may be charged with culpable homicide.
- Speed limits are 60 km/h (37 mph) in urban areas and 120 km/h (75 mph) in rural areas.



**ROAD WATCH**

**SOME DANGEROUS ROADS IN NAMIBIA**

ROAD	CONDITIONS
ROADS THROUGH KHAUDOM GAME PARK	Roads are mostly sand; the sand is very deep, especially in north half of drive; 4WD vehicles required for entry; even 4WD vehicles get stuck. Travel with conveyors of at least two vehicles with enough food and water for three days; roads deteriorate into mud slicks during rainy season
OVBAMBOLAND	Away from C46 and B1, road maintenance is poor; 4WD vehicles are necessary, especially during rainy season
MAHANGO GAME RESERVE: STRETCH FROM BORDER TO SHAKAWE	Deep sandy stretch; requires 4WD vehicles



<b>ROAD</b>	<b>CONDITIONS</b>
<b>BACK ROADS IN NAMIB-NAUKLUFT PARK NAUKLUFT MOUNTAINS, WHICH ARE AT EASTERN EXTREME OF PARK</b>	Requires 4WD vehicles; minor roads often are in poor condition and only marginally passable
<b>ROAD TO SCHUCKMANNBURG</b>	Can be reached only with difficulty along a rough 4WD track
<b>ROADS IN BUSHMANLAND</b>	No tarred roads; only C44 is graveled, which is the western approach to Tsumkwe; other routes have deep sand and require 4WD vehicles; travel in convoy is recommended
<b>WESTERN KAOKOVELD</b>	Harsh country; network of extremely rugged 4WD tracks; roads are not maintained. Take spare tires, puncture repair kits and compass; hazardous dust in dry months; In rainy season, mud can stop a vehicle in its tracks.
<b>VAN ZYL'S PASS INTO OTJINJANGE VALLEY</b>	Treacherously steep
<b>SKELETON COAST</b>	Heavy fog almost every morning
<b>FINAL 10 KM (6.21 M) TO LUDERITZ</b>	Sand drifts pile up extremely high, making for extremely hazardous conditions, especially during fog
<b>SWAKOPMUND-WALVIS BAY ROAD</b>	Has small hilly sections. There are frequent head-on collisions due to driver misjudgment of distances while passing. There is much heavy truck traffic; road is congested
<b>B1 FROM WINDHOEK AND REHOBOTH</b>	Some sections maybe closed from 2300 to 0100 due to construction; During 2004, a 4-lane divided highway will be completed.

**A GOOD ROAD IN NAMIBIA**

<b>ROAD</b>	<b>CONDITIONS</b>
<b>TRANS-CAPRIVI ROUTE, MAIN B8 ROAD (CALLED THE GOLDEN HIGHWAY)</b>	Is completely paved. Provides connection with Zimbabwe and Zambia.

**ROAD RECOMMENDATIONS****TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS****BUSES**

- Public transportation safety is fair.
- Bus service is not well developed.
- A local bus service exists in Windhoek.
- Few luxury coaches connect Windhoek, Cape Town, and Johannesburg.
- Public transportation is not generally available outside of the capital, where routes and schedules also are limited.
- Local minibuse service routes along the B1 (the main north-south route) exist from Oshakati to Keetmanshoop.

**TAXIS**

- Hotels or tourist information offices can recommend reliable taxi services.
- The most reliable taxis and radio taxis display the NABTA (Namibia Bus and Taxis Association) logo. If possible, *avoid* itaxis lacking this logo.

**TRAINS**

- Train service is available to Walvis Bay and the Northern and Southern regions.
- The TransNamib Railway connects most major towns. Trains are reliable but slow.

**RENTAL CARS**

- Cars, motorbikes, 4WD vehicles can be rented in Windhoek, Tsumeb, Walvis Bay, and Swakopmund as well as at the Windhoek Airport; however, they are expensive. Distances are vast and fuel costs are high. Consider joining an organized company tour, especially if traveling to more remote regions, such as Skeleton Coast, Kunene Valley, or Bushmanland.
- Generally, drivers must be aged 25 years to rent a vehicle.
- Rental cars are available at the airport and Windhoek.
- It is advisable to add a collision damage waiver (CDW) to rental fees.

**EMERGENCY INFORMATION****TOURIST ASSISTANCE**

- Emergency service contact numbers vary from town to town. Check the telephone directory. A listing of emergency contact numbers can be found at the beginning of each town's listings. However, these numbers may change and may not always be available 24 hours a day. In Windhoek, the emergency number for police and ambulance is 10-111.
- Outside Windhoek, the emergency number for ambulance is 061-10-111
- The GSM 900 cell phone network covers most major roads and cities. If an emergency occurs, call 112 and they will connect you to a private rescue service. The call is free, but the service must be paid for.

**MOTORCYCLES & BICYCLES**

- Using a cell phone while cycling is illegal.
- Drivers are not always alert for cyclists. The sport is growing but not widespread. Separate facilities for cyclists are rare.

**CRIME & SECURITY**

- Avoid night travel and exercise caution and maintain security awareness at all times when traveling near the Namibia-Angola border. Landmines and bandits make it inadvisable to leave the main road between Katwitwi (a village on the Okavango River in western Kavango Region) to Kongola Town (Caprivi Region).
- Consult the State Department's Consular Information Sheet before considering crossing the border into Angola. Cross only at official border crossings.
- Hitchhiking should be avoided because of the possibility of intoxicated and/or reckless drivers, poor mechanical condition of some motor vehicles, and high incidence of single-vehicle rollover road crashes.
- Petty crime is increasing, especially in urban areas. Violent crime directed at Americans or other visitors is rare.
- Street crime and vehicle thefts are common, especially at service stations.
- In Windhoek, crime has decreased sharply due to effective law enforcement measures.

- Roadside assistance and emergency medical services may be unreliable or non-existent outside of Windhoek, except on main roads. Many motorists are willing to stop and help; others will call for help on cell phones, but limited cell phone service is available outside major towns.
- Facilities for tourism generally are good.

The Ministry of Environment & Tourism can be contacted at Private Bag 13306, Windhoek, Namibia. The street address is Ground Floor, Continental Building, 272 Independence Avenue, Windhoek, Namibia. Phone is (61) 284-2111, fax is (61) 284-2364 or 221-930, e-mail is [tourism@iwwn.com.na](mailto:tourism@iwwn.com.na), and website is <http://www.iwwn.com.na/namtour>.



### MEDICAL CARE

- Medical facilities are modern, especially in Windhoek.
- Outside of Windhoek, emergency medical services may be unreliable or non-existent. EMS is good on main roads as many motorists have cell phones and airborne medical evacuation units are available. Medical evacuation from remote areas can take a long time.
- Increased numbers of smaller towns in the coastal region have well-equipped ambulances; medical evacuation helicopters are available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week.
- The doctor-to-patient ratio in Namibia is one of the best in Africa.
- Hospitals and clinics exist in all major urban centers.
- Standards range from private hospitals and clinics with modern equipment to government hospitals and clinics with fairly basic equipment.
- Katima Mulilo has a well-equipped hospital and trained physicians.
- In Windhoek, state hospitals are Katutura (203 9111) and Windhoek Central Hospital (203 9111). Private hospitals are the Catholic Hospital (92 Stubel St, 237 237), Rhino Park Clinic (225 434) and Medicity. Highly qualified doctors and staff are available.
- Kaokoveld has no hospitals.
- Pharmacies are available in most urban communities; but in rural areas, prescription medicines may be available only at state hospitals or clinics.
- Doctors and hospitals frequently expect immediate cash payment for medical services.

- U.S. medical insurance is not always valid in other countries. Medicare and Medicaid do not cover medical expenses rendered outside the U.S. Medigap policies (plans C through J) cover 80 percent of what Medicare would cover in the U.S. for the first 60 days of each trip; a \$250 deductible applies. Maximum lifetime limit of \$50,000. Medicare Advantage may offer coverage for care abroad. Phone: 800-633-4227; website: [www.medicare.gov/publications/pubs/pdf/11037.pdf](http://www.medicare.gov/publications/pubs/pdf/11037.pdf).

### EMBASSY INFORMATION

- Embassy of Namibia, 1605 New Hampshire Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Phone is (202) 986-0540. You can also contact the Permanent Mission of Namibia to the US at 135 W. 36th St., New York, NY 10016. Phone is (212) 685-2003, fax is (212) 685-1561, e-mail is [embnamibia@aol.com](mailto:embnamibia@aol.com), and website is <http://www.namibia.com.na>.
- The US Embassy, 14 Lossen Street, Ausspannplatz. The mailing address is Private Bag 12029, Windhoek, Namibia. Phone is (264-61) 22-1601, and fax is (264-61) 22-9792.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the Association for Safe International Road Travel  
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ASIRT is a non-profit humanitarian organization established in memory of Aron Sobel, age 25, who was killed along with 22 other passengers in a Pamukkale Bus Company accident on the roads of Turkey. © ASIRT 2004

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