



A guide to:

# *Desert Elephants in Namibia*



# Desert Elephants in Namibia

**Focus:** Elephants  
**Location:** Namibia

**Start Date:** Set Dates - Please Enquire  
**Arrival & Starting Point:** Swakopmund

The harsh albeit stunning drylands of the Namib Desert seem an unlikely place for large water dependant mammals to settle, yet here in this vast arid landscape a unique population of elephants have claimed the land as their home. As if the already scarce vegetation, intense heat, and low rainfall were not challenging enough, the desert-dwelling elephants have sadly been subjected to ongoing human-wildlife conflict.

Once thought to be a subspecies due to their unique behaviour and social structures, it was later discovered that they were in fact African bush elephants that had adapted to the extreme temperatures of the desert environment, learning to survive without water for multiple days. Desert-adapted elephants were once widespread across Africa but today there are only two populations found in Mali and Namibia. The early 20th century had seen the northwest of Namibia populated with around 3,000 desert elephants living in the Kunene Region, but by the 1980s, rampant poaching had decimated these numbers with a bleak total of just 300 elephants remaining. During the Namibian war of independence, the desert elephants moved north for safety, but slowly they expanded their range returning south of the region in the late 1990s towards the Ugab River where this project is based.



Having been absent from the area for over 30 years, the elephants returned to find many new human settlements. Many of these villagers, having no experience living alongside wild elephants, would see these lumbering animals as intrusive and destructive which is when the conflict began to grow. Realising the need for intervention, the project was founded in 2003 with the aims to provide and implement practical solutions to the problems that occur when two species are vying for the same land and resources. Over the 15+ years the project has been running, the team have seen an incredible improvement in the local attitude towards the elephants and a slow increase of their population has been noted.

Though the elephants are now protected under Namibian law, elephant conservation is still as important as ever, and as a volunteer, you'll play a vital role in helping the elephants and local communities to coexist peacefully. Through a number of important activities, you'll directly and physically make a difference to the conservation of desert elephants in Namibia. On patrol week, you'll track the herds taking notes on their numbers and movement patterns. Gathering information like this is crucial as this project is currently the only one in Namibia providing the government with this type of data. You will also make an immediate difference by undertaking construction tasks such as building protective walls around water sources and digging wells for villages. So for a humbling Namibian adventure, surrounded by majestic creatures and friendly locals, secure your place today.



# Activities

With a minimum duration of 2 weeks and a maximum of 12 weeks, it's important to know that there are two main focuses on this project which rotate in a 2-week block. During week one, known as 'Build Week', you'll physically contribute to elephant conservation by undertaking construction tasks, and week two, known as 'Patrol Week' will see you going out in search of elephants in the desert.

## Week One - Build Week

As the name 'build week' suggests, you'll be involved in a number of construction projects that are extremely important to the conservation of desert elephants, as well as the safety of the local villages they regularly visit. The tasks may include digging new wells in surrounding villages, building protective walls around valuable water sources, and creating alternative water points for the elephants and the areas newly released black rhinos to use. Along the way, you may also fix any damages created by the beautiful but unfortunately heavy-footed mammals! This is hard work in hot conditions but the work you undertake here makes a huge and lasting difference, and what better way to bond with your fellow volunteers than through teamwork, the shared excitement of visiting elephants and perhaps a sing-along while you work. Build week is certainly an experience, as well as an achievement to be proud of!

After completing build week, you'll have undeniably earned a weekend of rest! After packing up camp (respectfully leaving no trace behind), you'll head back to base camp for a well-deserved shower and a night sleeping in the tree house. The following day will see you head into the town of Uis for a relaxing day at Brandberg Rest Camp, which has a restaurant, swimming pool and Wi-Fi, before heading out on patrol the following week.





## Week Two - Patrol Week

This week will be spent tracking the elephants in the area, and once you find the herds, you will record movement patterns and information such as new births, deaths, and incidents of mating. The elephant's movements are recorded through GPS positions, which are then plotted onto an online map which forms part of a collective database. This shows where the elephants visit to drink water, or may do in the future, and therefore where the project needs to build protective walls and alternative drinking points. It's a humbling experience to see a wild elephant, let alone the unique herds of the desert elephants, so be sure to bring your camera along!

During elephant patrols, you'll also be present in the areas where the herds are under threat, monitoring the elephants to ensure they are together and without injury. You will help to compile identification files on 'new' herds in the northern reaches - an area where they have previously caused significant damage to local farms. Whilst on patrol, you'll speak to farmers and surrounding communities to understand and address any concerns they may have regarding the elephants. By doing so, you'll be able to get ahead of and reduce any potential conflicts that may arise. Whilst out on patrols, you are also likely to spot a whole host of other wildlife such as springbok, oryx, kudu, giraffe, zebra, and perhaps even the critically endangered black rhino!



# Itinerary

## Day 1

After arriving into Swakopmund, you will transfer to your first night's accommodation. After checking in, the day is yours to relax and explore as you please before a health and safety briefing at 6:30pm. Then rest up, as the adventure truly begins tomorrow!

## Day 2

Today you'll be picked up from your accommodation at approximately 11am, before beginning the 4-hour journey through the desert to base camp! Upon arrival, you'll have the chance to settle in and get to know your fellow volunteers, before a full orientation and health and safety briefing.

## Days 3 - 6

You'll start build week by setting up a camp for the next few days not too far from the build site. The remainder of the week will see you helping with a number of construction tasks that are designed to directly combat human-elephant conflict. You'll complete build week leaving a lasting impact on both the elephants and the locals!

## Day 7

On Saturday morning, you'll pack up the tents and journey back to base camp, where you can enjoy a well-deserved shower and relax for the rest of the day. The area around camp is perfect for exploring and if you're lucky you may catch Mama Afrika and her herd paying a visit to the nearby elephant dam!

## Day 8

Today, you'll have the chance to join staff on a trip into the local town. You'll spend the day relaxing at a lodge complete with a restaurant, swimming pool and Wi-Fi. This really is a well-earned rest day after build week! Then it's back to base camp for an evening briefing on the upcoming patrol week.

## Days 9 - 12

Packing up the vehicles, you'll head out in search of the elephants. This week will see you tracking the herds, collecting vital data such as births, deaths and new herds in the area. Each night, you'll set up camp in a new location, decided by the elephants! This is a truly wild experience, camping under the stars like you've never seen before.

## Day 13

Today is your final day in the desert. After saying your goodbyes at base camp and snapping your final photos of an incredible location, you'll begin your journey back to your final night's accommodation in Swakopmund. If you are staying for longer than 2 weeks, you will also return to Swakopmund for the weekend.

## Day 14

After a good night's rest, you'll check out and head to the airport for your return flight home, or commence your onward travel plans. Please note, transfers to and from the airport are not included but can be arranged for you. If you are lucky enough to be staying for longer than two weeks, then the adventure begins again the following day!



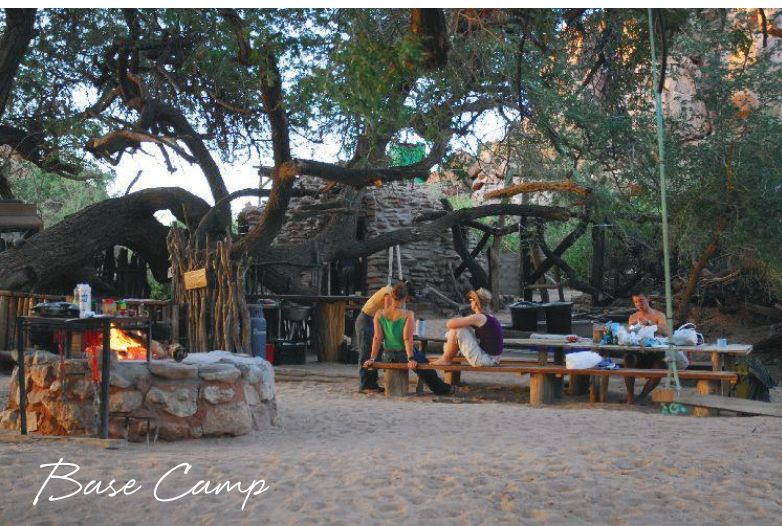


# Accommodation

Calling all camping fanatics! This project will see you truly immersed in the Namibian wilderness as you camp beneath the stars throughout your stay. On build week, you will set up a more permanent base that you will return to after a hard day's work, whereas on patrol week, you'll sleep where the elephants lead you, setting up a new camp in the desert every night. There are no washing facilities and only bush toilets whilst camping, so it really is a back-to-basics and 'be one with nature' type of experience!

You will of course have the comforts of base camp, which is located in one of the beautiful Ana trees that pepper the Namibian desert. You'll return to base camp for the weekends, where hot showers and toilets are available, as well as two elephant drinking dams that often attract elephants to the camp.

For your first and final night in Swakopmund, your accommodation is not included but can be booked for you in a modern hotel close to the beach. There are a lot of accommodation options in Swakopmund, so if you would prefer to stay elsewhere, please feel free, and just be sure you meet the team on the Sunday evening at 6:30pm for your briefing.



# Food & Drink

You will have three meals provided each day, which will be cooked over the open campfire. Volunteers usually follow a rota of 'kitchen duty', taking it in turns to cook for the group using recipes provided. Food runs will be made in the local town, where there is a small supermarket and any reasonable food requests can normally be accommodated by the project team. During your time here, you can expect to enjoy a variety of meals consisting of local cuisine and some western style dishes. There is something for everyone, and after a hard days volunteering, it's relaxing to sit round the fire dining al fresco!





## What's Included

- Accommodation (except in Swakopmund)
- Three meals per day
- A donation to the project
- Tea and coffee
- English-speaking project coordinator

## Not Included

- Flights
- Visas
- Travel insurance
- Accommodation in Swakopmund

## Volunteer Reviews

### George

"One of the most memorable moments for me was when one of the oldest, biggest bulls walked straight towards us. My heart stopped as the gentle giant just watched before turning away to eat."



### Paula

"My favourite moment was on the last day when the elephants came into camp! We were drinking champagne at sunset, watching them walk in."



### Susan

"I will never forget watching herds of elephants move up and down the river bed - it was completely mesmerising. Camping out under the stars was also special, I've never seen so many shooting stars!"







## What Next?

Becoming a volunteer on the Desert Elephants in Namibia project is simple, and you can help make a difference to elephant conservation efforts in just a few simple steps...



Visit the website to select your start date and how long you would like to volunteer for.



Secure your place online by paying a deposit of £195. You'll have up to 60 days before your start date to pay your remaining balance.



Prepare for your trip and ask your dedicated travel expert any questions before packing your bags and heading off to Namibia!



Finally, have an incredible time and don't forget to send in or tag us in your photos!

**#thegreatprojects**



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