



**PHOTO  
ADVENTURES**  
By Peter Adams

# NAMIBIA

TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHER PETER ADAMS VISITS NAMIBIA  
AND REPORTS BACK ON WHY THIS SCENIC COUNTRY IS  
THE PERFECT PLACE TO START AN AFRICAN ADVENTURE

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Namibia (Africa)

**N**AMIBIA IS AN EXCELLENT country for first-timers visiting south Africa. It eases you into the culture with European influences and is much safer and better equipped to deal with foreigners compared with other areas of the continent. I last visited the former South African colony almost 20 years ago in 1991, but this time I wanted to focus on the northern parts to photograph the Himba people, a nomadic tribe indigenous to Kaokoland – the world’s largest wilderness area. Namibia has very bare, elemental landscapes with lots of empty space. You can drive for hours without seeing another soul – it’s a refreshing change to the crowded confines of the UK.

Even though I had visited Namibia before, I did a fair bit of planning before I set off. I always check my log of vaccines to make sure I’m up to date with inoculations, but there’s nothing in Namibia that you have to particularly worry about and there are good medical facilities available. I also emailed a few tour companies in Windhoek, the capital, for advice, and researched on the web, but rather than hire a guide straight away, I decided to travel by myself for the most part as I had a good idea of the type of shots I wanted to capture.

The trip lasted around three weeks and began by flying in to Windhoek from Johannesburg. I hired a car and drove to a place on the coast called Swakopmund, in northwestern Namibia, where I spent the first few days planning and capturing some aerial photographs for the first time. Although I had taken images of Namibia’s famous sand dunes back in 1991, this time I wanted to capture them differently; from a plane. The best time of day to be in the air was mid to late afternoon as the sun is low and the light is at its best. Unfortunately you can get a sea mist in the morning, which hinders >

**PREVIOUS PAGE:** “I set my camera on interval timer mode and stuck it in a sand dune, then went off for a wander across the dunes so I could include myself in the shot to give a sense of scale.”

**RIGHT:** “An aerial view of the Namib Park, taken in late afternoon. It’s the largest game park in Africa.”

**BELOW LEFT:** “We flew out to sea and then cut back to shoot the Skeleton Coast, which is a big draw for photographers.”

**BELOW RIGHT:** “We were lucky to spy some Zebra, casting nice shadow patterns.”

**CENTRE RIGHT:** “A Himba woman repairs a mud hut.”

**FAR RIGHT:** “I asked the children to walk up and down the trail. My guide held a reflector to the side to add light.”



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Namibia



**“It was useful to have a local to translate and point the way to the remote villages. The guide helped break the ice with the Himba people and negotiate a fee”**

visibility, so when the time was right, I asked the pilot to do some loops over the dunes and desert and double back over the coast. I'd communicated with the plane hire agent before I arrived, so when I turned up they had removed the door to the plane so I could get a better field of view using the camera. There aren't the restrictions and regulations you would find at a UK airport, it is a small airfield so you turn up and get on with it. In places like America where everyone is paranoid about terrorism, you always have to seek special permission to fly over certain areas, but here there was just one form to sign and then we were away.

Once in the air I used a Canon 24-105mm f/4L and a 70-200mm f/4L lens on two bodies but, to be honest, I didn't use the 200mm that much as the 24-105mm gave me the focal range I needed.

The only kit disaster of the trip happened while in the air; one of my camera bodies showed me an error message after becoming clogged with dust. Although the cameras are well sealed, there's an awful lot of dust in the air. Luckily though it was towards the end of a flight and I had a back-up body. The DSLR quickly recovered though and started working again.

**LEFT: “I positioned the two children in the doorway to their hut so the background would fall into darkness.”**

**TOP: “Our visit coincided with a local festival, which included tribal dances.”**

**ABOVE LEFT: “While at the festival, I caught this shot as a lady turned around.”**

**ABOVE CENTRE: “I gathered the children around and shot from a low viewpoint.”**

**ABOVE RIGHT: “A close-up of the Himba's traditional red hairstyle.”**

I usually back up my images to a laptop everyday, not only as a fail-safe in case the cards corrupt but to see how my day's photography has gone. The hotels I stayed in all had good electrical facilities so I could charge my equipment via an adaptor plug.

From the look of the sand dunes, you would be forgiven for thinking that a 4x4 vehicle was essential for getting around but there are tarmac roads leading virtually all the way. I managed easily enough with a regular hire car, but had to park up and walk the final three kilometres to the actual dunes. If you want to spare the shoulder pain from heaving a heavy camera bag, perhaps a 4x4 is a good idea. Luckily, on my way back, a friendly jeep driver offered me a lift to my car.

From there I drove to the north-east of Namibia to Opuwo, the capital of the Kunene region, where the Himba people live. I based myself in the town and went out in the car each day with a guide. Rather than turn up by myself, it was useful to have a local to translate and point the way to the remote villages. The guide helped break the ice with the Himba people and negotiate a fee so I would be free to take images. The Himba are very friendly people. I've been to places like the Omo Valley ▶





**RIGHT:** "This is Dead Vlei, a famous clay pan. I shot this image as it represents the environmental issues well."

**ABOVE:** "Another shot with myself in the frame to give the dunes some scale. It took three attempts, but luckily it wasn't too warm in the late afternoon."

**ABOVE LEFT:** "Another image from Dead Vlei. The sun was setting, throwing the trees into shadow."

**ABOVE RIGHT:** "A dune in Namib Park taken on my 70-200mm."

**Peter's kit**

Two Canon EOS-1Ds MkIII bodies with 70-200mm f/4, 24-105mm f/4, 17-40mm f/4 and 24mm TS-E tilt & shift lenses, a Lensbaby Composer, Manfrotto 190CX Pro 3 tripod with Arca Swiss ball-head. Plus a Lastolite reflector and plastic 'zip-lock' bags to protect kit.

**"The Himba are very friendly people. I've been to places like the Omo Valley in Ethiopia and in comparison these people were easy to deal with"**

in Ethiopia and in comparison these people were easy to deal with. It was a case of spending some time in their company and then bringing up the question of whether I could take some photos of them and negotiating a fee.

I was pleasantly surprised with how open they were to posing for images; they were laid back about it all and certainly were not camera-shy. The traditional dress they wore for the images was simply how they dressed all the time, they don't swap from modern clothes the minute they catch sight of a tourist's camera. The Himba make for striking portrait subjects as they have a red tint to their skin from a paste called Otjize that they smear on to their skin. Made from butter, red ochre and herbs, the paste is partly to protect themselves from the vicious sun, but also for vanity purposes as the deep red colour is deemed highly desirable in their culture.

I usually start off by taking some standard portraits and then move on to trying something different like long lens reportage shots or asking subjects to run through the frame for a natural looking movement shot. A lot of the time there isn't much happening in these villages so, to get some energy in the images, you do have to turn

into a film director and ask your subjects to do certain things, like carry objects or interact with other subjects. I'm not keen on flash so all the shots were naturally lit and I also used a Lastolite reflector to fill-in any shadows. I asked my guide to hold the reflector to the side of the subjects, as I was keen to light their eyes. I was partly taking these portraits for my own satisfaction, but I can also see them being sold as stock images, too.

From the north, I drove back south to the dune areas again. It was a lot of driving so I broke it up into two days, stopping at Swakopmund. I then travelled back to Windhoek on route back to the UK.

The Namibian culture is quite diverse, with a mixture of African and German heritage left over from its colonisation. I'd describe it as Euro-African, but Namibia still has the 'feel' of Africa. I'd recommend Namibia to any photographer, but particularly to those who haven't visited Africa before. It's safe and many people speak English. You won't be short of scenic wonders, it's not 'hard going' to travel around and your money will go a long way. In fact, I'm actually tempted to go back myself again and shoot some wildlife – with my DSLR of course!

