

Willis's Walkabouts

2007 South African, Namibia, Botswana 4WD & Walk

7 Weeks: 28 February - 16 April 2007

Revised : 27 January 2007

Our first six tours to southern Africa have all been great successes – at least that's what our clients have said. We've seen a lot, but we want more. This trip will use 4WD vehicles to get us to places which are otherwise inaccessible.

Why use a Darwin-based firm for a South African tour?

Although this will be our seventh trip to South Africa, there is still no one else offering tours like these. Transport during the trip will be primarily by rental 4WD but may include various forms of public transportation as well and, of course, your own feet while carrying a day or overnight pack. This will be the same kind of trip which got us a highly recommended comment in the 1998 edition of the Lonely Planet book, *Trekking in the Patagonian Andes*. That book listed 11 companies from five countries which offer treks in the region. Nine were listed without comment. One was listed as "recommended", one as "highly recommended." (*) Willis's Walkabouts was the latter. This trip will be the kind of trip which got us the excellent recommendation in South America.

The Itinerary

Even more than most, this will be a flexible, exploratory trip. We plan to begin in Cape Town and head north stopping somewhere along the way before reaching Richtersveld in the northwest corner of South Africa. If you are interested in joining this trip, have a look at some of the links below. If you have time, look for some more and get back to us with your suggestions.

Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

This is another place where 4WDs are essential. If we have a large enough group to have two vehicles, we should be able to do one of the long distance 4WD tracks mentioned on the official SA National Parks website <http://www.sanparks.org/parks/kgalagadi/>

Here's a link to the Dept of Environmental Affairs & Tourism page describing the park. <http://www.environment.gov.za/ProjProg/TFCAs/kgalagadi.htm>

And yet more, <http://www.climaxafrica.com/Kgalagadi.htm>

It's worth noting that some of the websites I've looked at have conflicting information. Once we have enough confirmed starters to be sure we can run the trip, we'll look at these a bit more closely.

The Skeleton Coast

The Skeleton Coast in northern Namibia is an unusual environment. Rather than try and summarise, I'll offer a couple of websites and note that a large part of the Skeleton Coast National Park seems to be accessible only by 4WD.

Here's a link to an excellent Namibian website. <http://www.namibweb.com/skeleton.htm>

Unfortunately, the very northernmost part of the park may be closed to all but fly in safaris. We'll do more research before we do the trip.

Caprivi Strip

The Caprivi Strip is the tiny finger of Namibia which stretches between Angola and Botswana. It is also a good point to head south to the Okavango.

Here's a bit of information. <http://www.namibia-travel.net/northnamibia/caprivi.htm>

And another page from the same site. http://www.namibia-travel.net/northnamibia/caprivi_info.htm

And a bit more. <http://www.namibian.org/travel/namibia/caprivi.htm>

The Wikipedia articles I've seen for most of these places aren't too good. The article on Caprivi is limited but one of the better ones. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caprivi_Region

Chobe National Park

From Caprivi, we'll cross into Botswana where we'll be close to Chobe National Park. This is probably worth a visit.

Here's one bit of info. <http://www.botswana-places.co.za/chobe.html>

And another. http://www.game-reserve.com/botswana_chobe.html

(For some reason, I couldn't get some of the Botswana Government websites to work. They might be good sources of information.)

Victoria Falls

Given the current political regime in Zimbabwe, I am very hesitant to consider crossing the border to visit Victoria Falls. It is, however, only a short distance further to visit the Zambian side so we may add this in. We'll keep an eye on the situation and see how things develop.

Here's a great source of info. <http://www.zambiatourism.com/travel/places/victoria.htm>

Okavango

We'll be there at the beginning of the dry season when water should still be plentiful. This will make game harder to see but the water should make it worth while. Here's a good site for basic info.

http://www.game-reserve.com/botswana_okavango-moremi.html

This site gives a good overview of the geology and geography of the area.

<http://www.greatestplaces.org/notes/okavango.htm>

This next site has some general information plus links to more details about a number of places in the region.

<http://www.go2africa.com/botswana/okavango-delta/>

Last but far from least, here's a site with a mass of information. Follow the links on the main page.

<http://www.okavango-delta.net/>

Other

I haven't listed every possibility but I have listed enough to give you a good idea of what to expect. Other things you need to know are that the roads aren't always as good as they may be shown on the maps and that fuel is not always available where maps and tour guides say it is. Anyone who comes on this trip will need to be prepared for changes in plans along the way.

What does it cost?

South Africa and Namibia are two of the few countries where the Australian dollar still goes a long way. Botswana tends to be more expensive. Our fee is \$1950 plus an extra amount to cover our liability insurance. I cannot get a quote on this until closer to departure. Our public liability insurance requires you to have your own travel insurance. It may sound like overkill, but I have heard of a case where the Travel Insurer sued a tour operator for something that happened that they had to cover.

The \$1950 covers the guide, who also acts as organiser and cook, plus the evening meals on the walks where we do the catering. In addition, you will have to pay your share of all the expenses for food, accommodation, transport, etc. The guide will pay the same fees and fares as everyone else and will keep these as low as reasonable comfort, reliability and availability will allow.

If exchange rates stay similar, our town accommodation should cost anywhere from about A\$20 to A\$50 (US\$15 to US\$40) per night. Okavango will cost much more. The relatively low cost of restaurant meals and the high quality of our accommodation have been one of the more pleasant aspects of our previous trips. The prices above were twin share in what would be considered three or four star establishments in Australia.

Based on our recent expenses, a **very rough** estimate of the cost follows. With luck, we'll be able to shave a bit off the total. If the Aussie dollar collapses against the rand, it will cost more. If it gains, it should cost less. We do not expect the whole trip to cost less than \$6500 or more than \$8500. This does not include any souvenir shopping you may do. We should have a more accurate estimate closer to departure. I suspect it will be higher as I haven't included the cost of any guided game park walks.

Return airfare	\$	2000	Walkabouts fee	\$1950
Liability Insurance		200	Your own travel insurance	300
Breakfasts & lunches		200	Restaurant meals	500
Hire car		2000	<u>Accommodation</u>	<u>600</u>
Other park & camping fees		300	Total	\$8050

What do you get for the fee?

You get expert advice on the things to bring, the probable weather, etc. You get someone who will handle the mundane details of making the travel arrangements, doing the food shopping for the walks, organising accommodation etc. You get someone who will provide all the group equipment (billies, stoves, etc) and who will cook all the evening meals on the walks allowing you to relax and enjoy yourself. You also get a small, like-minded group of people with whom you can share your experiences and expenses. Hiring a vehicle as part of a group costs far less than hiring it with only two or three.

Note 1. Some of what you get for your money is not very visible. Bushwalking in southern Africa is restricted. Permits have to be arranged well in advance all trails have strict limits. Some of our walks are in national parks run by a national authority. Some are in provincial parks. Some are in other areas. In past years, making these bookings took anywhere from ten minutes to three weeks depending on the agency involved. All that paperwork has to be done well in advance or we won't be able to do the walks as planned.

As another example, prior to one of the long walks, you might spend a day relaxing or sightseeing while the guide goes out and hits the supermarkets, then spends an hour (or two or three) doing the final organising for the meals on the walk. If you can't see the value in services like these, you are unlikely to feel that you are getting real value for your fee.

Note 2. Prices are subject to change.

Note 3. A large majority of those who have taken part in our overseas tours are Australian so all prices are quoted in Australian dollars. We have had several people from other countries take part by making their own travel arrangements to and from the start and finish points.

Note 4. All bushwalks and 4WD driving routes are subject to change due to weather conditions. If we get really foul weather at the start of a walk, we may wish to abort it, at least temporarily. If we get really foul weather later on, we may have to cut a route short. If a road is impassable, we may have to do a long detour.

What you don't get?

You do not get a guide who will hold your hand and make every decision for you. **You** must be prepared to take on a much greater degree of responsibility than on most other tours. All members of the group, including the guide, are expected to work together in establishing how the group will function, who will lead on the walks, who will look after the stragglers, etc.

A trip such as this cannot work unless everyone helps out. A few examples may help you understand just how important this is.

Accepting the responsibility that goes with a trip like this is part of the experience we offer. It is one of the things that sets our trips apart from the vast majority of "adventure" trips on the market. For those prepared to accept this responsibility, it makes the experience doubly rewarding. Those who are not prepared to accept such responsibility would be better off going on a "normal" tour.

Is it for you?

This trip is not for the average tourist. We can neither control nor predict the weather, only accept it as it comes. If you do not want to take the necessary responsibility and/or you cannot obtain the necessary equipment, it is not for you. Good physical fitness and a good mental attitude are both necessary. If you have never carried a pack on an overnight walk, have never walked off trail, have never camped in cold, windy and wet conditions, it will be harder for you to cope with the likely conditions than for a person who has had the relevant experience. Past experience has shown us that a fit, experienced 70 year old may cope better than a fitter 25 year old who does not have experience in coping with adverse conditions.

A Final Caution and a suggestion

Do not expect everything to run like clockwork. Such things often fail to happen in South Africa. If you want to get maximum value for your money, you can go off and go sightseeing or simply relax while the guide does the food shopping or tries to organise or reconfirm hiking permits, etc. Or, if you wish, you are welcome to join him or her while (s)he does these things.

There may be occasional days between sections where you will be left to your own devices while the guide slows down and relaxes a bit and catches up on the organising. Based on past experience, things will run more smoothly if the guide does this.

If you would like a better visual picture of what these walks will be like, please have a look at our South Africa web page: www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/html/africa.html here are many photos from previous trips and links to other pages giving more information.

Conditions

1. A deposit of \$200 is payable on booking. This will be refunded in full if five people have not booked by mid December. Final payment is due by 1 November.
2. Our cancellation fees are \$200 before 1 November, \$500 before 10 December, \$900 before 15 January and the full \$1950 plus liability insurance fee after that. The different African authorities with whom we make bookings all have their own cancellation fees. If you cancel after we have made and paid for a booking on your behalf, you will lose whatever is non-refundable as well as our cancellation fee.
3. All participants are responsible for obtaining the necessary passport and visas and must have some form of travel insurance. **We need to see proof of your travel insurance before departure** We need this because of our own insurance.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Russell Willis

* Lonely Planet quote is on pages 69 and 70 of the 1998 edition.

Final Note. If you are interested in this trip and you have something else you are particularly interested in seeing, please let us know and we may be able to include it in the itinerary.

Additional Websites.

Namibia Hiking Trails: <http://www.holidaytravel.com.na/index.php?fArticleId=479>

Itinerary

There will be no more than minor, if any, changes to the itinerary below.

The Nossob 4x4 Eco Trail in Kgalagadi looks like a really good thing to do on the trip. I've finally heard back from South African Parks and they have only one departure available in March. The following is based on making that departure.

- Feb 28** Arrive in Johannesburg, early morning if flying with Thai Airways, late afternoon if flying with Qantas or South African. Collect vehicles, drive to a local B&B which we've used before. Qantas and South African Airways leave Sydney and Perth daily for Johannesburg arriving late afternoon. Thai Airways offers cheaper fares, possibly as much as \$450 cheaper but the flights all go via Bangkok and take longer. You arrive in Johannesburg very early (6:20 am). The flights leave Bangkok just after midnight on Tues, Thurs & Sat. If you don't want to stop in Johannesburg or can't make the earlier start date, it will be possible to arrive later. See below.
- Mar 1-2** Shopping for supplies and gear. We are going to want things like an esky, spade, tow rope and jerry cans. Gear can be donated to local people at the end of the trip. I don't plan to get bogged, but it's much better to be prepared. Fuel could be a big problem. I'm not sure how much we'll need. The vehicles run on petrol rather than diesel so the fuel economy won't be as good.
- Mar 3** En route to Kgalagadi
- Mar 4** Arrive Kgalagadi, overnight in park accom.
- Mar 5** **Start Nossob 4x4 Eco Trail.** This starts at Nossob, well inside the park, and finishes at Twee Rivieren on the southern border.
- Mar 6-7** **On Nossob 4x4 Eco Trail.** See the info at the end of this document.
- Mar 8** Overnight in park accom at Twee Rivieren.
- Mar 9** Day walk at Twee Rivieren. These are the only walks available at this time. Overnight at Twee Rivieren or head off and stay elsewhere as the walk is in the morning.
- Mar 10** Begin the 600-650 km drive to Windhoek. The first approx 250 km is on gravel, good highway after that.
- Mar 11** Arrive Windhoek. Overnight in Windhoek.
- Mar 12** To Swakopmund. The shortest route is 325 km, mainly gravel. Overnight in Swakopmund.
- Mar 13** Drive to Henties Bay and do one of their waling trails. Overnight in Henties Bay.
- Mar 14** Second Henties Bay Walking Trail. Overnight at Henties Bay. 18 & 20 km. The Henties Bay Website has good description and photos. The link below takes you to the Henties Bay walking trails page.
<http://www.hentiesbay.com/Tourism/walking%20trails/walking%20trails.htm>
It's worth using the menu at the top of the trails page to see some of the others. Full of info and pictures to let you know what to expect. If the link doesn't work as a link, cut and paste it into your browser.
- Mar 15-18** Skeleton Coast and en route to Etosha. Cape Cross Seal colony. breakfast.
http://www.hentiesbay.com/Tourism/cape%20cross_files/cape%20cross.htm
You might want to consider Cape Cross Lodge. Bit pricey but does include dinner & breakfast.
<http://www.namibweb.com/ccl.htm>

The distance from Terrace Bay to Okaukuejo is slightly over 500 km a bit over half of which is on gravel. I think we'll want to be somewhere en route.

- Mar 19** **Finish drive to** Etosha. <http://www.namibian.org/travel/namibia/etosha.htm>
Accom or camping at Okaukuejo. Spotlit waterhole visible from camp is well worth a watch.
- Mar 20** Driving around Etosha. Overnight at Namutoni on the eastern edge of the park or somewhere just outside. Namutoni <http://www.namibian.org/travel/lodging/namutoni.html> is probably less expensive than most of the nearby places.
- Mar 21** Exit Etosha in the east and drive toward Rundu. Rundu is 366 km by the main bitumen road. There are some gravel roads that look shorter, but the distances shown on my map are about the same.
- Mar 22-23** Popa Falls en route to Ngepi. It's a bit too far to get all the way from Etosha to Rundu to Ngepi. Two nights at Ngepi Camp. Canoe safari. Maybe Mahango Game Park. Might even sleep in a tree. Their website is worth at least a quick look, <http://ngepi.com/>. See the end of this document for more info.
Wandering through their website makes me think this will be one of the real highlights of the trip.
- Mar 24-27** Caprivi Parks. I'm particularly keen on Mamili but it will be just after the wet season so it could be a hassle. I plan to ask the people at Ngepi for advice, we might even stay there a third night. We might move on to Zambia on the 27th or even sooner depending on the roads.
- Mar 28 -** On to Zambia: Victoria and Ngonye Falls.
- Apr 4** Ngonye Falls? To quote Lonely Planet, "Imagine something almost as majestic as the Victoria Falls, but with almost no other person (local or foreign) in sight." It's hard to get to but we'll have 4WDs so we won't have a problem. See <http://www.go2africa.com/zambia/west-zambia/ngonye-falls/>
If time permits, we might make a quick visit to Kafue National Park. See <http://www.zambiatourism.com/travel/nationalparks/kafue.htm>
Depending on what I find, we could spend a bit more time in Zambia and less approaching Maun.
- Apr 5-7** Back to Botswana. Through Chobe to Maun and the Okavango. Boat trip at the north end of the park seems to be recommended. It won't be cheap. Here is a quote from one of the websites mentioned in the trip notes.
"The Okavango does not really cater for the 'Budget Traveller' - This is deliberate policy on the part of the Botswana Government. They are anxious to avoid the mass tourism that has been allowed to spoil other areas of Africa, but also to protect the fragile eco-system that is the Okavango Delta."
"The Government achieves this by making the Okavango a very expensive and difficult place to visit - The Government Airline Air Botswana is the only carrier allowed to fly in to Maun (the 'gateway' to the Okavango Delta) from the major hubs - and fares are astronomical.
Lodges and Camps are charged very high Concession Fees, Resource Royalties and Community Charges, and visitors must pay Park Entrance Fees of around US\$30 per day."
An accommodation list for the area had five price categories. The cheapest was "under US\$200 per person per night". The most expensive was over US\$1500 per person per night.
Oddballs has given us an offer of four nights for US\$920 per person or five nights for US\$1110 per person. See http://www.okavango-delta-safaris.com/Oddballs_Camp_Okavango.asp
Spend the night of the 7th in Maun.
- Apr 8-13** Oddballs & back to Maun. Alternatively, a 5th night at Oddballs. If we go for a 5th night at Oddballs, I might have to shift it back to the 8th.
- April 14-15** Leave Maun and the Okavango and head toward Johannesburg.

April 16 Arrive Johannesburg about noon. Tentative return to Australia. Flight leaves Johannesburg for Perth at 16:40 arriving at 08:20 the following morning. Different times if flying with other airlines.

Here is an email from Ngepi.

I have attached a full list of our rates for accommodation and activities for 2007.

Our standard mokoro trip is for two and a half hours from Ngepi camp and costs N\$100 pp. We also offer a half day trip that involves driving up to Popa Falls and then by mokoro downstream back to Ngepi, stopping off for a village tour. This is N\$300 for a minimum of 4 pax.

There are not really any designated hiking trails or routes, but it is perfectly safe to walk around the area of Ngepi. There are lots of small settlements located around Ngepi Camp and a large network of paths running between these and down to the river. We offer guided walks for +/- 2hrs, either early morning to see the local birdlife or during the day to a nearby village to see the way of life and have some of the customs and traditions of the local Hambukushu tribe explained.

Unfortunately I do not have any personal experience of Mamili Park. I do know that it is not visited by too many people and it appears to be quite hard to get information about what is available there. The access to this area can be a problem when the river is high and the area becomes waterlogged.

Apart from camping sites there is a choice of simple accommodation available at Ngepi Camp consisting of 2 Bush Huts and 7 Tree-houses.

The Bush Huts are rustic huts made of reed walls and thatch roof and are divided into two small rooms, one with one double and the other with two single beds, making them ideal for families. They are equipped with mosquito nets and have their own bathroom at the rear. The price for 2007 is N\$250 pp for room only.

The Tree-houses are constructed from reed walls and thatch roof and are built on raised wooden platforms around a tree and overlooking the river. It is simple accommodation but with lots of character and each one is slightly different. The Tree-houses come complete with either one double or two single beds with mosquito nets plus their own toilet and shower. The price for 2007 is N\$330 pp for room only.

To hold a booking we take a non-refundable deposit of 25% of the full cost of accommodation.

This deposit can be paid direct into our bank account or it can also be paid by credit card.

Meals are available from a menu during the day from 7.00am to 5.30pm, and in the evenings we serve a fixed dinner including dessert for N\$90 per person, which should be booked by 5.30pm.

Directions for Ngepi are as follows:-

Ngepi Camp is located 14km from Divundu, which is a small settlement on the B8 road between Rundu (200km) and Katima Mulilo (320km). At the T-junction in Divundu you will see signs for Ngepi Camp as well as for Popa Falls and Mahango Park which are in the same direction. Turn onto the D3403 road and drive 10km until you see the sign for Ngepi Camp on the left hand side, from where it is a further 4km.

If you are coming from Botswana you enter Namibia at Mohembo Border Post and continue driving straight through Mahango Park. When you exit the park gate it is a further 9km until you reach the turn-off to Ngepi on the right hand side, from where it is another 4km.

The GPS co-ordinates for Ngepi Camp are:- south 18° 07' .075" / east 21° 40' .225"

For further information check out our website www.ngepicamp.com

On the next page is an email I got from Oddballs.

Many thanks for your email and it sounds like you have an exciting tour ahead!

I have to agree, the Okavango is very expensive but as it offers one of the best game & wilderness experiences in Southern Africa it is not too be missed. A stay at Oddballs would be great to finish a tour though Southern Africa. The Camp is a no-frills camp but still offers great comfort, delicious meals and there is always a cold beer at the bar. The Oddballs staff is the most welcoming team in the Okavango and even after 2 months on the road you will see that your tour group will learn so much from the guides, nothing beats tracking the animals on foot!

Oddballs is not reachable by car, the best is to first drive back to Maun, spend one night here, and depart the following morning on a charter flight to Oddballs. The flight is very scenic and a brilliant experience by itself, this will give you the opportunity to see the water ways from the Okavango from above, the only inland Delta in the world! By 17 April the flood water from Angola will most likely have come up, spectacular to see from a plane.

If spending one night in Maun I can highly recommend to stay at Audi Camp, a very nice campsite with all facilities, including a bar with the ---best- Okavango safari stories as all the local safari operators, pilots & lodge owners gather here. I can ask them for you to leave the cars here, they have 24 hr security, but of course; valuables should never be left in the car. Alternatively you can park the cars opposite the Airport at Avis Car hire for a small fee.

<http://www.okavangocamp.com>

Please find below a quote for a stay at Oddballs. 2 nights is the minimum amount of nights for a stay, and 4 nights for a mokoro trial / bushcamp. But you may wish to enjoy the facilities in Camp after coming through Moremi, Savute & Chobe... If staying in camp each night the price remains the same as staying 2 nights in camp & 2 nights out on Mokoro trial.

Oddballs:

http://www.okavango-delta-safaris.com/Oddballs_Camp_Okavango.asp

<http://mokoro.island-safari.com/>

Your Itinerary includes:

- Light aircraft flight Maun to Oddballs Camp
- 4 nights accommodation at Oddballs, with the option for 2nd & 3rd night on Mokoro Trail
- All meals; Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner - on a 'self preparation' basis whilst on Mokoro Trail
- Teas & Coffees & non bottled water
- All excursions into the Moremi Game Reserve by both mokoro and walking safaris accompanied by your personal Guide (one Guide for two persons)
- Moremi Game Reserve Park entrance Fees
- All basic camping equipment whilst on Mokoro Trail; tent, mattresses, cutlery, crockery, pots and pans, BBQ grid and cooler box
- Light aircraft flight Oddballs to Maun
- Sales Tax
- Botswana air tax

It excludes:

- International flight to and from Maun
- Visa fees
- Sleeping bags if going out on Mokoro Trail, they can be hired with prior notice
- Travel and medical insurance
- Gratuities and Items of personal nature
- Laundry & Drinks other than tea & coffee and non-bottled water at Oddballs

Our discounted price for the above itinerary:

4 nights at Oddballs is US\$920 (appr AUD\$ 1,200) per person sharing for a direct booking for April 2007 (this is the Nett tourgroup rate, rack would be US\$1,350)