

The 18-hole Rössmund Golf Course, one of only five registered all-grass desert golf courses in the world, where springbok graze on the greens.

SWAKOPMUND

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A lovely town on the edge of an inhospitable desert, Swakopmund sprawls along the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, its back to the undulating ochre-and-red sand dunes and gravel-covered lichen fields of the vast Namib Desert. It lies just north of the Tsoakhaub (Swakop) River mouth.

Getting There

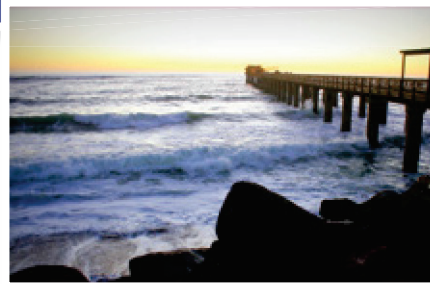
Fly into Windhoek's Hosea Kutako International Airport or Walvis Bay's Rooikop Airport, and drive to Swakopmund. Or take the slow TransNamib train from Windhoek to the coast, or the luxury Desert Express with several excursions en route. Or hop on a shuttle bus.

History

It was founded in 1892 by Major Curt van Francois of the Schutztruppe as the main harbour for German South West Africa (now Namibia) — the deep sea harbour of Walvis Bay, some 30 km south, was under British control. In 1915, South Africa took control of the country from Germany, until Namibian independence in 1990. Much of the architecture is still in the German colonial style, with gorgeously preserved historical buildings, and many people still speak German.

Climate

The pleasantly temperate climate attracts visitors from up country, keen to flee



Left from the top: View from the Woermann Tower looking towards the sand dunes. Pelicans at the quaint Walvis Bay waterfront, and the historic Swakopmund jetty with a seafood restaurant at its tip.

riding in the Swakop river valley, through the dunes and along the beach.

Or buy an ice-cream at the Museum Café and stroll to the front of the breakwater (the Mole), which was originally constructed north of the Swakop river mouth to create a safe harbour. This silted up, forming a beach ideal for sun-bathing and swimming. No visit to Swakopmund is complete without crisp freshly baked Brötchen from Café Treff Punkt, whose baked goods come from the Hansa Bäckerei.

Excursions

Drive east to the dramatic and desolate Moon Landscape and follow Weltwitschia Drive into the lichen fields to the largest *Welwitschia mirabilis* – over 1500 years old.

Drive north to the angling village of Henties Bay and the largest colony of Cape Fur Seals in the world at Cape Cross, and onwards to the isolated Skeleton Coast National Park.

Drive south to Walvis Bay, via the beach resorts of Langstrand and Dolphin Beach. Refresh yourself with strong coffee and German Brötchen at Café Probst, admire flocks of flamingos feeding in the shallow waters of the lagoon. Take the inland road (C34) back to Swakopmund, stopping at Dune 7, at 130 metres the highest dune in the coastal dune belt.

The history of Swakopmund is peopled with fascinating characters, who displayed courage and resourcefulness in the face of hardship and adversity. Amble in their footsteps and be awed by those brave pioneers who settled in the desert. ■

scorching summers. An impenetrable morning fog regularly cloaks the town (10 km inland, though, the skies are blue!); clearing up mid-morning, it reveals brilliant blue skies. Desert-adapted fauna and flora depend on this fog for their survival.

Activities and sightseeing

As befits a tourist mecca, every type of accommodation is available, as well as shops, banks and internet cafés, arts, crafts and souvenir shops. Adrenalin junkies will be in heaven — take a flip in a helicopter, micro-light or small plane, go skydiving or hot air ballooning, quad-biking or sand-boarding, horse-riding and even camel-