

Friday 18 September 2020

# SPOTLIGHT

on

# Tourism



## Reviving Tourism & Leisure



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## Foreword

# Developing Post Covid Tourism Activities



**Pohamba Shifeta, MP**  
Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism

The tourism sector is the hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic due to restrictions particularly in travel.

To avoid the further spread of the pandemic, countries across the world, Namibia included, closed their borders. This has led to a situation in which the country's tourism enterprises have recorded very little to no income. Furthermore, companies closed and people lost their jobs. This is a painful situation for any government to witness. For this reason, Namibia's government tried to come up with initiatives to assist enterprises to weather the storm.

After months of battling with the Covid-19 pandemic, on 22 June, his excellency Dr Hage G Geingob announced the Tourism Revival Strategy. The initiative started on 1 September with specific protocols for the sector and visitors to adhere to in the wake of this pandemic.

The revival initiative and the pandemic itself present an opportunity for the tourism sector to transform itself in alignment to what is referred to as the 'new normal'. We must develop tourism products that recognise and promote co-existence with Covid-19. I urge that Namibia must take a lead in developing post-Covid tourist activities, at the same time giving our visitors a maximum Namibian experience.

Tourism is a competitive sector, but Namibia has a competitive edge because of its amazing landscapes and abundance of wildlife species. Since Namibia's tourism is highly dependent on wildlife and landscapes, I urge everyone to shun poaching particularly that of high-valued species.

The country has many attractions which must be marketed aggressively. This includes the 20 national parks; one of the oldest deserts with the highest sand dunes in the world; the largest canyon in Africa, the Fish River Canyon, second

only to the Grand Canyon; amazing cultural diversity and people; largest free-roaming desert lion population in communal areas; largest cheetah population in the world; the second-lowest human population density of any sovereign country, after Mongolia.

In addition, Namibia has sound policies and a legal framework in place to assist in achieving tourism growth and development. The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism in consultation with the tourism sector has also developed the National Tourism Investment Profile & Promotion Strategy and the National Sustainable Tourism Growth and Development Strategy, in order to address constraints and strategically re-position Namibia's tourism sector into becoming the key national economic and development sector of preference.

The country's tourism sector is facing challenges. It must be understood that Namibia is not a mass-market or an easy destination. Namibia is a niche market, requiring excellent services and products.

The tourism sector is further very susceptible to negative international, regional and national incidents that can have serious impacts, e.g. pandemics such as Ebola and potential security threats even though far away from Namibia.

Seasonality is a main challenge to investment in the Namibian tourism sector. Most income has to be generated in four to six months. This is a drain on assets, and pressure on cash flow during low season of severely reduced income makes it difficult to maintain momentum and commitment. This also underscores the need to do due diligence in the way that business plans are structured to ensure return on investment.

Finally, from the government perspective, we fully recognise the importance of tourism as one of the pillars of our economy.

The government will continue to make efforts to create a conducive environment enabling all the stakeholders to grow from strength to strength.

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For guests' added convenience, the hotel recently passed a stringent government health and safety (Covid-19) audit ensuring that all relevant protocols and interventions are in place for the safety of hotel employees and guests.

A fantastic promotion is currently on offer for all people residing in Namibia. For more information, please email: [reservations@nesthotel.com](mailto:reservations@nesthotel.com)



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## FROM THE BACKPACK OF A

# Domestic Traveller

CHARLOTTE NANDJAMBA

THE road to southern Namibia is usually busy. If someone is not fixing a punctured tyre or playing photographer to their spouse at Solitaire, then it's a bus parked at the roadside while groups of travellers take pictures of the majestic landscape.

This was not the case during my recent visit to one of Namibia's biggest attractions.

The roads were empty, sadly so. The gravel was smooth – as a consequence of a reduced number of travellers and, frankly, the journey felt longer than it should've been.

I remember thinking, "Goodness, this pandemic really hit us!" on arrival at our destination.

Things were the same, but not quite.

There was an aura of peace and quiet, but just a little more quiet than usual. It later hit me that there was some reduction in staff at the lodge. I also spoke to a staff member who mentioned that they have resorted to rotating shifts as there was no longer demand for every employee to be on site every day.

That is one of the ways in which the coronavirus pandemic hit us.

Jobs have been lost and lives have changed drastically.

Many people have had to stay home and wait for the situation to get better. Every other week, some or other company announces retrenchments. It's difficult. That is why I am here to encourage you to explore Namibia.

Why, you ask?

Namibia is Safari heaven!

We have the largest free-roaming rhino population outside parks in the world; the largest population

of cheetahs; we have the welwitschia plant, the Big 5 and the Hoba meteorite, and have you seen our landscapes? Mother Nature's finest achievement!

It may be vast and the distances travelled may be long, but Namibia has so much for us to do and see. Sossusvlei, Kolmanskop, the unique coastlines of Swakopmund and Skeleton Coast. So much to offer!

Additionally, the point where the cold Atlantic Ocean and the world's oldest desert meet is right here, in Namibia. It does not get better than that.

Namibia is home to some of the finest natural wonders. We have the Fish River Canyon – the second largest canyon in the world – and the reddest and highest dunes and wildlife in abundance in places like Etosha National Park, all making for perfect adventures.

I have been to a number of resorts in the country, including Omaanda, a lodge of Zannier Hotels, the Am Weinberg Boutique Hotel, the stunning Desert Whisper and Desert Grace of the Gondwana Collection, recently Mowani Mountain Camp, the oh so authentic Ngepi Camp and Popa Falls Resort of Namibia Wildlife Resorts.

Each experience was unique. Worth every cent spent.

There are a number of specials running right now. Grab your bag and camp through southern Namibia, convince your family to take a safari vacation in Etosha. The Erongo region ban has been lifted, so it's time to finally see Sandwich Harbour.

Do all of this and more.

You won't just be gaining unforgettable memories, you will be changing and saving lives too.

*\* Ndapanda Haininga is a Namibian travel blogger.*

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*Twitter: @lahyahaininga*



Gitta Paetzold

CHARLOTTE NAMBADJA

OVER the past decade, the Namibian tourism sector has grown to become one of the three most important pillars and contributors to the country's economy.

Tourism was confirmed in the recently published Tourist Statistical Report 2019 to be one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in Namibia, both in terms of its valuable contribution to the country's gross domestic product and due to its significant contribution to employment creation.

Overall revenue generated from tourism in 2019 was between N\$22 billion and N\$25 billion.

Tourism contributed between 11% and 15% to the country's gross domestic product, and provided jobs to about 47 000 people directly employed in the sector.

Its overall employment impact was in the form of about 120 000 job opportunities – about 20% of the total labour force – provided directly and indirectly.

Gitta Paetzold, chief executive officer of the Hospitality Association of Namibia (HAN), which was founded in 1987, in an interview with *The Namibian* said what was remarkable

## Hospitality Sector's Battle for Survival

about tourism was that it created opportunities for livelihoods and income for Namibians across the country – in particular in rural and remote areas, and that people of all walks of life and skills levels could find opportunities in this sector.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, which has affected the entire planet, tourism has been the sector hardest hit, with travel having come to a standstill and tourist arrivals in Namibia plummeting to zero after the lockdowns were announced.

After the announcement in mid-March 2020 that the country's borders were being closed and a ban placed on international travel, Namibia's tourism industry came to an abrupt halt, Paetzold said. The unpredictability of the duration of this situation and the lack of certainty on a way forward is making matters even worse for tourism and the ability to plan for a future, she stressed.

The tourism sector is facing a total revenue loss of between N\$15 billion and N\$18 billion in a best-case scenario this year (70% to 80% revenue loss compared to 2019), while 30 000 jobs directly in tourism are also expected to be lost.

By mid-August, as far as HAN was informed, only a few in the tourism sector confirmed to have received financial assistance from the government through wage subsidies and other aid.

The industry also approached banks and other institutions for assistance, through payment holidays and the like, but in reality the severe income loss and bleak outlook for income for the rest of the year has forced many employers to downscale operations severely, including staff and salary cuts, while a number of businesses have been put on ice, with the possibility of not being able to reopen at all, said Paetzold.

### RELIEF

In June, restaurants and catering businesses were allowed to resume trade, and Namibians were again able to enjoy the 'winning and dining' experience.

For the past three months, a part of the accommodation

and catering sector could resume some of their operations. Travel within Namibia kept spirits and morale up, and many of those lodges and establishments that did decide to restart operations were able to share some of the beauty and splendour of the country's uniquely diverse scenery, Paetzold recounted. It was encouraging to see that some Namibians made use of the special prices offered over the past few weeks and months to experience and discover all corners of the country, she said.

Sadly, this came to an abrupt halt again in mid-August, with the return to travel restrictions in Khomas and Erongo, resulting again in hundreds of bed nights booked in the second half of August having to be cancelled, she noted.

Marketing companies are hard at work with promotional material, in the form of videos, online platforms, brochures and the like, and HAN is delighted to see support from Namibia's local media to help carry the flag for Namibian tourism and help HAN tell the country's story, she said.

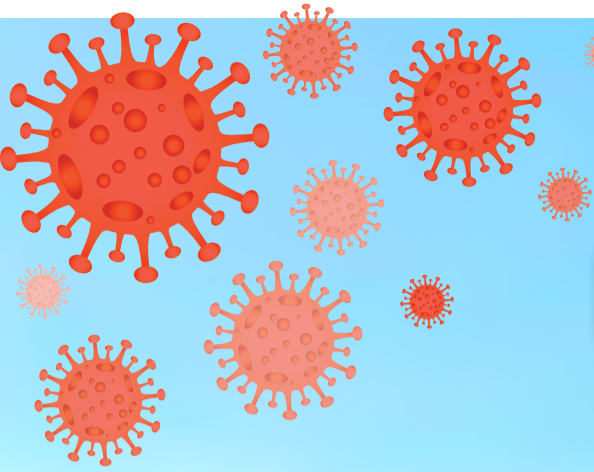
HAN wants to ensure that the world keeps Namibia in mind as the "ideal destination to travel to post-Covid", to escape to wide open spaces, the sparsely populated countryside and the fresh air and sunshine the country provides to replenish the bodies and souls of people, said Paetzold.

Namibia's image as a safe and spectacular travel destination has not been tarnished at all by the international coronavirus crisis, as thus far the country's actions and reactions to the pandemic have been responsible and commendable, she said.

However, she added, the time has come for all to face that the current situation compels us to accept reality and learn to live with the virus, as it is not likely to leave the globe soon, and hardly any country to keep its doors closed forever.

A country with an economy that relies on tourism for a significant part of its overall income does not have the luxury to suffocate this sector forever – as that may be to the detriment of the entire nation.





# Covid-19 sends tourism SMEs CRASHING



### TUTALENI PINEHAS

THE Covid-19 pandemic has ravaged the global tourism sector, particularly small-scale entrepreneurs, and Namibians have not been spared.

Sister Kashala is a travel consultant who owns Lazilia Travels, a small travel curating company which specialises in budget group trips for mostly young adults.

The startup has been affected by the pandemic such that much of the momentum they gained in business has been lost.

The company was established in 2019 by Sister Kashala, who realised that most people love travelling, but struggle with travel partners. The company then organised group tours to make life easy for those finding it hard to get partners.

She explains that originally the company organised trips to Cape Town only, but it added Zanzibar to its list of destinations.

Her company offered packages ranging from a weekend, to three nights and seven nights. However, its tours have been suspended due to Covid-19 lockdowns and travel bans.

"We are keenly following developments regarding the travel bans to determine whether to start organising trips to Cape Town and Zanzibar or not," she says.

Kashala says the pandemic has, however, presented the company with an opportunity to tap into the local tourism market.

"We had two trips to Sossusvlei and two others are on hold because of the travel restrictions imposed on Windhoek." This was meant to be our year for expansion,

but this could not happen due to the pandemic. However, I believe the pandemic has created some local opportunities for Lazilia Travels as well.

"As a budget travel curator, we definitely believe our target market will be keen to travel after the pandemic." The company's tour groups have between 10 and 12 people; although the biggest group they can cater for can be as big as 40 people.

"I think the government needs to shift the focus from temporary measures and develop recovery measures aimed at reviving the industry," she says.

Another small to medium enterprise hit by the impact of Covid-19 is Katu Tours, which provided tourists an opportunity to get a first-hand experience and view of Katutura, the township that many describe as the heart of Windhoek.

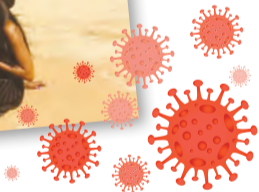
This experience comes through a bicycle tour of Katutura.

The route through Katutura offers tourists a lot of opportunities to see local lifestyles and culture, Katu Tours owner Anna Mwafila explains.

"Tourists usually spend most tours sitting in vehicles, and I want to give them a different experience during their visit to Namibia and show them that it is not only about landscapes, but there is an interesting community right here that has so much to share and teach," she says.

The company has temporarily closed because of the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdowns.

The travel bans also meant that no tourists came to Namibia to experience Katutura. Mwafila has relocated to Germany for the time being.



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# Travel and Tourism vital to economy of our country



As we all know, tourist destinations around the globe are experiencing huge economic loss from the drastic decrease in travellers. The worldwide numbers are devastating with the scenario in Namibia just as bleak, as the industry across the whole country having been dealt a devastating blow as the COVID-19 travel ban and shut down of borders has had an impact on products and services, suppliers, recreation, clothing, housing and household goods (needed in B&B's); spending and tax payments by employees in this industry and VAT payable to the Receiver of Revenue.

Travel and Tourism remains a vital aspect in any country which is reliant on its income and where this sector is one of the four GDP pillars on which the economy of the country rests. Everyone in our country has been hit – from the street vendor selling his handmade items to tourists, to the luxury lodge which caters to the affluent travellers.

Last week our Government released the 2019 tourism statistics report where more than 1,6 million tourists visited our country in that year. 2020, of course, will paint a much different picture. We know, that this industry remains one of the largest



earning industries in Namibia and it is thus imperative to ensure that this industry survives and revives within our country as soon as possible.

FNB Namibia has been a partner to this industry for many years and is the preferred financial services provider for many in the tourism community. FNB has been assisting establishments, tour operators, car rental companies, professional hunters, and more – as far possible during the last four months of the pandemic through the offer of payment holidays, budget restructuring, and other financial relief.

We have been working tirelessly with our clients over the past few months to assist where possible and to ensure that they are able to survive the pandemic and safeguard their livelihoods and that of their dependents.

## Here are few general pointers

To ensure the bank understands your business and supports your plans for the future especially in these uncertain and challenging times.



### Be proactive

Talk to your bank / relationship manager as soon as possible about your situation. Please do so before you default on any payments due. Once default occurs, our mandate as a Bank is much less than when you speak to us pro-actively.



### Be honest

About your situation and the challenges you are encountering.



### Plan properly

What are the critical expenses you need to pay in order to sustain your business until things return to normal?



### Manage your finances

Keep detailed and relevant records. Make sure your financial statements are in order, accurate and up to date.



### Be prepared

Keep all the necessary and relevant documents on hand and ready before your appointment at the bank. All these documents are critically important and will ensure that the bank understands your application or request and will consider it with the merit it deserves.



### Be informed

Be informed – keep in contact with people in the industry. This will help you stay in touch with what is happening in the greater industry.



# FNB

How can we help you?

While the travel and tourism industry has probably been the hardest hit industry by COVID-19, history tells us that this industry has always shown a strong resilience to adapt, innovate, and grow from adversity. We know there has been a huge impact, but also believe that together we will overcome this and help our clients to re-build their livelihoods.

To continue the conversation, contact Christo Viljoen at [CViljoen@fbnamibia.com.na](mailto:CViljoen@fbnamibia.com.na)





# Views on domestic tourism

**YOKANY OLIVEIRA**

In a bid to boost Namibia's tourism sector, many local businesses including hotels and lodges have reduced their prices, while others have offered special holiday packages. We asked Namibians whether they would use this opportunity to travel locally. Here's what they had to say:

Yes, I would definitely travel more with cheaper rates, and advise people to do the same. It would be great though for the tourism industry to consider special rates for locals during the low season. We have over the few months seen that locals have been the most valuable clients. Namibia is one of the world's most scenic countries. There is so much to see, ranging from wildlife to landscapes and a burst of rich culture.



**Grace Luvindao**  
(30), Communication and stakeholder engagement practitioner: Capricorn Group

Yes. In fact, I was planning to travel as soon as travel restrictions on Windhoek are relaxed. Mainly because initially, the prices were ridiculously high for locals. I do not think the tourism industry does enough to encourage locals to travel. They believe international travellers are sufficient to sustain their businesses and make them profitable. Covid-19 should have encouraged locals to travel.



**Maitjituavi Kavetu**  
(28), Corporate lawyer

It would depend on the economy; whether I have money or not, or if it's the best time for a vacation with my family. I recently got retrenched and my business is suffering. Hopefully the president will open Windhoek soon.



**Maggy Kambonde**  
(29), Former chef, street vendor

Yes, I would consider travelling locally but I believe once international tourists are welcomed back into the country the tariffs will skyrocket. In the past months I have not travelled locally due to the Covid-19 lockdown.



**Fiffy Kashululu** (29), Cyclist



I do travel locally; I've been to a lot of lodges and paid ridiculous prices. Local prices should be three times cheaper so that we can travel a lot nationally. One thing that bothers me is the treatment. Foreigners and white Namibians are treated special whereas locals are treated like we are not supposed to be there.

**Hitjevi Hijakaere**  
(34), Civil servant

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# Lessons for the Tourism Sector Post-Covid-19

A QUICK look at the situation in the Namibian tourism sector shows it is going through an unprecedented period that requires it to re-engineer itself, says Mufaro Nesongano, corporate communications manager at Namibia Wildlife Resorts.

"The reality is that no one has all the solutions for challenges faced by the sector," he adds.

Nesongano highlights that "amidst this crisis, there are possible lessons to learn which can be explored and taken advantage.

The following are some of the lessons for the tourism sector:

## FUNDAMENTALS

To get the best out of the sector going forward, the fundamentals must be right, and one of the critical fundamentals is making it easier for travellers to acquire visas. Thus far, the Namibian government should be applauded for having started a programme in September 2019 where tourists from more than 60 countries, nearly half of them in Africa, can receive their tourist visas on arrival. The government could, therefore, look at adding more countries onto the list to increase Namibia's visitors' base.

## MESSAGING

After Covid-19, countries need to work on their messaging to take advantage of their distinct offerings. Some time ago, Bernd Schneider, chairman of the Namibia Tourism Association (NTA), said something interesting.

He emphasised that Namibia is known as the country with wide open spaces which in itself have not been lost or will change post-Covid-19. Considering that social distancing will be the norm for some months to come, as a country, Namibia can capitalise on its wide open spaces that offer social distancing to whoever wants to visit.

## TECHNOLOGY

The tourism sector needs to harness the power of technology if it is to take advantage of travellers that use technology for most of their travel arrangements and decision making. For instance, a travel app such as LEFA or TaxiConnect can greatly assist tourists searching for reliable transport. In contrast, PayToday can assist in making various payments for different types of products and services more accessible.

With the world pushing towards harnessing technology as a way of life, different companies can look at creating their apps or better still make use of the apps already in existence. For example, in February 2020, there were 687 000 Facebook users in Namibia with that figure growing to 711 000 in March 2020. This is the potential reach that companies have at their disposal.

## MARKETS

Something that came out prominently was the need for tapping into new markets or tackling the current markets that have not received the necessary attention. International markets that have driven the tourism sector will not disappear overnight. However, post-Covid-19, there is an opportunity to look at emerging markets that could become significant contributors to Namibia's GDP in years to come. Equally, increasing the visibility within the SADC region is an opportunity the sector can look at, considering ease of market access.

## BUSINESS MODEL

With the disruption that Covid-19 has brought, there is a need to rethink the current business models. For instance, if domestic travellers were a segment that as an operator you did not pay much attention to, this is an opportunity to do so. Equally, if the pricing of products or activities was a hindrance for the domestic market to visit, offering discount rates or loyalty programmes could be some of the ideas operators could look into to grow their local market share.

## PARTNERSHIPS

The last lesson is that if the tourism sector wants to get out of this crisis more robust, it would need to strengthen current partnerships. Through alliances, great opportunities to collaborate can be explored. Opportunities that exist are media houses working with different establishments to create campaigns that can improve the sentiment of the sector among local travellers.

Other partnerships could involve the use of social media influencers to market one's product or service to a broader audience. There are many other partnerships that could be created, which reminds us of the African proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

\*Compiled by: Mufaro Nesongano



Mufaro Nesongano, Corporate communications manager at Namibia Wildlife Resorts.

Photo: Tutaleni Pinehas



Recipients of 2019 Eco Awards



## ECO AWARDS NAMIBIA

### Sustainable tourism in Namibia

Eco Awards Namibia is the only Certification Programme, rating sustainability in Namibian Tourism Establishments. It is an NGO-partnership of twelve organisations, comprising private sector, civil society, tertiary Institutions and the government, including the Namibian Tourism Board, that have come together to form an 'Alliance'. This Alliance promote, supports and facilitates the development of responsible and sustainable tourism in Namibia, specifically through the Eco Awards Namibia assessment programme, making Namibia a destination of choice for environmentally conscious tourists and setting international standards of excellence in the industry.

Fenata and the NTB has produced a Covid-19 protocol for tourism business in Namibia. It includes information to help these businesses make decisions about how to ensure they put the health and safety of people first. Based on these protocols, Eco Awards Namibia had drafted a Covid-19 readiness checklist, which assessors can use to do a third party audit, while doing sustainability assessments. This will ensure minimising their environmental impacts and continue their important community support work, as well as caring for their staff.

All details regarding the programme, including the criteria, the Good Practices Handbook, the process for application and the names of current Award holders, can be found on the website: [www.ecoawards-namibia.org](http://www.ecoawards-namibia.org) or obtained by email to the project coordinator, Hazel Milne, [admin@ecoawards-namibia.org](mailto:admin@ecoawards-namibia.org)



# Attracting Tourists through Ornaments, Culture

ARLANA SHIKONGO

THE contrasting, beautiful landscapes of Namibia are home to people belonging to various tribes and clans.

These organised groups of people have faced and experienced diverse histories, ranging from migrations from west African countries to pushing back against the influence of various missionary groups and colonial powers.

In the midst of all this, the tribes fostered their own cultures and traditions; all signified by various symbols carried with them as ornaments and trinkets.

Namibia's tribes are a pivotal part of experiencing the country's culture. They have become just as important a part of tourism as the landscapes and wildlife that are the traditional highlights for visitors to the country.

## AAWAMBO

The Aawambo, one of the largest tribes in the country, have a vast collection of colours, traditional wear and trinkets that are symbolic. Perhaps the most popular of them is the odelela fabric. What was originally a material produced from dyed animal hide, has now evolved into a pink, red, black and white dyed cotton cloth.

The white cotton cloth is decked with stripes coloured red and black. The cloth can be left white, but it is often coloured a bright pink with a powdered dye called oshide, obtained from grinding stones.

What was in the past reserved for significant cultural and traditional ceremonies has now become an easily recognisable and obtainable print which has found its way into mainstream fashion and become an eye-catching cultural ornament for Namibians.

## OVAHERERO

The Ovaherero women's iconic headdress, the otjikaiva, has become a recognisable ornamental feature of the Namibian tribal landscape.

Representative of the history of the Ovaherero and who they are as a people, it is also symbolic of a most sacred and cherished possession for the tribe: their cattle.

The otjikaiva, too, has gone through an evolution to get to its present-day form.

The piece is so instrumental and emblematic to the tribe that in 2018 an entire festival was launched in its name.



## OVAHIMBA

Called the 'red people of Namibia', the Ovahimba are perhaps globally one of the most well-known tribes. Apart from being recognised as one of the few groups that continues to live in its traditional ways, they are quickly identifiable because of the red, matt colouring in which they cover their hair and bodies.

The colouring – called otjize – is a combination of red ochre pigment, butterfat and spices used by the Ovahimba people to protect themselves from the hot and dry climate of the environment where they live. It is also said to cleanse the skin.

The colour red is said to be symbolic to the tribe, representing the deep red earth tone of their home area, Kaokoland (now Kunene region).

## KAVANGO

The people of the Kavango regions are known for their woodcarving and reed-weaving, the products which have become a vital part of their sustenance.

Woodcarving has become an important and popular local industry as items such as bowls and masks are produced for trade, tourists and other markets.

In the Kavango (east and west) and Zambezi regions numerous little craft shops can be found in which these ornamental creations are displayed and sold.



## SAN

Dubbed 'the first people of southern Africa', the San have historically been identified as the oldest remaining African tribe. They are believed to be the world's most ancient race.

An iconic symbol of the tribe's material culture can be observed in their beadwork, seen in the beaded jewellery



adorning their necks, waists, knees and ankles.

The San's use of beads is said to be symbolic of 'magic and medicine' as the beads were used for both protective and medicinal functions. The San, who are naturalists by way of their hunter-gatherer lifestyle, are traditionally known to be 'medicine people'.

The beads are made from a variety of materials: stone, horns, teeth, ostrich eggshells, marine shells, wood, glass and more. Today, these bead items contribute to the livelihood of San clans as tourists purchase the handmade items as mementos of their encounter with the historic tribe.

Tourism also generates income for San communities through 'living museums' where visitors can learn about their traditions and way of life through first-hand experiences with the tribe's people.



## BASTER

Descendants of the Khoikhoi people and European settlers in the Cape Colony, the ethnically mixed group can be identified by the white 'kappie' worn by Baster women.

The bucket-styled head covering, meant to shield the wearer's face from direct sunlight and sunburn, is not worn every day, however, it is still a part of the group's ceremonial attire.

## DAMARA

The Damara are a people who are very connected to nature and as a result they have rich knowledge of natural medicine. Much of their healing processes are based on herbal medicine and these practices are a pinnacle of their culture.

One such medicine is the traditional Sâ i (perfume powder) used by women as a self-care product. It is a small flower found in Namibia's forests which is pounded into a powder and then stored in a !Uros (tortoise).

The natural perfume powder is a rite of passage for women which is gifted to them when they come of age. Aside from its aromatic qualities, it is also said to aid tranquility and clear one's alignment.

The preparation of the powder is also ritualistic, as Damara tradition requires that songs are sung during the pounding. Herbal medicines and healing processes are interconnected for the tribe; and this knowledge is carried with them from birth to death.



The Mbunza, one of the five Kavango tribes living along the Okavango river, fish in the river using their self-made reed baskets. Fishing is one of the activities which dominates the Mbunza's economic life.



# Afro-style flair at Sossus Dune



**ENDLESS VIEWS** ... Excellent views of the dunes and mountains can be admired from the chalets.



**MATRON FIGURE** ... Loide Mukuwiilongo has been a manager at Sossus Dune Lodge for the past six years.



**GUIDED TOUR** ... Oscar Mainga is the in-house tour guide at Sossus Dune Lodge.



**TUTALENI PINEHAS**

**T**UCKED away near the Sesriem gate in the Namib-Naukluft National Park close to the Sossusvlei tourist attraction is Sossus Dune Lodge. The lodge is surrounded by an array of mountain ranges, the beautiful Sesriem canyons and a never-ending horizon. The Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR) establishment is built

in an attractive 'afro-village' style that is also environmentally sensitive, using wooden frames and canvas walls and topped with thatched roofs. Sossus Dune Lodge offers guests an evocative and life-changing experience. The most easily noticeable personality at the lodge is the affable Meme Loide Mukuwiilongo. Meme Loide is the lodge manager and has been working for NWR for the past 11 years.

healthy profits for 2020 since we had fully paid bookings," she explained. The bookings have, however, been postponed to next year, and the funds from the bookings have been used for other operational costs. "It is going to be very hard to recover from this situation," she said. But it is not all doom and gloom as business at the camp started picking up since June with local tourists visiting for an experience at the lodge – mainly at weekends, she highlighted.

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The 43-year-old has become the personification of the lodge, with a bright smile, a heart of gold and an accommodating personality. It has not always been easy for the matron figure. "It was tough at first. Being away from your family for long periods of time can be detrimental for the young ones, but I soldiered on because of the passion I have for my job," she says. She started her career in the tourism sector in 2007 as a housekeeping supervisor at Namutoni in Etosha National Park, before she was made acting restaurant manager and then rose to manage the resort. Heading the command hierarchy is not what she really strived for, but her passion for her job gave her the drive to reach higher levels of performance. Meme Loide has over the years acquired qualifications in her career field, including assessments and standards of hospitality from the College of South Africa. On the day *The Namibian* visited, she is so absorbed in her work that she nearly misses her lunch break, had it not been for a staff member who was coming from a construction site. "Oh, it's lunchtime already, I forgot to eat," she murmured, but continued with the news crew. "It's been tough for us because of Covid-19, but all the staff have been chipping in to assist, they are helping to construct a new parking lot for the guests," she explained. "Occupancy at the lodge dropped 100% during the lockdown, and we had projected

The lodge has faced other challenges. The staff has been reduced by half to survive the slump in business in the face of the Covid-19 lockdown. Weekend guests often only book for lodging and proceed to Sesriem campsites to braai, bringing their own food and drinks. This deprives the lodge of much-needed revenue, Meme Loide said. Because the road infrastructure is not easy to navigate for most Namibians with small cars, there are plans for a shuttle vehicle, but the pandemic has affected those plans as well. Her greatest fear is that the pandemic would linger on, leading to more job losses. She said the lodge has reserved two rooms for its Covid-19 response measures.

- THINGS TO DO AT SOSSUS DUNE LODGE:**
- A guided tour by resident guide Oscar Mainga took *The Namibian's* news crew to watch the sun rise and set from the dunes.
  - A hike of the Sesriem Canyon, guided excursions to Sossusvlei, Sesriem and the surrounding areas, and photography are on offer for guests.
  - For the physically active, the climb to Dune 45 is the highlight and the petrified dunes may be a particular challenge.
  - Deadvlei is a dry clay pan, about two kilometres from Sossusvlei. A notable feature of Deadvlei is that it used to be an oasis with several acacia trees; afterwards, the river which watered the oasis changed its course.
  - Stargazing – the stars can be seen from the comfort of the chalets' balconies.

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# Keeping Damara Culture Alive



## CLEMANS MIYANICWE

**D**RESSED in traditional Damara attire, Hans //Hoabeb, the owner of Damara Living Museum sits, in his office made from mud at Louw Inn near Twyfelfontein.

//Hoabeb (41) founded the Damara Living Museum, also known as Taotatite, which means 'I would not be a shame' in Khoekhoegowab, a decade ago, to educate people, especially the younger generation, about the culture and traditions of the Damara people.

"We opened the place (Taotatite) with the aim to educate our children and tourists about the culture and traditions of the Damara people. The visitors experience how the Damara people lived ages ago. We

educate students too," said //Hoabeb. He added that the other reason for opening the museum was to fight poverty and unemployment.

At Taotatite, visitors are shown the milking of goats, learn of metal work and how the Damara hunted in the distant past.

//Hoabeb said he hired a number of locals, most of them school dropouts, to work at the museum before it was closed due to Covid-19.

"We used to share whatever income we made daily but with the closure of our place there is no more income," //Hoabeb said.

When the museum closed during the first lockdown, //Hoabeb bought food combos for his employees.

He also assisted to transport water for the Louw Inn community but the Museum's

coffers dried up too. The Museum used to make between N\$5 000 and N\$20 000 a week before the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We get our income mainly from the tourists who buy artefacts as souvenirs. We are heavily dependent on tourists and we are awaiting their return," //Hoabeb added.

//Hoabeb said he had wanted to open the place but it was no use as no tourists visit the Twyfelfontein area at the moment, and said he supports the government's moves to reopen borders for tourists as communities who made a living from tourism are hard hit.

"We will follow governments' regulations on Covid-19. We have the hand sanitisers and the temperature thermometer too. We have running water at the Damara Living Museum,"

//Hoabeb emphasised.

"We appreciate the return of tourists. Our sector is doomed if tourists don't return. The country needs them," //Hoabeb said.

## DREAMS

//Hoabeb said once everything returns to normal, he plans to build living quarters where people visiting the Damara Living Museum can experience the traditional Damara way of life. "If the leasehold is given, I will live my dream. I want to preserve the ways of my people. I want to be that testimony," //Hoabeb emphasised.

He said he also wants to make DVDs and CDs for sale to tourists, so that the Damara culture can be taken beyond Namibia's borders.

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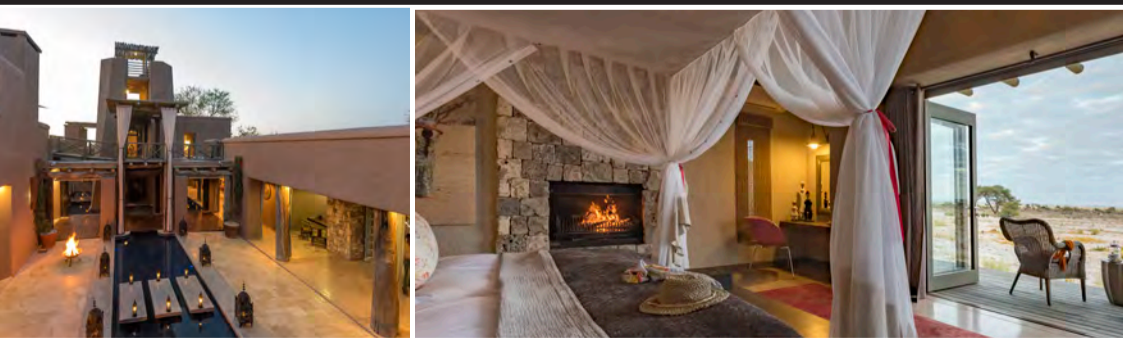
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## A Tour Guide's Journey

### CHARLOTTE NAMBADJA

**N**AMIBIAN tour guide Abner Simeon, who has been working in the tourism sector for eight years now, says his main reason for venturing into the field is the love he has for nature and the beautiful scenery of Namibia and exploring every part of the country.

He also wanted to engage with people from other parts of the world and to be able to guide them, says the 27-year-old.

Simeon joined a tourism company in 2012 as a general worker. He says working there was a dream come true, since he always wanted to become a tour guide.

One day he approached the guide manager and told her he was interested in becoming a guide, he recalls. "I was given some tests which I wrote and have passed and got my driving licence in 2013," he says.

Simeon adds that he was sent on a six-month guiding training course in 2014. He later did a long-distance course at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (Nust) and acquired a certificate in guiding. "I love exploring and therefore went to do a photography course just to add to my résumé and career," Simeon says.

"I have thus far learned a lot of new skills and hobbies like wildlife photography."

The job he is doing now is a source of happiness to him, and sometimes he feels he is not working at all, but just having fun, he says.

Simeon further says despite present difficulties tourism is a promising field in which many dream to be able to work.

"My advice to those that want to venture into tourism is that they should first study the right courses for the specific field depending on which sector of tourism they would like to major in, since there are a lot of job specifications with each assigned to different working duties," he remarks.

"There are different colleges and universities where you can go study in tourism and hospitality, but I always tell people to do what they do with passion and enthusiasm – in that way the work becomes easier and more fun, especially in the tourism industry," he says.

Simeon adds that he would encourage people to consider tourism as a field of study. "I am looking forward to seeing new faces always and to embrace together this beautiful motherland Namibia," he concludes.

#

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# Tales of a Park Ranger

## TUTALENI PINEHAS

CHIEF warden Jeremia Amutenya has spent the last eight years of his career in Khaudum National Park. These are years he describes as the toughest experience of his life. Amutenya told *The Namibian* that a conservation ranger's job is to protect the flora and fauna of the national park, which can be very exciting.

However, Amutenya said he dreaded his assignment in Khaudum, situated in the Kavango East region, because of how isolated the park is. All he could think about was why it was decided to assign him to the "isolation camp", he remembered.

The 32-year-old explained that Khaudum has been given that nickname because of how remote it is and how tough its terrain is.

"The job ranges from assisting tourists, managing wildfires, investigating poaching, and trophy hunting," he said.

"We once had to manage an early burning fire for a week. We had lost control," he recalled.

It was the first time he and his colleagues were doing firefighting on such a large scale, working 12 to 13-hour days, dousing fires from water pipes and breaking up burning tree stumps with axes and shovels.

A ranger's job also includes digging up logs to prevent a fire from spreading underground via tree roots. Once a fire has been brought under control, they also transition to mop up, a process of clearing smouldering stumps or wood still holding heat.

When wildlife wander into areas where people are, the rangers have to make certain both are safe. One such instance was when a baby elephant was found stuck and abandoned in a trough and had to be rescued at Tari Kora waterhole in Khaudum, Amutenya recounted.

Amutenya – a father of one – said he has always been

passionate about conservation, and that growing up on a farm had much to do with that.

Before settling in Khaudum, he worked as a ranger at Okaukuejo in Etosha National Park.

The passionate Amutenya recently attained his master's degree in natural resource conservation from the Namibia University of Science and Technology.

Amutenya loves visiting lodges with his five-year-old daughter in his spare time. "The Gondwana Collection has by far been some of the best I have experienced," he remarked.

Khaudum National Park, situated in north-eastern Namibia and bordering Botswana, receives fewer than 3 000 visitors annually. The park can be accessed only by four-wheel-drive vehicles, and visitors have to traverse its rough twin-track roads through deep Kalahari sand.

More elephants than people are seen around the park, which is a refuge for animals like the endangered African wild dog, roan antelope, and also lions, cheetahs and leopards.

The park is unfenced except along the Botswana border, so game are able to move freely between Khaudum and neighbouring conservancies and small-scale farms. Hence, park staff cooperate with the conservancies in the joint management of wildlife.

The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism's spokesperson, Romeo Muyunda, says the ministry's field staff members are important in terms of conserving the country's natural resources. They are the people who are giving up their comfort to protect the natural resources of Namibia, and who often face challenges in the form of a lack of resources, coupled by financial challenges the government is facing, he notes.

Muyunda says people might not realise the value of the ministry's unseen field staff members, but when tourists visit Namibia and view the country's wildlife a ranger has protected that wildlife.



**PULL THROUGH ...** A baby elephant which was stuck and abandoned in a trough was rescued at the Tari Kora waterhole in Khaudum National Park.



**FIREBREAK ...** Chiefwarden Jeremia Amutenya carries out early burning to create fire breaks in Khaudum National Park.

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