Photographing in Namibia is unlike shooting anywhere else in Africa. Desert is everywhere. Endless miles of unspoiled coastline, graphically interesting plants, rugged rock formations and spectacular sand dunes present landscapes of overwhelming splendor—and the country encompasses one of the world's great national parks for wildlife photography. Fascinating Namibia contains a remarkable infrastructure of well-kept roads, modern accommodations, wholesome food and drinkable water—which makes traveling here a delightful surprise!

Our Namibia tour is crafted as an absolute dream photography trip. It features an outstanding itinerary highlighting the country’s unique landscape photo opportunities and its spectacular wildlife. We travel overland and by chartered private aircraft to experience the country both from the ground and by air, with luggage weight limits calculated to accommodate our full complement of camera gear. Accommodations include a broad range of lodges from luxurious to simple guesthouses—always with their location selected to be in proximity to our photo subjects to assure easy access at times of early or late light. During wildlife game drives in Etosha there are only three photographers per safari vehicle—a virtually unheard of luxury in Namibia, or most anywhere else in Africa! We photograph in the prime time of the dry season.

Our travels focus on four incredible areas: the immense red Sossusvlei sand dunes at Namib-Naukluft National Park, the highly photogenic aloe "quiver tree" forest while staying at adjacent accommodations allowing starry night photography, the haunting turn-of-the-last-century "ghost town" of Kolmanskop—
spectacularly engulfed by encroaching coastal sand dunes—and an exciting encounter with the world-renowned wildlife of Etosha National Park. Due to its demographics—it's one of the most sparsely populated nations in the world—Namibia is very wild and starkly beautiful, and we see some of its most interesting and photogenic features on this exceptional tour.

The stunning desert landscapes of Sossusvlei (at the southern end of Namib-Naukluft National Park) produce sensuous, undulating sand dune images. The towering Sossusvlei Dunes are the world's highest—several world-famous photos of gemsbok (oryx) walking across these stark rolling red dunes were made here.

Due to the extremely dry desert conditions, photographing wildlife on safari in Namibia is very different from the majority of other African countries where water is more plentiful. Normally, on safari, a photographer drives through the landscape, searching for and photographing wildlife as it is found. In Etosha, one simply waits in the safari vehicle by a water hole to photograph the never-ending parade of animals that are forced to visit the water holes every day for survival. Gripping predator/prey dramas unfold in front of you near the water's edge. In Etosha virtually every water hole has a different mix of animals that frequent it, so exploration of a number of them over several days is essential.

This spectacular "winter" gathering of animals at the evaporating water holes and artesian springs on the Etosha Pan constitutes some of the greatest diversity of mammal species seen anywhere. One of the first Europeans to visit Etosha described the sight as "a menagerie turned loose." Throngs of remarkable animals, such as greater kudu, gemsbok, springbok, southern giraffe, zebras and the endangered black-faced impalas, come to drink at the small desert pools dotting the park. Etosha is famous for its huge elephant herds; black rhinos are still observed regularly, and lions are seen frequently.

Join us for a spectacular African adventure that combines breathtaking landscapes, genuinely weird, otherworldly and graphically wonderful photo opportunities and bountiful, accessible wildlife in one of Africa's great national parks.

Check out John Shaw's trip report from our 2018 Namibia photo tour
Tour Itinerary

Day 1
Depart from home.

Day 2 (May 6)
Participants arriving at the Hosea Kutako International Airport, 28 miles from Windhoek, are met on arrival and transferred to our hotel. The group meets in the lobby this evening for a group introduction and a short logistical briefing, followed by dinner in the hotel dining room. (D)

Day 3
Depart by four-wheel-drive vehicles after breakfast. We travel south to Keetmanshoop with scenic photography stops and a picnic lunch along the way. We check in at our farm guesthouse and head out in the afternoon to the "quiver tree (Aloe dichotoma) forest," photographing hundreds of these graphically appealing tree-like aloes —also known as "kokerboom"—bathed in evening light or juxtaposed against the setting sun. Following dinner we head out again to shoot the quiver trees against the Milky Way (virtually the brightest in the world in Namibia) or with star trails. (BLD)

Day 4
Quiver tree photography at sunrise, sunset and after dark is on our schedule today. As midday approaches, we head back to our hotel to relax and download the morning shoot. We also photograph captive rehabilitated cheetahs cared for at our rustic farm accommodation. (BLD)

Day 5
Heading west this afternoon we drive through the Namib Desert to the Atlantic coast, stopping at Aus for lunch. We arrive at the seaside town of Lüderitz before exploring the amazing ghost town of Kolmanskop. The buildings of this derelict diamond mining town are slowly being engulfed by the relentless shifting coastal sands. Images created here impart an eerie quality of absolute ruin, yet are simultaneously graphically compelling, sensuous and downright intriguing. With special permits we photograph here through sunset. (BLD)

Day 6
Rising early, we’re out at the ghost town before sunrise. We shoot both interior and exterior “sandscapes” amidst these early 20th-century structures before returning to our lodge for lunch. Driving east towards the edge of the Namib we reach tiny Helmeringhausen, halfway on our journey toward the Sossusvlei dunes. (BLD)

Day 7
We leave early in the morning to drive northward, tracing the edge of the Namib-Naukluft National Park. Along the way we shoot the expansive plains that stretch from horizon to horizon and stop at some massive social weaver nests during our drive. In the late afternoon, we arrive at the spectacular red sand dunes at Sossusvlei. Our lodge is the one inside the Namib-Naukluft National Park. (BLD)

Days 8–9
Two full shooting days provide plenty of time to explore the Sossusvlei area with our cameras. We are out before sunrise and back after sunset with time for a midday rest or to download images at our lodge oasis. We hike into the famous and über-photogenic salt/clay pan called Dead Vlei. Here, long-dead camel thorn trees create a graphic foreground to the rolling dunes behind them. (BLD)

Day 10
We drive north and then west along Kuiseb Canyon to Walvis Bay on the Skeleton Coast, arriving at Swakopmund in the late afternoon. Dune sand along our route has changed from red to gold. Swakopmund is Namibia's "big" seaside resort town and our prestigious hotel is situated within easy walking distance for necessities shopping or souvenirs. (BLD)

Day 11
Baggage is collected very early to be driven to Etosha National Park as we enjoy dune excursions in the morning. We fly to Etosha with our camera gear via a scenic route over the Skeleton Coast. We meet our vehicles on an airstrip by the park this afternoon. For the next three nights we stay in the simple guesthouses at Okaukuejo within the park boundary. They are located within a five-minute walk of one of the most spectacular water holes in the park. Here, virtually every species of large (and small) animal comes to drink at one time or another—from elephants to elephant shrews; plus black rhinos, hundreds of gazelles, kudus, gemsboks, giraffes and zebras—and the things that eat them! (BLD)

Days 12–13
Etosha is the third largest national park in the world and we have more than four days to explore. From our base at Okaukuejo we will travel through the park's southwestern region. Numerous water holes give rise to a wealth of wildlife images, including a fantastic white clay elephant wallow. Immense bull elephants roll in this gooey white clay to emerge from the wallow as the famous "ghost elephants" of Etosha. (BLD)

Days 14–15
A slow drive toward the eastern region of the park allows photo stops at many water holes along the route. Expect to see huge herds of elephants, throngs of gazelles, gemsboks, kudos, zebras,
giraffes and a wide variety of birds. We arrive at our lodge, just outside the park, by late afternoon on Day 14. The following day we explore the Namutoni area of Etosha, visiting photographically productive water holes for large mammals, and in some cases hundreds of thousands of birds (red-billed queleas) and thousands of doves that come to drink in these desert oases. (BLD)

Day 16 (May 20)
A midmorning flight brings us back to the Windhoek airport. Depart for home after 4 PM. (B)

Day 17
Arrive home.

Joseph Van Os Photo Safaris are always excellent—well planned, fantastic photo leaders and well-chosen destinations.

—E. Carr

I love the Joe Van Os trips because everyone is serious about photography and happy to get up early for the best light.

—A. Nagda