

## Press Release by the **Gondwana Desert Collection**

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Subject: **Four Deserts Route Namibia** (in the south of Namibia)

Text: 1,340 Words / 8,100 Characters

**Text**

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### **Desert Diversity - Four Deserts Route Namibia**

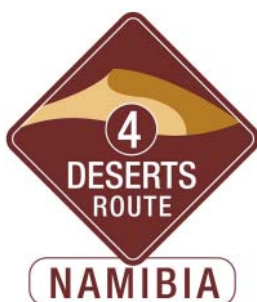
Deserts have many faces. Most tourists are amazed at the diversity of arid landscapes in southern Namibia. The secret is that it is not merely one desert, but four different desert systems - the Kalahari in the east, the Nama Karoo in the central parts, the Succulent Karoo in the south-west and the Namib in the West.

Deserts world-wide come into the lime-light this year, as the United Nations have declared 2006 the “International Year of Deserts and Desertification”. Two issues are at stake: the protection of deserts as natural ecosystems, but also the control of unnatural desertification which is a threat to sustainable development in many parts of the world.



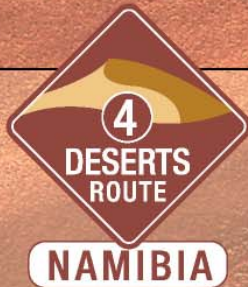
04 – In the heart of the Namib Desert: parched clay pan at famous Sossusvlei. Photo: Gondwana Desert Collection

Both these issues are part and parcel of the new ‘Four Deserts Route Namibia’ which was introduced at the ITB (Internationale Tourismus Börse) in March 2006: the route enables tourists to experience all the diversity of Namibia’s four desert systems more intensively than before, and at the same time their stay contributes to the protection of these deserts and to the development of local communities. Open Africa and the Gondwana Desert Collection are at the forefront of this initiative; another more than 30 partners have joined so far. Open Africa is working on a network of tourist routes which will link the wonders of Africa from the Cape to Cairo. With its four nature reserves the Gondwana Desert Collection introduces tourists to the four deserts in Namibia.

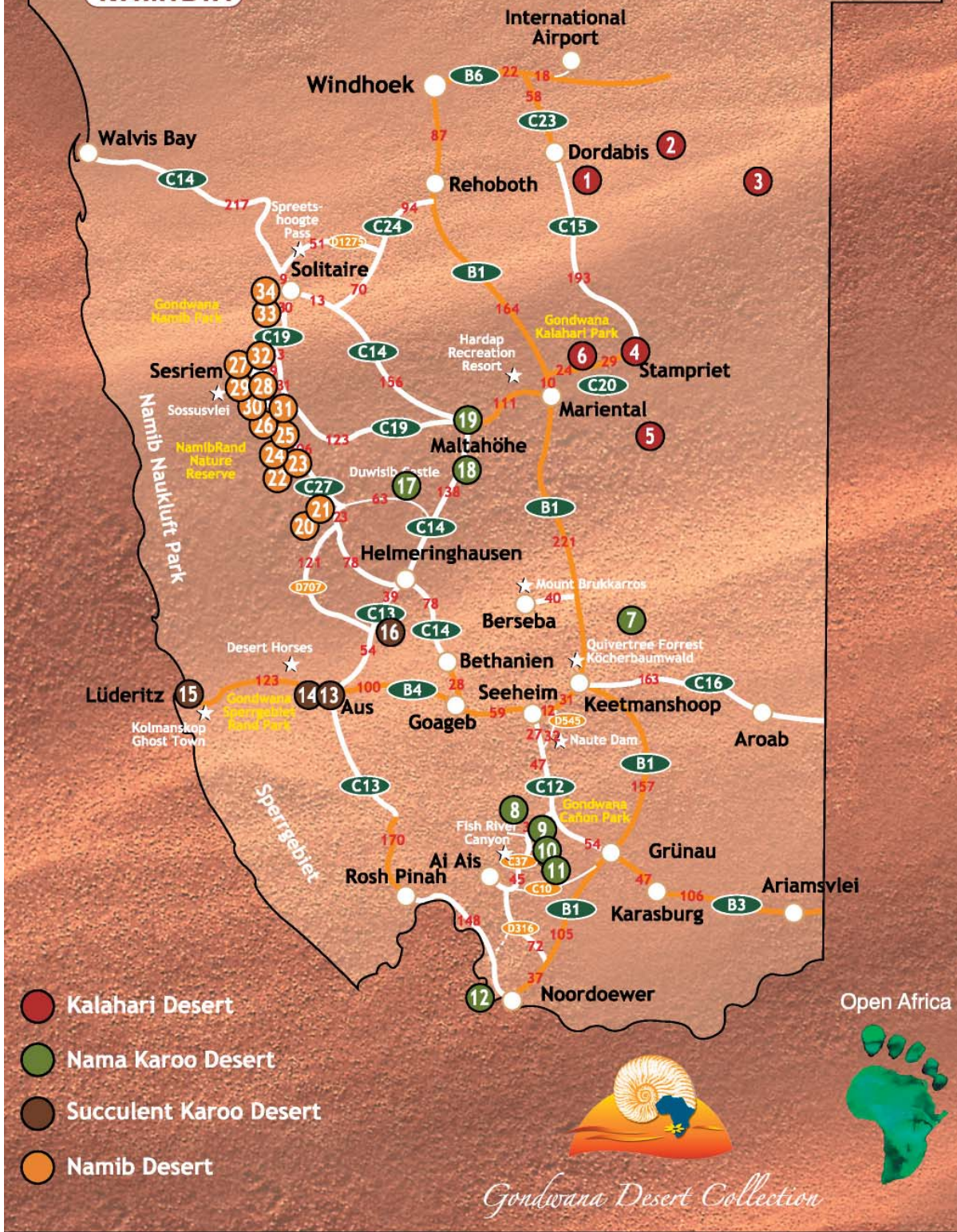


The ‘Four Deserts Route Namibia’ covers the entire south, from the Gariep (Orange) River right up to the Tropic of Capricorn. This route, however, does not consist of a single road which happens to run through the four deserts, but rather represents a variety of enterprises – accommodation, tours, arts and crafts – which offer their services in the vicinity of attractions. Tourists also have the option to explore side routes in pursuit of special interests such as game or bird watching, botany, geology, archaeology, history and culture. The adventurous are being catered for as well. The partners in this project share a common vision for the ‘Four Deserts Route Namibia’: to get visitors enthusiastic about Namibia’s deserts, preserve the delicate habitats and support rural communities in their development.

As the route is being developed in phases, the group of participants will expand further. Gondwana also intends to set up an information centre in each of the deserts. In words and pictures visitors will learn not only about the desert in question, its origins and its fauna and flora, but also about the people who live there and about their culture and history. The first information centre is nearing completion in Aus on the fringe of the Succulent Karoo; the second one will be opened in the Kalahari, on the Tropic of Capricorn.



# Four Deserts Route NAMIBIA



- Kalahari Desert
- Nama Karoo Desert
- Succulent Karoo Desert
- Namib Desert

*Gondwana Desert Collection*

### Four Deserts in Southern Namibia

By definition a desert is a dry area. But think of it as an area where water loss through evaporation exceeds the low rainfall (less than 250 mm) by at least ten times, and you will quickly develop a healthy respect for any kind of life that survives under these conditions. It comes as a surprise for some that desert landscapes are not just endless stretches of sand but can be rocky and mountainous as well, with vast gravel plains in between. This kaleidoscope of varied and fascinating geological formations and dramatic, ever-changing scenery casts a lingering spell on enchanted visitors. With plant and animal life minutely adapted to survive under these harsh conditions, our living deserts are also important centres of biodiversity. Extremes of aridity, heat and cold can be experienced; space and quiet, incredible sunsets and star-spangled night skies. To get acquainted with the people is definitely another highlight. With a cultural and historical identity rooted in survival, they are keen to share the beauty of their surroundings with visitors, and their genuine warmth and hospitality makes them perfect ambassadors of the desert.



03 – Desert in bloom: Succulent Karoo near Aus. Photo: Klein-Aus Vista

The new route invites visitors to explore the deserts and to start to understand their unique plant and animal world.

In the east the deep, red sand of the **Kalahari** Desert forms long parallel rows of dunes, partly covered with grasses and accentuated by gnarled old camel thorn trees and shepherd's bush. Since rain is soaked up rapidly, surface water is a rarity. Animals have therefore developed special survival strategies, and large numbers of Gemsbok, Springbok and Ostrich are once again moving across the Kalahari; vultures are also increasing in numbers. The Kalahari is the home of the San Bushmen, the legendary ancient people who were able to live so frugally from these resources and perfected the art of sustainable living.

The **Nama Karoo** covers most of southern central Namibia like a large wedge from north of the Gariep (Orange) River to about 120 km south of Windhoek, with a narrow strip along the fringe of the Namib reaching right up to Angola. Geological formations take on stupendous proportions in the Fish River Canyon, the second largest canyon on earth. It was formed during the disintegration of the ancient continent of Gondwana some 130 million years ago. Apart from dwarf shrubs and scattered grasslands the fascinating quiver tree is a distinctive symbol of the south. While hiking or driving there is ample opportunity to watch growing herds of Springbok, Gemsbok, Kudu, Mountain Zebra and Ostrich. Much of the Nama Karoo consists of vast plains. The mysterious, dark massif of Brukkaros rises about 120 km north of Keetmanshoop. Was it perhaps the tranquillity of this tremendous desert that inspired the construction of magical little Duwisib castle, slightly further to the west, a century ago?



05 – At a weaving workshop in the Kalahari carpets are woven from Karakul wool. Photo: Ibenstein Weavers

The **Succulent Karoo** spreads out south-west of Aus. It is located mainly within a winter-rainfall area, and it is characterised by bizarre looking shrubs which store moisture in their leaves and stems. The Succulent Karoo is the most diverse desert on earth and is regarded by scientists as one of the 25 biologically most precious areas in the world. Although these floral wonders are at their most spectacular when they transform the desert into a sea of blossom after the rains, they are well worth a closer look throughout the year. Lüderitz with its harsh, barren landscape resembles an island. African Penguins can be seen - and heard! - in the vicinity, and on a visit to the ghost town of Kolmanskop you cannot help wondering about what life must have been like in the former diamond settlement. Just west of Aus the fascinating Wild Horses of the Namib can be watched. They conquered their habitat about 90

years ago – and may be regarded as a breed in their own right (the ‘Namibs’) by now.

To the north the **Namib** Desert forms a narrow strip along the Atlantic Ocean. The scenery is one of shifting, glowing red dunes in the south, to gravel plains with inselbergs in the central parts, and jagged blue mountains in the north with deep valleys cut by ephemeral rivers. Fog supplies plants and animals with moisture. Visitors have a wide range of experiences to choose from: at Sossusvlei they can clamber to the top of the highest sand dunes in the world at dawn; discover the ancient fossilised red dunes south of Solitaire where they stand frozen in time; watch huge black Lappet faced Vultures as they spiral upwards into the sky; or trace the tracks of a solitary Gemsbok across the gravel plains. One of the ultimate desert experiences is a leisurely balloon-ride when the endless sand sea dons a scarlet gown in the early morning sun.



02 – Typical Nama Karoo scenery at the Fish River Canyon.



01 – A herd of Gemsbok in the Kalahari.

The Four Deserts Route Namibia is a very special one: it showcases diversification, alternative land utilisation and sustainable approaches in the management of desert landscapes which are more productive, create more jobs and generate more income than conventional farming activities. At the same time the natural balance and diversity of the deserts is protected and even restored.

For more on the Four Deserts Route Namibia see Open Africa at [www.africandream.org](http://www.africandream.org) from May 2006, and until then ‘Namibia’s south’ at [www.gondwana-desert-collection.com](http://www.gondwana-desert-collection.com).



A similar article on this topic was published in the Gondwana News 2006 (included in your press kit). For text and pictures in print quality see the enclosed CD or ‘Info Downloads / Press Releases’ at [www.gondwana-desert-collection.com](http://www.gondwana-desert-collection.com).

### Captions

- 01 – A herd of Gemsbok on a Kalahari dune. Photo: Gondwana Desert Collection
- 02 – Typical Nama Karoo scenery at the Fish River Canyon. Photo: Gondwana Desert Collection
- 03 – Desert in bloom: Succulent Karoo near Aus. Photo: Gondwana Desert Collection
- 04 – In the heart of the Namib Desert: parched clay pan at famous Sossusvlei. Photo: Gondwana Desert Collection
- 05 – Spinner at a weaving workshop near Dordabis in the Kalahari where carpets are woven from Karakul wool. Photo: Ibenstein Weavers
- 06 - Four Deserts Route Map.
- 07 - Logo ‘4 Deserts Route’ (version 1)
- 08 - Logo ‘4 Deserts Route’ (version 2)
- 09 - Logo Open Africa
- 10 - Logo Gondwana Desert Collection
- 11 - Logo UN Year of Deserts

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