



Gondwana Desert Collection

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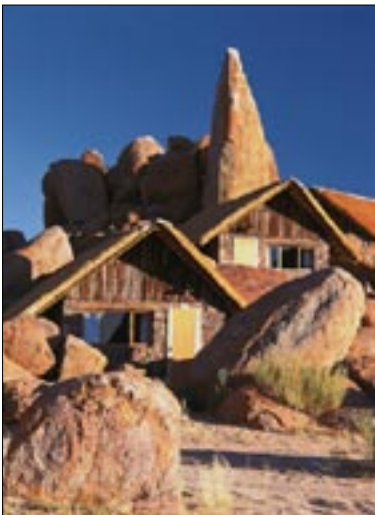
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Four Nature Reserves born from a Vision

Nature + tourism + people = sustainable nature conservation. Not only does this formula prove right, but since its inception at the Fish River Canyon in 1996 it has in fact grown and flourished extremely well. It has even produced three offspring in southern Namibia which are thriving despite the dry climate – or perhaps because of it? Reason enough to celebrate the tenth anniversary as befits the occasion. And, of course, to extend a heartfelt thank-you to all of you who have helped the vision to grow from a delicate young shoot into a sturdy tree.



The anniversary of the Gondwana Desert Collection, which by now comprises four nature reserves with nine accommodation establishments in southern Namibia, was celebrated last Wednesday (20 Sept. 2006). 300 guests, including government representatives as well as tourism and media personalities, had been invited to the Safari Court Conference Centre in Windhoek for a festive gala dinner. The majority of the guests were the staff of tour operators who have strongly supported the development and growth of the nature reserves by booking their clients into our accommodation facilities.



A brief review. It all started with a conservation concept. In the long run livestock farming is not viable in desert systems like the Nama Karoo in southern Namibia. Average precipitation around the Fish River Canyon, on the southwestern fringe of the summer rain area, is less than 100 mm per year; lengthy periods of drought are a regular feature. Livestock farming therefore contains the risk of severe overgrazing. Game, apart from being regarded as competitor for grazing, is prevented by fences from moving about freely – a vital strategy in response to annual fluctuations in rainfall and grazing conditions.

Hence the idea to utilise the land for tourism: a hospitality business takes up a much smaller area than farming activities and returns are much higher, more and better paid jobs are created and earnings help to finance nature conservation. Moreover, a desert landscape attracts guests even in times of drought.

But it was a long road for the idea to become reality. Gondwana's cradle is Cañon Lodge at farm Karios, about 20 km from the main lookout point at the



canyon. The first group of guests was welcomed in November 1996. Extension work started as soon as everything was running smoothly. Cañon Roadhouse, completed in June 1999, was intended as a rustic, affordable country inn and also sported a camping site. As the demand for accommodation in the vicinity of the canyon continued to rise, it was decided to add Cañon Village, which opened in August 2003. Larger groups find themselves in good hands there, and Cañon Lodge can once again focus on individual travellers. To date, close to 200,000 holidaymakers have visited Gondwana Cañon Park.

With increasing numbers of guests the volume of shopping in Keetmanshoop or even Windhoek rose steadily as well. This gave rise to the idea of keeping dairy cows and growing fresh produce on site. The idea developed into the Self-Sufficiency Centre which produces milk, yoghurt and cheese, ham and cold meats, eggs, fruit and vegetables. Production covers 70 percent of the accommodation centres' demand, replaces costly imports from South Africa and creates additional jobs. Gondwana also invested into staff training. An in-house training centre was set up in 2001; there are also programmes for supporting disadvantaged Namibians, and lectures on social topics like family planning and HIV/Aids are arranged regularly.

Nature conservation also got its fair share, of course; funds were made available to dismantle fences, set up watering places, buy patrol vehicles, purchase and release game. Burchell's zebra, hartebeest and giraffe are back at the canyon – after an absence of about 100 years, due to being hunted to extinction in this area. An experienced park manager and several rangers maintain watering places, keep the external fences in good repair and monitor the conservation area; they also lend their support to research projects on quiver trees or mountain zebra and handle preparations for the annual game counts.

The concept which had proven so successful in Gondwana Cañon Park was applied to other desert areas in 2004. The Gondwana Desert Collection today consists of four parks in which guests on a tour through the



south can experience all four of Namibia's deserts: Gondwana Kalahari Park (100 km², east of Mariental), Gondwana Cañon Park (1,120 km², at the Fish River Canyon), Gondwana Sperrgebiet Rand Park (510 km², west of Aus and near the Wild horses of the Namib) and Gondwana Namib Park (100 km², 60 km north of Sesriem/Sossusvlei).

And the prospects for the next 10 years? Setting up larger conservation regions, where game can once again roam as freely as it used to, is envisaged in cooperation with national parks, farmers and rural communities. There are also plans to establish a chain of information centres to make more facts about Namibia's deserts available to travellers and to bring local communities into the tourism business. The first centre, in Aus, already opened its doors in July...



Captions

(news 06-09-25 ten years landscape) – Gondwana's cradle: Cañon Lodge on a plain of Gondwana Cañon Park. Photo: Gondwana Desert Collection

(gondwana - 10 years - lodge bungalow) - Chalets of the Cañon Lodge, nestled against massive granite boulders. Photo: Gondwana Desert Collection



(gondwana - 10 years - pc course) – Training in the Education Centre: Computer teacher Manuel Epker with Thomas Nangolo (baker) and Sakaria Iyambo (cook). Photo: Gondwana Desert Collection

(gondwana - 10 years - nico) - From petrol pump attendant to Head of Guest Relations: Nico Angula. Photo: Gondwana Desert Collection

(gondwana - 10 years - kalahari) - Gemsbok in Gondwana Kalahari Park, one of Gondwana's offspring. Photo: Cecile Lederer

(gondwana - 10 years - aus daisies) - 'Namibia's Namaqualand' in Gondwana Sperrgebiet Rand Park: winter rains transform the desert into a colourful sea of blossom. Photo: Klein-Aus Vista

(gondwana - 10 years - namib) – A new chalet in front of an ancient Namib dune at Namib Desert Lodge. Photo: Gondwana Desert Collection

(gondwana - 10 years - map) - Four deserts, four parks. Source: Gondwana Desert Collection

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