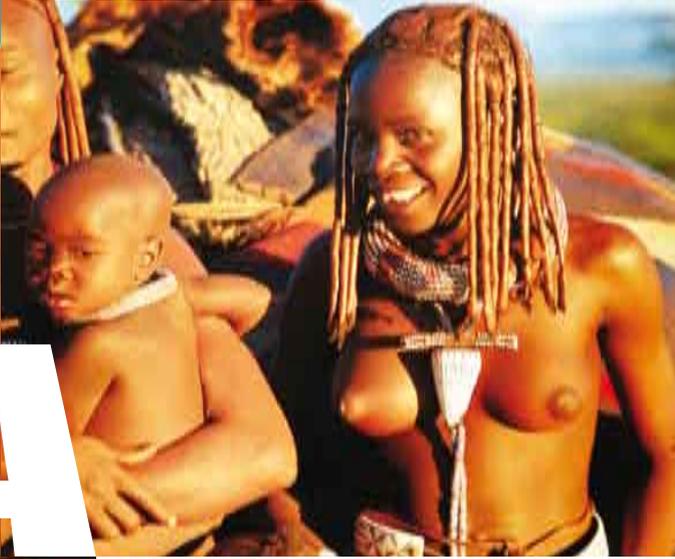


NAMIBI

a country to discover

By Carmen Peregrina





On the South-West coast of Africa, between the Kalahari desert and the cold Atlantic, is one of the most fascinating places on the african continent. This enormous country with spectacular seascapes, deserts and forests, is a beautiful place to visit, and has yet to be discovered.

The country is divided into three regions, and on the central plateau, between the Namib desert and the Kalahari, is where the small capital of Windhoek is located. Situated at the geographical heart of the country, the town centre is characterized by its mixture of charming German-style buildings. But the influence of that European country - which at the end of the 19th century annexed Namibia - is not only noticeable in the buildings of the town. The social life - at least that of the descendents of the colonists - still conserves the customs and the language of their country of origin.

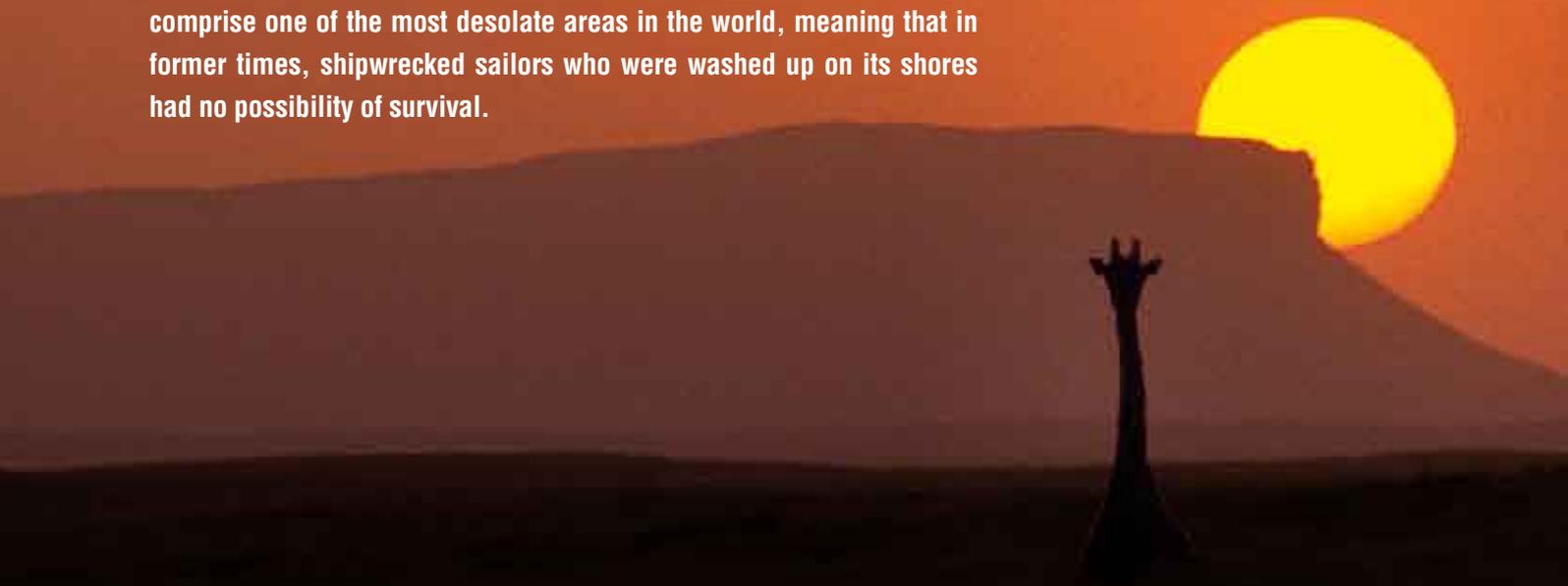
Not a large town, Windhoek is ideal to discover on foot. Dominating the skyline of the town is the Christuskirche, a German Lutheran church in neo-gothic and art-nouveau style built in the year 1010. Other important buildings are the Parliament, or Tintenpalast (1913), the Alte Feste, a former fortress converted into a museum, and the Dutch-style railway station dating from 1912.

Although Namibia is a country that is predominantly desert, it has regional variations in climate. Its capital, Windhoek, - situated among rolling hills at an altitude of 1 650 m. - enjoys a fresh mountainous climate with plenty of rain. In fact the whole of the central plateau is excellent farming land where the German colonists and the Afrikaners –who inherited part of the land – raise sheep and cattle on enormous country estates, and cultivate fruit and vegetables.



But what really characterises this country are the deserts, the famous Kalahari and the Namib, - which extend all along the Atlantic coast of Namibia. Dating back over eight hundred million years, the latter is considered to be the oldest arid area on earth.

Although the Skeleton Coast consists of the area where the rivers Kunene and Ugab flow into the Atlantic, the name is often used to mean the whole of the coastline. Its two million hectares of dunes and sand comprise one of the most desolate areas in the world, meaning that in former times, shipwrecked sailors who were washed up on its shores had no possibility of survival.





At the end of the 15th century, the first white visitors came to this Atlantic coast, Portuguese navigators in search of a route to India. But it was not until the end of the 19th century that Namibia was annexed by Germany.

To the south of the Skeleton Coast park is the town of Lüderitz, almost a relic of colonial times. This town offers everything you might expect of a small German town, from delicatessens and coffee shops to Lutheran churches. The area is rich in diamonds, which is evident from the prosperity of the town.

The natural parks and reserves of Namibia are famous. The most important, the Etosha Natural Park, is one of the most ideal places on the planet to enjoy observing wildlife. The soul of Etosha is the Etosha Pan, an immense salt pan that only has water on very few occasions. During the winter months the springs attract large concentrations of birds, elephants, giraffes, lions, zebras and some leopards and cheetahs, as well as protected species such as black-faced impalas and black rhinoceros. After exceptionally rainy seasons, the water level of the Etosha Pan can rise to height of one metre, which makes it particularly attractive to large flocks of flamingos and pelicans, which convert this area into an ideal spot to reproduce and feed their chicks.

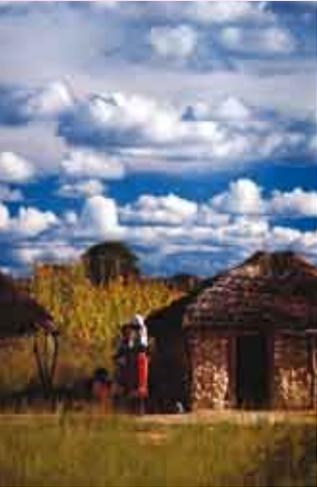
Another area that the visitor should not fail to see on his trip to Namibia is the Fish River Canyon, for its spectacular views. This deep gorge, 160 km long by 27 km wide, is the result of water erosion over the course of the centuries. Its main information centre is found at the northern end of the park, in Hobas. In all the parks and reserves of the country there are areas where camping is permitted, and visitors can enjoy the experience of life in the open air. Other recommended activities are river rafting, canoeing, and horse-riding.



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Namibia became independent in 1990, after the SWAPO (South West Africa Peoples Organization) won the election the year before. During the First World War, the country embarked upon the long road towards independence, when the German forces surrendered to a South African expeditionary force that was fighting on the side of the Allies. When the war ended, South Africa received the mandate from the League of Nations to govern the territory.



Surface area : 825 418 km²
Population : 1.8 million
Capital : Windhoek
 (175 000 inhab.)
Nacionalities :
 87,5% natives, 6% whites,
 6% mixed-race.
Density : 2,2 inh/km²
GDP/Inh : 2250 \$ (2003)
 UK : 23 942 €
 Spain : 17 680 €
Religion :
 Catholic 80 %
Language : English (official)
 Afrikaans, Deutsch, Bantoue



In 1949, with the idea of a greater control over the area, the Government divided up most of the agricultural land and put it into the hands of the white colonists, while the black workers and their families were confined by law to living in reservations.

Forced labour, which was the destiny of the most of the Namibians after becoming a German colony, was one of the principal factors leading to large-scale demonstrations and the development of nationalism at the end of the 50's. During this period several political parties were formed and strikes were organized. By 1960, most of the political parties had merged to form the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO).

Details on Namibia :

Bordering to the north with Angola and Zambia, to the south with the Republic of South Africa, to the east with Botswana and South Africa, and to the west with the Atlantic Ocean. The territory, most of which is flat terrain, is located within the desert strip of the Tropic of Capricorn. The climate is hot and dry, with temperatures ranging from 10° to 30°. The driest part is the central Namib, with annual rainfall of less than 50 mm and exceptionally hot summers, where temperatures often register more than 40° (whilst the thermometers plunge to below 0 at night). With a population of 1,797,677, the people are 87.5% black (divided into 11 ethnic groups, of which the Ovambo, with 47.4% of the total, is the largest group), 6% white, and another 6% of mixed. The best time to visit the country is during the dry winter season (May to October). You are recommended to avoid going to the national parks of Namib and Etosha between December and March, as they are extremely hot during that period.

