AFRIQUE UNIE · TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

South Africa and Namibia in 14 days: a day-by-day itinerary

From Cape Town to Windhoek, the road north takes you in two weeks through vineyards, sandstone mountains, plains that flower in spring, then the great deserts of southern Namibia. It is a one-way road trip that crosses the Orange River at the Vioolsdrif and Noordoewer border post. The itinerary begins with a night in Johannesburg, the country's main air gateway, and ends at Windhoek airport. The border formalities, for travellers and for the hire car alike, are set out below. Read the official travel advice for both countries before you leave.

Day by day

Day 1 · Johannesburg, history before the road (night : Johannesburg)
Most long-haul flights arrive at Johannesburg's O. R. Tambo airport. Rather than rushing straight on to a connection, devote the day to the country's recent history. The Apartheid Museum takes two to three hours. In Soweto, Vilakazi Street, where Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu lived, and the Hector Pieterson Museum are visited with a guide: the French authorities recommend keeping to organised tours. They also advise having your accommodation book the airport transfer and avoiding the old city centre, especially in the evening. Stay in the northern suburbs, such as Rosebank or Sandton, which are linked to the airport by a rapid train. The next day, a flight of about two hours takes you to Cape Town.

Days 2-4 · Cape Town, between mountain and ocean (night : Cape Town)
Once in Cape Town in the late morning, go straight up Table Mountain if the sky is clear: the cable car closes as soon as the wind picks up, and the blanket of cloud can cover the summit for days on end. The next day, board the boat at the Waterfront for Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela spent eighteen years in detention; the tour, often led by former political prisoners, must be booked ahead, and crossings are cancelled in bad weather. Keep the third day for the peninsula: the Chapman's Peak cliff road, the penguins of Boulders Beach and the cliffs of Cape Point. Collect the hire car on the last evening or on the morning you leave; you do not need it in town.

Day 5 · North to the Cederberg mountains (night : Clanwilliam)
The N7 leaves Cape Town heading north, runs past the wheat fields of the Swartland, then climbs over the Piekenierskloof Pass before dropping into the Olifants River valley, planted with citrus trees. Allow about three hours for the 230 kilometres or so to Clanwilliam, at the foot of the Cederberg range. This is the only region in the world where rooibos grows, and some farms can be visited. It also preserves many San rock paintings: an easy trail, half an hour's drive north-east of the town over the Pakhuis Pass, links several of them along a river. Walkers will prefer to head deeper into the range, with its striking red sandstone formations sculpted by erosion. In summer the heat is fierce, so walk early in the morning.

Day 6 · Through Namaqualand to Springbok (night : Springbok)
Another 330 kilometres or so northwards, which means three and a half to four hours on a straight, quiet main road. Beyond Vanrhynsdorp the landscape turns semi-desert: this is Namaqualand, known for its succulent plants. In August and September, after the winter rains, the plains are carpeted with orange, yellow and white wildflowers; Namaqua National Park, near Kamieskroon, then has the finest displays, best seen in sunny weather and around the middle of the day. For the rest of the year, the drive is worthwhile for its granite hills and huge skies. Springbok, a former copper-mining town, is the last South African stop: fill up with fuel and buy some supplies.

Days 7-8 · The Orange River border and Fish River Canyon (night : Hobas or near the canyon)
Vioolsdrif is only a little over an hour from Springbok. After the South African checkpoint, a bridge crosses the Orange River to the Namibian post of Noordoewer, where you also pay the road charge for the vehicle. The tarred road continues north, then a gravel road branches west towards the canyon; allow about three hours from the border. Fish River Canyon, some 160 kilometres long and in places more than 500 metres deep, is the largest in Africa. The viewpoints near Hobas are visited at sunset and again at sunrise. Day hikes down into the canyon are forbidden, and the multi-day trek is open, with a permit, only in the cool season. Further south, Ai-Ais is named after its hot springs.

Days 9-10 · Lüderitz and the ghost town of Kolmanskop (night : Lüderitz)
A long stage of five to six hours: the gravel road heads north to Seeheim, where you rejoin the tarred road to Lüderitz. After the village of Aus, it descends through the Namib Desert; at Garub, a waterhole attracts the wild horses that have lived here for a century. Lüderitz, a windswept port, has kept its colourful houses from the German period. The next morning, visit Kolmanskop, ten kilometres inland: this diamond town, founded after the discovery of 1908 and later abandoned, is gradually being swallowed by sand. Entry is by permit, normally sold at the gate; come early in the day, before the wind gets up. In the afternoon, drive round the peninsula as far as Diaz Point.

Days 11-12 · The dunes of Sossusvlei and Deadvlei (night : Sesriem)
This is the longest driving day of the trip: seven to eight hours, largely on gravel, heading north from Lüderitz to Sesriem through Aus and Helmeringhausen, between the red dunes of the Namib and the Tiras Mountains. Leave at dawn and fill up whenever you can. The next day, go through the Sesriem gate as soon as it opens, around sunrise; only accommodation inside the gate allows an earlier start. A tarred road of about sixty kilometres follows the Tsauchab valley between some of the highest dunes in the world; stop at Dune 45 in the low morning light. The last five kilometres, in deep sand, are covered by 4x4 shuttle. Then walk to Deadvlei, a white clay pan dotted with camel thorn trees that died centuries ago. Carry plenty of water, and keep the small Sesriem Canyon for the late afternoon.

Days 13-14 · The Namib passes, then Windhoek (night : Windhoek)
Leave the desert through Solitaire, a simple crossroads with a filling station, then climb on to the central plateau over one of the passes of the Great Escarpment: Spreetshoogte, the steepest and most scenic, or Remhoogte, which is easier. Allow four and a half to five hours to Windhoek, at an altitude of nearly 1,700 metres. The capital can be seen in half a day: the Lutheran Christ Church, the Parliament Gardens, the Independence Memorial Museum and Independence Avenue, where the shops are concentrated. Leave nothing visible in the car and avoid walking in the evening. On the last day, return the vehicle at Hosea Kutako airport, some forty kilometres east of the city; allow an hour for the drive.

Getting around

Hire a car in Cape Town and return it in Windhoek: one-way rentals between the two countries exist, for a surcharge and with a letter of authorisation from the rental company, to be shown at the border. There are about

2,500 kilometres to cover, a third of them on Namibian gravel roads. A saloon car is enough if you drive slowly, but a high-clearance vehicle with two spare wheels is safer. Drive with your headlights on, never at night, and do not exceed 80 km/h on gravel, where tyre blowouts and loss of control are frequent. Both countries drive on the left. Between Johannesburg and Cape Town, take a flight.

When to go

No season is perfect for both countries at once. Namibia is best visited from May to October, during the southern winter, which is dry and sunny, with cold nights in the desert. That is Cape Town's rainy season, especially from June to August, and the city is at its best from November to March, when southern Namibia is scorching. The best compromises are therefore April and May, then September and October. August and September add the Namaqualand flower season. The long Fish River Canyon trek is only possible in the cool season.

Practical information

South Africa

Entry	Depends on your passport: visiterafriqueunie.com/en/visa/south-africa/
Yellow fever	Certificate required if arriving from a risk country
Malaria	in some areas
Currency	South African rand (ZAR)
Languages	English, Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans…
Plugs	type C, M, N · dialling code +27 · UTC+2
Emergencies	police 10111 · ambulance 10177 · fire 10177

Namibia

Entry	Depends on your passport: visiterafriqueunie.com/en/visa/namibia/
Yellow fever	Certificate required if arriving from a risk country
Malaria	in some areas
Currency	Namibian dollar (NAD)
Languages	English, Afrikaans, Oshiwambo
Plugs	type D, M · dialling code +264 · UTC+2
Emergencies	police 10111 · ambulance 112 ou +264 61 211 111 · fire 112 ou +264 61 211 111

Departure checklist

Documents

☐ Passport valid for at least six months after your return, with blank pages
☐ Visa or e-visa (printed if required)
☐ International vaccination certificate (yellow fever if required)
☐ Travel insurance certificate and assistance number
☐ Paper and digital copies of your passport and bookings
☐ Tickets, bookings and addresses saved offline
☐ International driving permit if you are hiring a vehicle

Health

☐ Travel consultation done and vaccinations up to date
☐ Malaria tablets if your doctor recommends them
☐ First-aid kit: plasters, antiseptic, anti-diarrhoea tablets, rehydration salts
☐ Mosquito repellent suitable for the tropics
☐ Sunscreen, hat and sunglasses
☐ Personal medication and prescriptions

Money and connectivity

☐ Bank told, Visa or Mastercard (and a backup card)
☐ Cash in euros or dollars, recent notes in good condition
☐ eSIM or local SIM card sorted
☐ Plug adapter for the country
☐ Power bank and cables
☐ Offline maps downloaded
☐ Afrique Unie app installed

In the bag

☐ Light clothes that cover up (sun, mosquitoes, places of worship)
☐ A fleece for evenings, dawn safaris and altitude
☐ Walking shoes and sandals
☐ Head torch
☐ Water bottle (ideally with a filter)
☐ Small daypack and waterproof pouches
☐ Luggage padlock

Before you close the door

☐ Your government's travel advice reread
☐ Trip registered with your consular service (if it offers this)
☐ Itinerary and contacts left with someone close
☐ Online check-in done and baggage allowance checked

Notebook made from visiterafriqueunie.com/en/itineraries/south-africa-and-namibia-in-14-days/ · information checked in November 2026 against official sources. Entry, health and safety rules change: check them again before you leave (your country's official advice, the embassy of the country you visit).