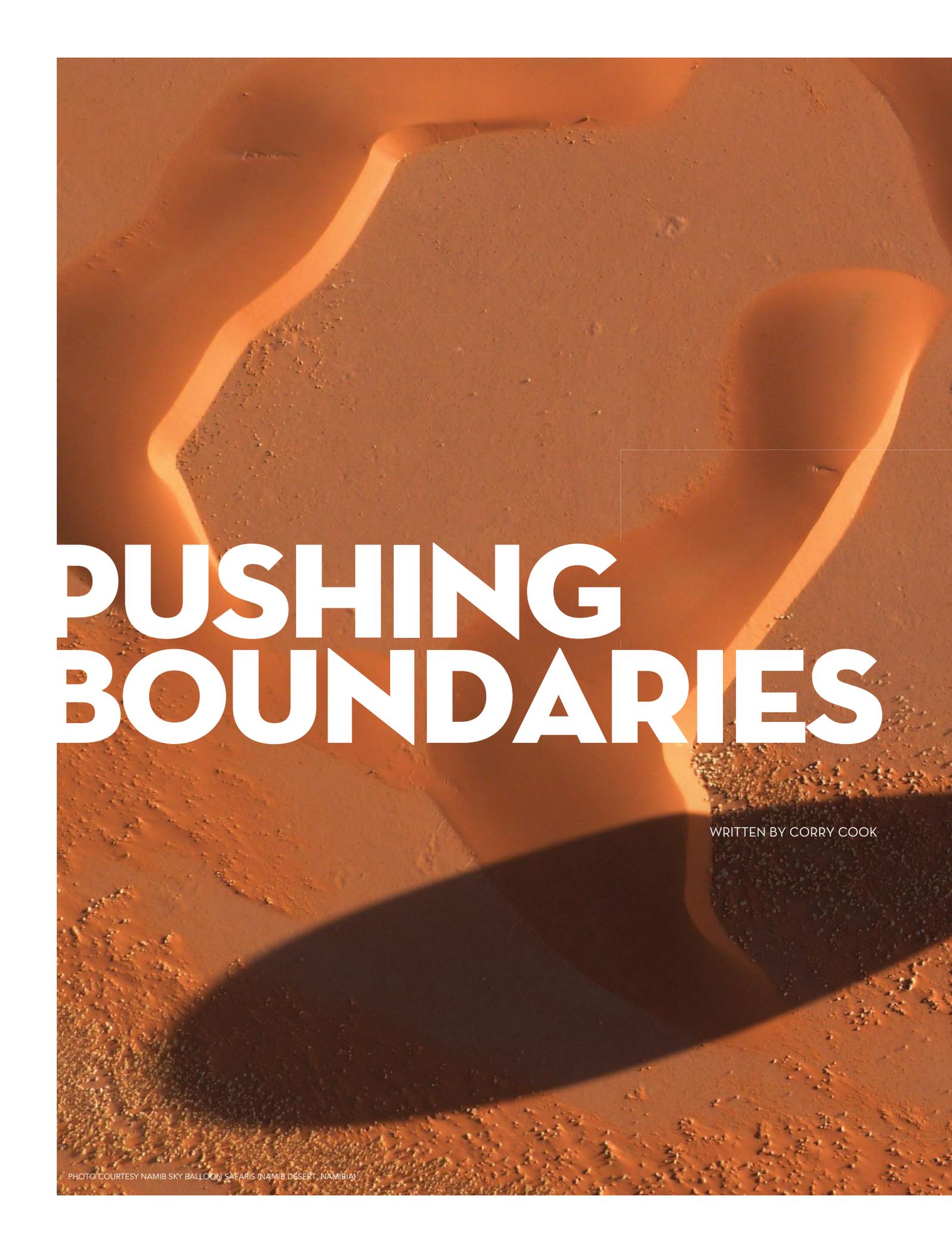


GENTRY

# DESTINATIONS



JUNE/JULY 2019

An aerial photograph of a desert landscape, likely the Namib Desert in Namibia. The terrain is a mix of reddish-brown sand and darker, pebbly ground. A large, dark shadow is cast across the lower portion of the image, suggesting a balloon or a person is positioned just out of frame. The overall color palette is warm and earthy, dominated by various shades of orange, red, and brown.

# PUSHING BOUNDARIES

WRITTEN BY CORRY COOK

PHOTO COURTESY NAMIB SKY BALLOON SAFARIS (NAMIB DESERT, NAMIBIA)

A high-angle photograph of a desert landscape. The ground is a mix of reddish-brown sand and small rocks. In the upper half, a large, curved, light-colored sand dune or ridge runs across the frame. In the lower right quadrant, a colorful parachute with segments of blue, red, yellow, and white lies on the ground. The lighting is warm, suggesting a sunset or sunrise.

*Celebrated English broadcaster, writer, and naturalist Sir David Attenborough once said, "The natural world is the greatest source of excitement; the greatest source of visual beauty; the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living."*

*Situated on the southwest coast of Africa, Namibia is home to outstanding landscapes, with deserts that have sprawled into deserted towns, one of the deepest canyons in the world, and beaches strewn with whalebones and shipwrecks almost in equal measure. Sea lions surf turquoise waves, rare desert-adapted wildlife wanders freely in search of water, and the world's largest sand dunes are just begging to be climbed.*

*"Exciting" doesn't even begin to cover it.*





PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATURAL SELECTION



**C**ut from the same travel cloth as Sir Attenborough, Will Bolsover, founder and CEO of Natural World Safaris (NWS), believes travel is a gateway and adventure is a thrilling window into the natural world that enriches and enlightens us. Under his direction, NWS is a bespoke wildlife travel outfitter aiding in luxurious personal discovery and transformation, whether you want a family holiday, honeymoon, group trip, or even a special secluded spot for a proposal.

Personally curated by Bolsover and his team of eco-glam pioneers, “my” Namibia was a time-maximizing, fly-in expedition; an epic personal quest with jaw-dropping, awe-inspiring landscapes and environmentally-friendly luxury properties in unique settings. In the air, Scenic Air’s Kodak Quest, nick-named “Tweety,” expertly delivered me to each must-see site. On the ground, a specialist-led quest put me up-close-and-personal with some of the world’s most spectacular and elusive wildlife, all the while adhering to NWS’ emphasis on learning from, engaging with, and contributing to local conservation and community programs.

Namibia reveals itself as a land of effortless and exotic extremes, from the wildly luxurious to the remote and simply wild. When it comes to living and giving in the natural world, all of Africa beckons, yet there are some things that you can only do in Namibia. The journey is waiting for you to make your own.

## ADAPT OR TRY

### SEARCHING FOR RARE DESERT-ADAPTED WILDLIFE

Days begin long before dawn when pursuing epic wildlife sightings in Namibia. This was the moment we had been waiting for, coming nose-to-horn with a magnificent and critically endangered black rhino. Even at a safe distance, he was a force to be reckoned with. Rhinos are one of the oldest groups of mammals, virtually living fossils. Gun-metal gray and estimated to weigh one ton, he was powerful, and then, protective. Suddenly, we discovered why: there was his mate. We had accidentally stumbled into a lively love nest—and this Romeo wanted us gone.

Namibia is an immediate refresher course in Darwin, who wrote that when it comes to the survival of a species, intelligence and strength take a back seat to adaptability to a changing environment. Here, life thrives in barren rock and sand and landscapes of infinite vastness. First up are the desert-adapted elephants, digging deep beneath the sand for the last vestiges of water. Then, making use of the wells left behind by the pachyderms, are giraffes, lions, and baboons, and perhaps even a brown hyaena or two existing alongside snakes and lizards and insects in a brilliant kaleidoscope of colors. There is also an extraordinary diversity of succulent plants, as well as the shrub-like *Welwitschia mirabilis*, which has only two leaves, yet can live for over 1,000 years.

With precious wildlife and ecosystems in

survival mode in every direction, the warm and welcoming Namibian people have ensured that conservation is the cornerstone of the Namibian experience. Namibia was the first African country to incorporate protection of the environment into its constitution, and the government has reinforced this by giving its communities the opportunity and rights to manage their wildlife through communal conservancies. According to Visit Namibia, the country's focus on conservation now boasts record numbers of free-roaming cheetahs as well as desert-adapted elephants, black rhinos, and desert lions. The Namibian government is not taking this for granted and strives to uphold, or even increase, the effort.

## RISE ABOVE IT ALL

WATCHING DAWN BREAK IN A HOT AIR BALLOON OVER THE WORLD'S OLDEST DESERT

The roar of the balloon's fire begins before dawn, and soon after you are floating, silently, over a breathtaking sea of red and yellow hues marking the Namib, the world's oldest desert. The dunes of Sossusvlei provide one of the "reddest" landscapes on the African continent, with some of the highest sand dunes in the world, at nearly 1,000 feet high. Over the next hour, witness the awakening of the Namib Desert from above: tiny springbok jumping and kicking, and tiny oryx racing each other in the distance. At the landing place in the middle of nowhere, an excellent breakfast buffet with sparkling wine reception awaits.

Natural World Safaris' partner on the ground, Namib Sky Balloon Safaris, recently created the Namib Sky Community Foundation, which helped fund the first early childhood development center and lower primary school in the region. The facility, Little Bugs, provides hope and opportunities through education for disadvantaged children.

## SINK OR SWIM

DISCOVERING SEALS AND SKELETONS IN ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST GRAVEYARDS

Shrouded in mist and mystery, the Skeleton Coast National Park stretches more than 300 miles along the Atlantic to the Kunene River. Described by Namibia's San Bushmen as "the Land God Made in Anger," this striking and ruthless coastline, with its thick fog and forceful winds, has laid claim to thousands of ships. A sense of danger is imminent; perhaps the

ghosts of those lost in shipwrecks, claimed by the powerful Benguella current.

The cool, refreshing towel inside your stylish jeep feels reassuring, a comforting counterbalance to the out-of-this-world sights and sounds outside. The furious Skeleton Coast and its raging Indian Ocean make for a consistent crashing rumble, an intriguing "roaring" dune littered with the bones of centuries of catastrophic shipwrecks. Marine life positively thrives, feeding off the nutrients in the Atlantic, and the most iconic inhabitants are the Cape fur seals that line the rocky shoreline in large colonies. To the west: a haunting void, a blank page of spectacular desert scenery.

## ENJOY THE SILENCE

SLEEPING INSIDE A WRECK

There is nothing on earth like a stay at the Shipwreck Lodge. Opened in June 2018, it is the sole luxury property in the Skeleton Coast National Park. Made of sustainably-sourced timber, the lodge includes 10 "shipwreck-style" cabins, including two family rooms, all spaced for peace and privacy along the sand dunes like the relics of the ancient ships that dot the coastline.

Operating eco-friendly and using solar power, the main lodge was designed to create eclectic yet comfortable living spaces, as if flotsam from shipwrecks was transformed into usable pieces. Local potters, joiners, designers, and other skilled craftspeople worked tirelessly to deliver high-quality furniture, upholstery, and focus pieces for the cabins and main area. Shades of blue, burgundy, black, and white represent the ever-changing moods of the Atlantic Ocean, whilst accents of rose and mauve take inspiration from the semi-precious stones found in the area.

In addition to the luxurious quiet and comfort, days here are active, with wildlife excursions, quad bikes, and ample space to explore. The Namibian Coast is a fisherman's paradise, and passionate anglers staying at Shipwreck can cast to their heart's delight with an exclusive stretch of beach.

## BLEND INTO THE BACKGROUND

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT AT A LIVELY WATERING HOLE

Dry and arid, Etosha is one of the largest parks in Africa. The big hitters of the animal kingdom reign here, including lion, white rhino, wildebeest, cheetah, leopard, desert el-





PHOTO LEFT AND ABOVE COURTESY OF NATURAL SELECTION



PHOTO BY SHAWN VAN EDEN



PHOTO COURTESY OF OKONJIMA NATURE RESERVE



PHOTO COURTESY OF NATURAL SELECTION

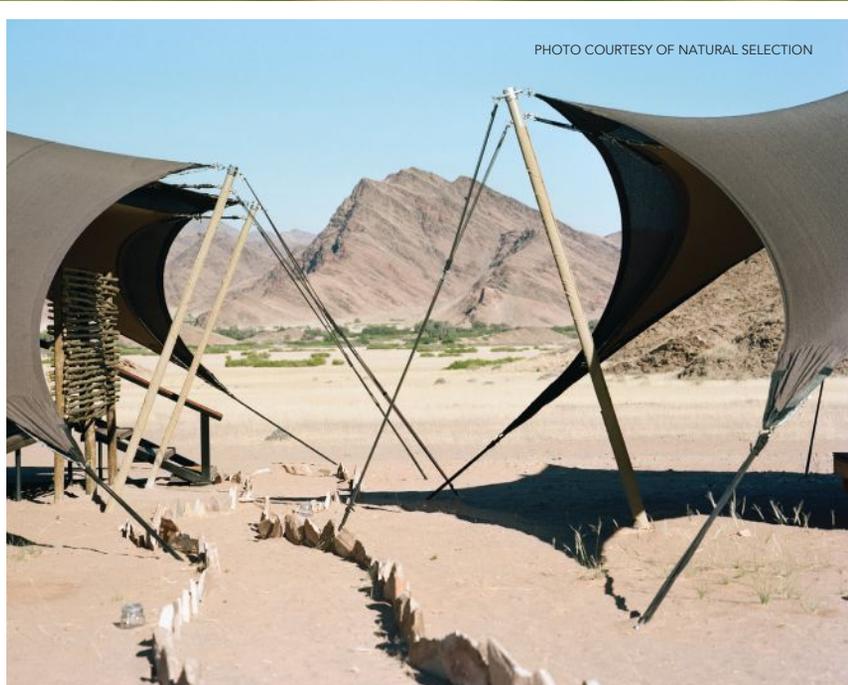




PHOTO COURTESY OF OKONJIMA NATURE RESERVE



elephants, giraffe, zebra, and a variety of grazers. Bordering the park and perched on top of a hill overlooking the plains below is Safarihoek Lodge. You'll find cool, thatched chalets all with private decks and a swimming pool with 180-degree vistas of the brilliant savannah.

In addition to a minimal footprint, the Lodge is dedicated to community engagement and development, using locally sourced and sustainable materials and art, recruiting its staff from local communities, and funding wildlife protection efforts in the area.

Whether enjoying some leisurely laps in the pool or positioned in the Lodge's unique two-story photography hide, you have an exceptional front-row seat to nature in motion.

## TEAMWORK IS EVERYTHING

ENGAGING IN EFFORTS TO STUDY AND PROTECT GIRAFFE AND OTHER WILDLIFE

A joint venture between the local communities and the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, the Hoanib Valley Camp is an elegant, intimate affair that immerses you in the wilds of the desert. The camp's six guest tents and restaurant bar area blend perfectly into the rugged environment with locally sourced furniture, décor, and art in every direction. The whole camp is solar powered to ensure carbon emissions are kept to a minimum, and the tents sit on decks made of a wood, bamboo, and 70% recycled-material composite.

Game drives in the area reveal desert-adapted elephant, as well as stately desert-adapted giraffe, and, if you're very lucky, desert lion. Zebra, klipspringer, and kudu move freely through the mountains, and you'll find hardy herds of springbok and oryx along with the region's largest population of free-ranging black rhino. The Camp has an impressive partnership with the Giraffe Conservation Foundation, offering a unique window into giraffe conservation in the area and insight into the work being done to ensure the survival of these magnificent creatures of northwest Namibia. Camp guests play their part as well, helping guides collect giraffe identification data on every drive.

## WISE UP

COMING FACE-TO-FACE WITH BIG CAT CONSERVATION AT THE OKONJIMA NATURE RESERVE

Home to the celebrated Africat Foundation, the Okonjima Nature Reserve also includes extensive protected habitat alongside an attractive variety of accommodations ranging from rugged to luxurious villas. The property's crown jewel, The Okonjima African Villa, is a stunning private compound overlooking a natural waterhole. When not lounging in luxury, guests at Okonjima have a variety of exceptional opportunities to get close to Namibia's big cats and other species.

Delightful days in this striped and spotted mecca are spent observing the expert naturalists as they "radio track" leopards and cheetah, and learning about the Africat Foundation's commitment to promoting wildlife conservation through education and human-animal conflict mitigation. Though many of the reserve's big cats are radio-tracked for protection and research, they roam freely and hunt within the 75,000 square mile nature reserve.

On my last day in Namibia, I found myself lying flat in the dirt, a hot but happy mess of dust, sweat, and sunblock. My whole body was shivering with excitement. Just a few meters away, two cheetah, Spitfire and Sniper, were lounging, fresh from a kill, teeth razor-sharp and bright pink tongues stained with blood, each brilliant black spot and tear-stained face amplified in a way no photograph could ever truly capture.

Lean and mean yet graceful, the world's fastest land animals are surprisingly quiet; unlike other big cats, cheetahs cannot roar. What I didn't know is that they can purr like hell. Sniper and Spitfire were in a collective full-body buzz. I lay there silent, every sense electrified, totally transfixed. Namibia had stolen my heart. ♦

To learn more about Natural World Safaris' Self-Drive, Fly-In, or Guided Namibia expeditions, please visit [naturalworldsafaris.com](http://naturalworldsafaris.com) or ring toll free: 1.866.357.6569.