

Wolwedans Boulders Camp

## *A landscape as old as time*

Nestled below giant granite outcrops in the remote south of the NamibRand Nature Reserve, Wolwedans Boulders Camp offers exclusive tented accommodation amid majestic desert vistas – and the tranquility that only an ancient landscape, barely touched by human endeavour, can provide.

This remote camp is sheltered by ancient granite monoliths that rise out of the flat desert landscape as if from nowhere.



OPPOSITE TOP Spacious canvas suites set on a wide wooden deck offer all that's needed for a relaxing stay in this unique desert environment. The sides of the suites can be closed for ultimate privacy, or opened to allow uninterrupted views over the awe-inspiring landscape.

BELOW You may be staying in the middle of nowhere, but creature comforts are still well provided for in the lodge's communal bar and lounge area.

'No man can live this life and emerge unchanged. He will carry, however faint, the imprint of the desert, the brand which marks the nomad; and he will have within him the yearning to return. For this cruel land can cast a spell which no temperate climate can match.'

Legendary British explorer Wilfred Thesiger wrote these words about Rub' al Khali, the vast 'Empty Quarter' that stretches across the heart of the Arabian Peninsula, but his eloquent prose could just as easily have been about the wide open plains of the Namib.

Certainly the lure of the desert proves irresistible for all but the most jaded traveller, and the NamibRand – one of the largest privately owned nature reserves in Southern Africa, hugging the eastern fringe of the Namib-Naukluft National Park just south of the legendary dunes at Sossusvlei – is particularly seductive. And while its 172 000 hectares may at first glance appear 'cruel', there is both life and beauty in its dry, rocky terrain.

The plains are covered with a velvet cloth of auburn waving grass that transforms into a delicate shade of green at the slightest hint of rain. Underground streams trap these precious beads of moisture and give sustenance to shepherd's trees, which in turn provide shade for hardy inhabitants, such as the muscled oryx that wander ponderously from sustenance to shade. Young males joust like knights of old, stamping their dominance into the red dust under hoof. Shy springbok pick their way daintily across the gravelly plains, while officious ostriches shepherd their clutches of fluffy chicks. Sociable weavers build their giant nests in the boughs of the spiky camel thorn, while scorpions and skinks take haven in the tree's latticed bark. Beneath rocks and inside crevices, shy barking geckos escape the heat of the day in elaborate underground burrows, ready to emerge at sunset. There is life in this barren land, if you only take the time to look for it.

And at Wolwedans Boulders Camp, you'll have all the time in the world. For it's in

an ancient landscape such as this – the dunes of the Namib have been here for millennia – that time truly does stand still. Here days are marked not by clocks or deadlines, but by the rising heat of the morning, the lazy torpor that afternoon brings and the happy arrival of the evening's restorative cool.

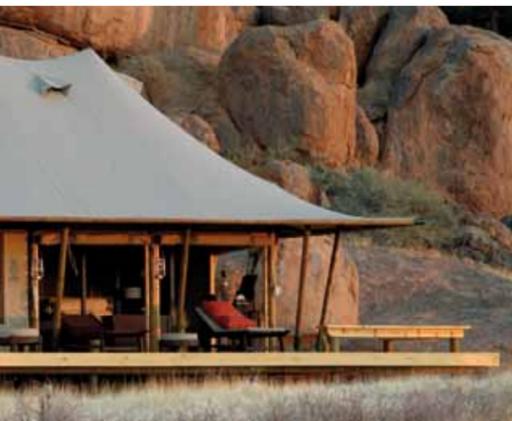
Perhaps cool isn't a word that readily springs to mind in a desert, but at Boulders Camp – the most exclusive lodge in the acclaimed Wolwedans Collection – refreshment for body and soul abounds. Arriving at Boulders is a soul-restoring adventure in itself. Self-drive visitors are now able to drive most of the way to the tented camp, but travellers would do well to ease themselves gently into life in the desert – perhaps by starting their holiday at one of the other Wolwedans camps. A night or two at the stunning Dunes Lodge – perched on an ochre crest of Namib sand – or in the luxury of Dune Camp will help you acclimatise to the heat of the desert, and the slow pace of life in the NamibRand. Breathe in deeply. Breathe out, and smile at the marvel of your surrounds. Relish the exquisite peace that only perfect silence brings. Enjoy that first ice-cold G&T on a hot African afternoon. Savour the beads of moisture on the shaft of cool glass, as the lengthening shadows spread across your private deck. The sun slips gracefully into the horizon, turning the African sky into a mirror of the ochre Namib dunes.

Once the shackles of stress have released their grip, the real adventure begins with a 45-kilometre journey into the southern heartland of the NamibRand. After two hours of travelling through pristine desert landscapes, the massive granite rocks for which Boulders is named shimmer out of the heat haze. Ancient monoliths, they cradle the lodge in their protective arms, as if fearful it will be discovered by the outside world. The four tented suites wait patiently for your arrival; a work of art made real among the ever-changing palette of desert colours.

There's a warm welcome at the stylish main lodge, a canvas haven of deep leather couches and panoramic views.



ABOVE An old gramophone, a well-stocked bookcase and a beautiful telescope set the scene for relaxed, old-world bush elegance. LEFT Lone oryx are a common sight on these arid desert plains.



LEFT AND BELOW Loungers provide for lazy desert days, while striking four-poster beds guarantee a good night's rest.

OPPOSITE Guests are treated to silver-service meals in the softly lit dining tent.

Here a vintage gramophone harks back to the golden era of African travel, while a small library offers well-chosen Africana to help you appreciate this unique environment. In the chill of winter, soft leather armchairs welcome you in a warm embrace, as the crackle of firewood provides a soundtrack to the sunset.

Out on the deck, lunch is laid out on fine linen tablecloths and chilled bubbly is poured into sparkling crystal to toast your arrival. All meals are served with a side

order of desert vistas – whether they're romantic dinners à deux under the Milky Way or communal feasts around the fire, where fellow travellers swop tall tales over a fine Cabernet.

From the main lodge, a meandering pathway skirts the granite boulders to deliver you to your private tented suite. Canvas walls are rolled skywards and desert breezes wash in over the four-poster bed swathed in fine percale linen. On the secluded deck that encircles the suite, two loungers relax in a corner,

beckoning you to enjoy a cool, quiet afternoon in the shade of the dramatic boulders. And, certainly, your days can be as relaxed or busy as you choose. If it's the start of an African adventure, this is a refuge to shake off the malaise of a long journey; if it's the end of a safari, this is the spot where you put your feet up and remember the incredible scenes you've enjoyed thus far. And relish those still to come.

There's a sense of understated bush elegance here. An unfussy natural charm pervades each hideaway, where tones of ochre and sand echo the views washing in from the plains. Here, the landscapes speak for themselves, and there's no need for extravagant décor to distract your gaze from the vistas outside. These pristine desert scenes have remained untouched by man for millennia, and we are just the latest in a long line of desert travellers to admire them.

Come evening, hurricane lamps set a romantic mood and crystal-clear skies offer up a star-spangled ceiling. In this absolute stillness, a good night's sleep is all but assured.

But in the cool of the morning and gentle heat of the afternoon, this vast desert reserve is your playground. Whether it's a short outing or a full-day safari, the guided scenic drives are the best way to explore the unique ecology of this little-visited corner of Namibia. A remarkable variety of birdlife is to be found here, while antelope still roam freely in the



PHOTOGRAPHS: STEPHAN BRUCKNER

grasslands and shy leopards watch from craggy hilltops.

But the landscapes, not the wildlife, are the real star here. With few roads, there is no intrusion of modern life, and little sign of human impact. These are the ancient hunting grounds of the San, and Boulders' well-trained guides will teach you to follow in their footsteps on the daily walking safaris, taking you to distant hills where you can still see their ochre animal paintings daubed on cave walls.

There's also the option – not offered at Boulders, but at the other Wolwedans camps – of an excursion in a hot-air balloon. Soaring silently along, the sheer majesty of the NamibRand unfurls below. It's a land where the ancient past still echoes among the granite boulders, singing you to sleep with lullabies of deserts and dunes and earth's earliest peoples; a song of time standing still on wide, empty plains. I think old Thesiger would approve.

■ Richard Holmes



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The Wolwedans Collection comprises five camps in the NamibRand Nature Reserve. Boulders Camp, set in the deep south, is the latest addition and is the most remote and exclusive.

