



FAMILY AFFAIR

Travel Namibia reader **Jeff Blumberg** embarks on the adventure of a lifetime with his wife and 20-month-old son as they travel by air and land across several regions of this incredible (and child-friendly) country ▶



CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT: Sam in pensive mode inside a Land Rover – his favourite place; running free: our last day in the Namibrand; Burchell’s zebra considerably present a perfect photo opportunity

CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT: Our beloved rusty Defender at Terrace Bay; studying rock paintings on the Skeleton Coast; giraffe reflections: “Yes, this is my Land Rover, actually”, Sam has a chat with Martin, the chef at Wolwedans; a dik-dik caught on film in Etosha; “It’s that way dad”, Sam and I explore the Sossusvlei dunes

When Jeff Blumberg made the decision to leave his job after ten years service with the same company, he found himself in the enviable position of having three months ‘gardening leave’ and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to embark on a long trip somewhere in Africa. However, he wasn’t going to be travelling alone. His wife, Claudia, quite rightly pointed out that wherever he planned to go, both she and their 20-month-old son Sam would be joining him!

“Of course that was exactly what I wanted,” says Jeff. “But I also wanted us to travel in comfort, have a relaxing time, and very importantly, I wanted Sam to have an amazing learning experience. No boring beach resort hotels for us!” This meant Jeff had to come up with an African destination that would be most suitable for travelling with a child.

“I am a huge wildlife enthusiast and recently became passionate about photography. The two, of course, go hand-in-hand in the African bush, so

I began searching for a country that would satisfy these two passions while at the same time being child-friendly. It wasn’t too long before I narrowed the search to Namibia for the following reasons...

Why Namibia?

01 Namibia is very safe and has first-world infrastructure. Namibia also has first-world towns and cities. Travellers to Windhoek and Swakopmund and even the very small towns in Namibia will be surprised to see shops full of the basic essentials.

02 Namibia is very sparsely populated. I knew wherever we went in the country, we were going to get a true wilderness experience.

03 Namibia is a photographer’s dream, with a combination of spectacular wildlife, beautiful landscapes, and desert and semi-desert scenery. It’s no wonder that photographs from Namibia are a regular feature at Wildlife photography competitions.

04 Sun. Sun. And more sun. We live in London don’t forget. Namibia has more days of sunshine than just about anywhere in the world. Beautiful clear skies all year around. In Namibia, you get nice warm sun without the humidity. If you had to put a list together of cities, for example, that had the best, most comfortable weather in the world, Windhoek with its 20-30 degree days would be near the top of the list.

05 April-May is a great time to travel to Namibia and this suited us timing-wise. In fact, it’s probably the best time of the year to visit. You miss the summer heat and catch the tail-end of the rains. The result is a cooler, more pleasant experience, with landscapes still green from the rains. A perfect combination in my view.

06 As with anywhere in Africa, there is minimal time difference from London. In fact, Namibia at that time of year is in the same time zone as the UK. It makes it much easier to keep children in their routine.

07 Little or no malaria. Much of Namibia is malaria-free. The only part that is a high-risk malaria area is the Caprivi Strip, and we didn’t travel there for that very reason. Otherwise, the country is either very low-risk (the northern interior) or malaria-free everywhere else. As a result, in the areas we travelled, we didn’t need to take anti-malaria medication. We also didn’t need any other inoculations. We could simply pack and go.

08 Many parts of our itinerary included areas where there were literally no dangerous creatures – Wolwedans and the Skeleton Coast among them. No mosquitoes, no dangerous snakes, no nothing. It’s just too dry. As a result, we could let Sam run around and be worry-free. The worst thing that happened to Sam was that he received his first bee sting – from a honey bee at the Sossusvlei Desert lodge!

09 Namibia has something for everybody. Amazing wildlife for the naturalist, including surprisingly good bird-life. Amazing

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CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT: Sam and Claudia enjoy playing on the dunes– the colours of the sky and the sand are a photographer’s dream; now that’s what I call a bath! Sam swaps a bucket for the real deal at Mushara Lodge; up close and personal with the Mr Big of Namibian wildlife

CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT: We discover that Sam is exactly one Oryx horn tall; landing at Wolwedans in the Namib after another spectacular flight in our six-seater Cessna; roughing it at Mushara Lodge – both the interiors and exterior were beautifully designed and totally luxurious

geology for the geologist. Amazing landscapes for the photographer. Stunning star-gazing for the budding astronomer.

10 Interesting history and culture. Namibia combines a fabulous mix of German, Afrikaans, and African language, cuisine, and culture, plus there are some wonderful examples of German colonial architecture.”

No Place Like Home: Child-friendly accommodation in Namibia

When choosing where to stay, Jeff opted for camps that either welcomed children in their literature or on their website (Mushara Lodge, Wolwedans, Doro Nawas), were family-oriented by their very nature (Okaukuejo), or where they could book the camp exclusively (Skeleton Coast Safaris).

★ **OKAUKUEJO**

Okaukuejo in Etosha is very popular with local Namibians as a family holiday spot and the camp is

very child-friendly. There is a great swimming pool, the restaurant has high chairs, and you can order a cot (crib) for your room. The waterhole chalets where we stayed are particularly nice because you can put your child to bed and then walk a few metres to the waterhole viewing area and be within earshot of your child and of all sorts of wildlife frolicking in the water. The first thing we would do in the early morning and late evening was sit by the waterhole while Sam slept.

★ **MUSHARA**

This exclusive, privately owned lodge located just outside Etosha is fantastic with children. All the amenities exist including baby cots, high chairs, etc. The staff were very efficient and would prepare Sam’s food and baby milk bottle at a moment’s notice. During one of the days, I went on a game drive while Claudia and Sam stayed in camp and played in the children’s play area (located at Mushara Bush Lodge). The play area contained a

rustic playground (tyre swings, etc), baskets with toys, arts & crafts, and games, etc) and a children’s pool. The staff were very happy to play with Sam. The restaurant also had a children’s menu. The villa accommodation was as luxurious as a Four Seasons Hotel anywhere in the world, probably with better service.

★ **WOLWEDANS**

The NamibRand is very conducive for family travel. Wolwedans welcomes children. You have to have a private vehicle, of course. You also have to stay in more exclusive accommodation so that you are far enough away that your child does not disturb other guests. Private Camp, where we stayed, was ideal. Absolutely heaven with a child. Sam had a beautiful wooden, hand-made crib. We also had a beautiful handmade high chair too. Private Camp comes with your own personal chef, trained at the Namibian Culinary Institute. Any type of food was on-demand, and that included food for Sam. Warm

milk, pureed vegetables, chicken, etc. ... whatever we wanted. The camp itself was situated right in front of a waterhole where we could sit and watch oryx, ostrich, and springbok come to drink. There was also a variety of birds. Sam absolutely loved watching and pointing out all the animals. Given that there are no dangerous creatures in the Namib and literally no insects at night, we slept in the open (with a roof above us). Waking up in the morning, we would pick up Sam in his bed and sit and watch the sun come up. Sam would spot jackals and all sorts of animals in the dawn light well before we were able to adjust our eyes. Sam was also able to run around the camp where we didn’t have to watch him every split second. It was terrific. I also mention that Sam fell in love with the Land Rover and spent much of his time on the lap of our ranger as he drove up and down the dunes. We met Wolwedans’ owner, Stephan Brückner, who has two young kids of his own, and tries to promote the area himself as a family destination. Brückner is also continuing ▶

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CLOCKWISE TOP LEFT: Our Damaraland Camp on a moonlit night; our exclusive accommodation at the Wolwedans Private Camp; family portrait taken on the dunes on the Skeleton Coast, not far from the Atlantic Ocean; hanging out at the Kuidas Camp Airstrip on the Skeleton Coast

We really had fun on this part of the trip, travelling to some of the most remote places in the world

to try to purchase farmland around the reserve to expand it – I only hope that he is successful!

★ **SOSSUSVLEI DESERT LODGE**

Part of the e-Beyond Collection, Sossusvlei caters very nicely for children. The accommodation feels somewhat akin to a ski chalet in the Rockies. Again, baby cots are provided. There is also a children's menu and the staff are happy to make whatever you ask (pasta, pureed food, etc). There is also babysitting available so Claudia and I enjoyed a couple of 'sun downer drives' by ourselves.

★ **DORA NAWAS CAMP**

Part of the Wilderness Safaris collection Dora Nawas in Damaraland was suitable for children too. Again, most of the amenities are provided (baby cot, car seat etc) but no high chairs. Dora Nawas is not situated in a camp-rich area but the activities are such that you can include your child (the Twyfelfontein paintings, petrified forest, etc.). I wouldn't recommend Dora

Nawas purely as a family destination, but if you are interested in the area it is a very suitable place to stay with a child. As with all the camps, I strongly recommend a private vehicle if you have children (assuming it is not mandatory in any case).

★ **SKELETON COAST SAFARIS**

Certainly the most adventurous part of the trip and in many cases the most fun. You have to book an exclusive tour and children pay full price. That is the downside. The upside is that you experience the trip of a lifetime – both for the child and for the parents. We loved every minute. Travelling in a six-seater Cessna plane several times a day. Sam absolutely was thrilled – when he was awake! He often went straight to sleep in the plane.

Sam also loved the Land Rovers and travelled on our guide's lap much of the time. We travelled with Henk Schoeman, the youngest of the brothers. He and his wife, Anita, were fabulous with Sam. They were so relaxed. We even left Sam with Anita

and went on a game drive. It was the first time we had ever left Sam alone. Admittedly we were a bit nervous, but when we got back we found Sam having a blast with some of the staffs' kids. In advance of the trip, we had told Skeleton Coast Safaris what to bring for Sam in terms of milk, food, etc. It ended up being absolutely fine.

The camps themselves are extremely remote and somewhat rustic, but very comfortable. There were no high chairs or baby cots but we could easily devise a make-shift bed for Sam in the tent with pillows surrounding the mattress so he could sleep absolutely soundly. We were able to do this at every camp. Sam also loved the bucket baths we gave him. We really had fun on this part of the trip travelling to some of the most remote parts of the world. On most days we didn't see another person. The Kunene River Camp was on the Angolan border where the next tiny village was more than 30km away. Sam was the youngest traveller that Henk had had up till that point. 🇳🇦

TRAVELLING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

THE PRACTICALITIES

★ **CAR SEATS**

A number of places had car seats, including Wolwedans and Dora Nawas. However, not all places had them and we knew it would be a necessity on the trip. We therefore brought a Sit-N-Stroll Car Seat and Stroller (<http://babyproducts.about.com/od/travel/gr/sitnstroll.htm>). It proved essential and meant we didn't need to bring a stroller – we just wheeled Sam around in the Sit-N-Stroll at airports and then it converted into a car seat for airplane rides, the Cessna, and the Land Rovers.

★ **BABY ESSENTIALS**

In terms of our travel gear, we had a large bag full of supplies just for Sam. This included 120 nappies (we budgeted about 6 per day, which proved about right), baby wipes, bibs, a whole box of Cheerios, porridge, and fruit snacks. Had we done it again, we wouldn't have brought as many nappies. We passed through places like Swakopmund a couple of times and we could have just run into town to replenish supplies. We also brought a couple of simple toys and books but tried not to overdo it. In the end, Sam didn't play much with his toys – he preferred playing in the sand with rocks.

★ **WEATHER**

I think we went at the perfect time of year. While the Skeleton Coast has nice cooling breezes all year, the interior, particularly the Namib, gets scorching hot during the summer months. I'd therefore recommend that April-August are likely to be the most comfortable months... especially travelling with a child.



FOR MORE INFORMATION...

- ★ www.skeletoncoastsafaris.com
- ★ www.wolwedans-namibia.com/kids.htm
- ★ www.villamushara.com
- ★ www.wolwedans-namibia.com/private_camp.htm
- ★ www.andbeyondafrica.com
- ★ www.wilderness-safaris.com