

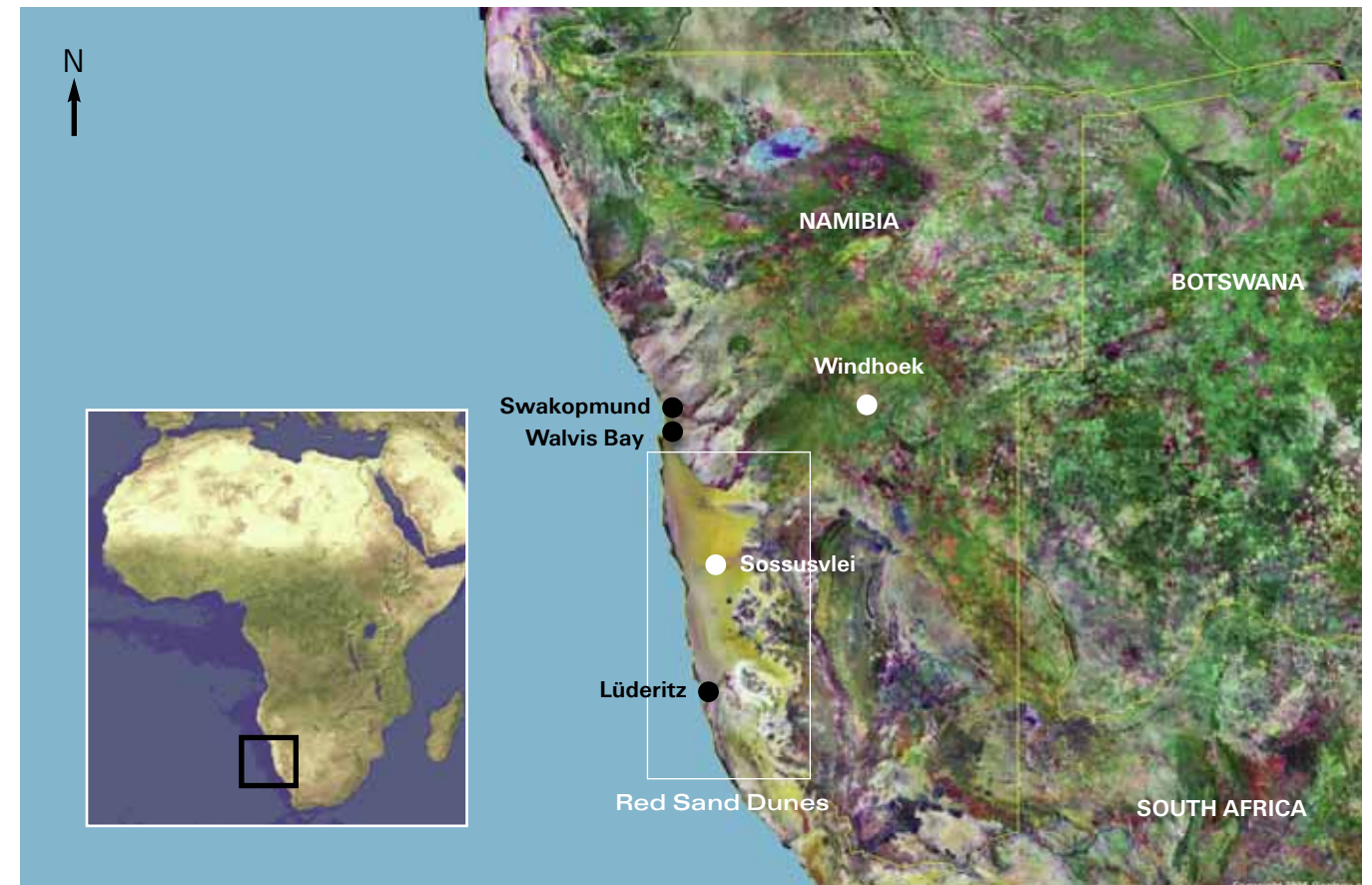


DESERT EMBRACE

A Solitude of Dunes in Sossusvlei, Namibia Draws Adventurers In

The "sossus" in Sossusvlei in Afrikaans means "the place of no return." The "vlei" in Sossusvlei translates as "marsh." The marsh of no return in the world's oldest desert – southern Africa's Namib – which for 1,000 miles along the Atlantic coast of Namibia is one of the harshest, most desolate places on earth – a sea of rolling sand that unfurls in an unbroken immensity of...nothing. Rains that on average fall only once every five to 10 years seep deep to disappear between dunes – the world's tallest – that over at least 80 million years have grown to soar as high as 1,476 feet. These vast sands, deposited into the Atlantic by the Orange River, moved northward by the Benguela current, and dumped back on land by the surf, have been shifted by the wind farther and farther inland for up to 100 miles. The desolation is staggering. And because virtually no water means virtually no life, certain parts of the Namib are no home for lions and hippos and cheetah; Sossusvlei, the large, dry mud pan at its heart that was created eons ago by a river that in a blink flows after each decade's rain, is not where you go to awe at giraffe or thrill to big cats or fall in love with the fun of safari.

Sossusvlei is instead where you go if you long to blow your mind.



Map provided by Voyager Flight Planning Software

It is an immensity of wonder, an experience of awe, a sight of sense-shaking, soul-stirring joy. Sossusvlei and its dunes – the two are synonymous – are a two-hour flight from Windhoek, Namibia’s hilly capitol city. Fuel-up here, your last chance at “civilization,” and 120 scenic minutes later alight on the dirt landing strip of private Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge – the ideal home base for your explorations (see A Sossusvlei Seduction, page 30). Like most miracles born of planet earth – and these Namib desert dunes certainly qualify as one of nature’s most marvelous acts – “the marsh of no return” is not as it appears. Within the desolation, despite the unkind climate, a delicate, even fragile ecosystem thrives. Life, so starkly absent to the eye, car-

ries on beneath the surface. Some of the world’s rarest and weirdest creatures and plants – an eyeless mole that virtually can swim beneath the sand, for one – have evolved over millennia to take advantage of the extreme days and years that pass with not a single drop of rain.

Fly above such a remarkable ecosystem at work and be amazed. Dead-ahead, to the right and to the left, is the miracle of Sossusvlei itself: rust-red dunes that by early morning and late afternoon (the best times to view) are an otherworldly kaleidoscope of shadowplay. Sunrise, when the vast African sky is a blaze of hue – purples and oranges and blues – and sunset when said sky is streaked with beauty, are also amazing dune-

The marsh of no return is the world’s oldest desert and one of the harshest, most desolate places on earth.

GREAT GECKO!



A Brand New Species Surfaces in Sossusvlei

The little guy was just a bit of black bug when Miles Paul saw it scurry across the floor. Or so he assumed. A *blister beetle*, he thought. But the astronomer and retired biologist, who was staying at Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge, the luxury safari camp run by CC Africa in Namibia's NamibRand Nature Reserve, looked closer. This was no blister beetle but a tiny creature disguising itself to pass as one. A gecko! Paul realized. And not just an ordinary gecko, one of 70 or so species common to Australia, Mexico and Africa. And not just an unusual gecko, like the various types that have a screamer of a mating call, look like a crocodile, or are so easy to get along with that families keep them as pets. No, *this* gecko, Paul suspected, was entirely new. A never-before-seen species of lizard – geckos are lizards after all – that was making his debut, right there next to his shoe. Confirming his find with Professor William R. Branch, Curator of Herpetology at the Bayworld Museum in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, Paul and Branch both were thrilled and astounded. "Totally tickled," was the word used by the professor, who has embarked on the year-long process of getting the new gecko officially, scientifically described, confirmed and named.

The little hatchling less than an inch long (he'll grow to a maximum of three) that appears to be the first of his kind is a beauty: gold of head and tail, with a dusky gray body that sports intriguing white markings, the reptile is a blessed event especially for its larger meaning as a creature of the Namib. The "living desert" at a spry 80 million years old is home to only the most adaptable species – the exceptionally rare plants and animals that can live in one

of the most harsh and desolate places on earth. Starkly beautiful, with vast deserts and endless horizons, the Sossusvlei area of the Namib hosts a unique community of desert-adapted beetles, spiders, lizards and moles. Plants, too, are weirdly unique. The extremely rare, shrub-like *Welwitschia mirabilis*, for instance, grows only two leaves throughout its life, its only nourishment moisture from sea fog. But these leaves become many feet long, and are gnarled and twisted into eerie shape by the desert wind.

Adjacent to the dunes along the plains of dry water-courses, larger animals like rare oryx and springbok (species of antelope) are found. But even these include not-your-usual species particularly clever about what it takes to survive near the Namib. Hartmann's Mountain Zebra, for example, can simply refuse to sweat if water grows too scarce.

The gecko, however, is a happy desert dweller. It is unique among lizards for the chatty, chirping vocalizations it makes when among its family and friends. It has no eyelids but possesses fabulous toe-pads that allow it to walk upside-down across ceilings with ease. Some are even parthenogenic, meaning females can reproduce on their own, no male necessary. Whether subtly colored or brightly marked, whether it snacks on ants or dives beneath sand when threatened, geckos of Sossusvlei are geckos that celebrate the miracle of life in a region where its brilliance isn't immediately obvious. But looking more closely, as did the lucky Miles Paul, and there you are: the desert ever thriving, alive with the joy of new birth.

Congratulations Sossusvlei on your new arrival!



viewing moments. Day by day, eon by eon, the wind continues to shape these towering forms, forcing the sand on the flat, windward slope upward toward the crest; the leeward slope, always steeper, drops to the desert floor in astonishing drama. Some among this collection of wind-sculpted works of nature's art are petrified – just like the perfectly preserved trees that can be found in Dead Vlei, a bowl of sorts in the middle of Sossusvlei; a strange and hypnotic draw of a place where for centuries there has not been enough moisture even for decomposition. In death there is so much life when it comes to the Namib. For not only do these petrified dunes, these petrified trees express a beauty almost beyond imagining, but this African



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CC Africa's Safari Lodge Turns Desert into Dream

Curving sensuously along the rock escarpment, the desert villa of natural stone and glass cradles a quiet rarely found elsewhere. Airy, beautiful, the oh-so-private suite that is only one of 10 soothes with comforts – a shaded verandah, outdoor shower, living room fireplace. Even the skylight above the bed that come dark becomes spangled with stars exudes the romance of Sossusvlei.

The Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge run by CC Africa, purveyors of arguably the ultimate luxury safari experience in Africa, is a Namib Desert Shangri-la where flying-in adventurers can expect to create one *wow* of a safari camp memory. Designed expressly to capture the splendor and solitude of the magnificent Namib, the lodge treats guests to some of the greatest sophistication – and epic amazement – to be found when on safari in southern Africa. Take breakfast in the bush. Correction: take a lavish spread of a breakfast in the bush. At sunset, sip a sundowner (aka cocktail) while gazing upon the animals – zebra, springbok, fox – that have gathered at a watering hole ingeniously engineered by the lodge a mere 100 feet away. Dine on sublime Pan-African cuisine. Your dramatic backdrop? The starkly stunning desertscape that is glorious Sossusvlei.

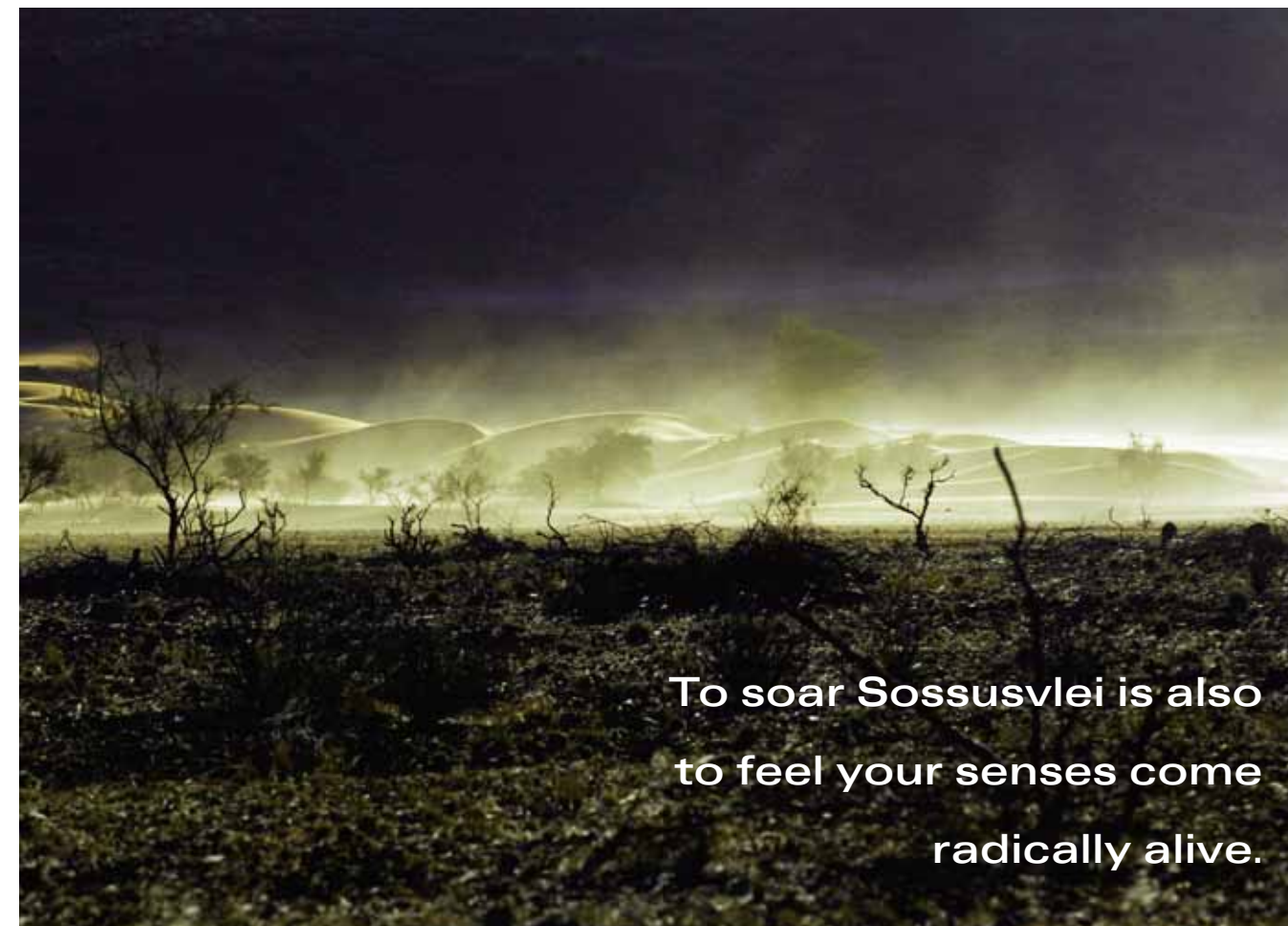
Between-times the life and culture of the safari camp is a thrill of serious astonishment in a seriously spectacular environment. Twice-daily, excursions by 4x4 – ranger and naturalist onboard – venture out into the NamibRand Nature Reserve. Here, the lodge has exclusive traversing rights to 32,000 exciting acres of pro-

tected land where Africa's wonder – its wildlife – await your awe. Staying in one of only 10 private villas is one thing; going on safari through a reserve so vast and uninhabited by all but the animals is another: This is seeing Namibia in a way that is as exclusive as exclusive gets. You can also journey by foot or via a 4x4 Quadbike ATV up and down CC Africa's private sand dunes. You might venture to Sesreim Canyon, a geologic fascination, or amble happily along one of the area's nature trails. Later, after a lingering, convivial evening with new friends in the intimate, open-air dining room, Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge's resident astronomer will invite you to join him in the lodge's observatory. Now, joy: In an adventure that expands on the smaller telescope found in your suite, he will introduce you to the Sossusvlei sky – a starry expanse of such brilliant, glittering wonder that you will marvel at the very miracle.

Indeed, come bedtime at this seduction of a lodge that mirrors the haunting magnificence of the desert, Sossusvlei's splendors of beauty, solitude and adventure become yours. Nightie-night, sleep tight: safari dreams live in the Namib.

** For additional details on this CC Africa luxury safari camp, visit ccafrica.com.*

** For information on how to fly Sossusvlei in your own (rental) aircraft in an all-inclusive adventure that includes accommodations at the Sossusvlei Mountain Lodge, contact African Flying Safaris, africanflyingsafaris.com (702) 562-9598.*



region beneath your wings pulsates with the energy of excitement.

Just west of this fascination is the Atlantic and, extending north for miles, the famed Skeleton Coast. Here, immense ocean fogs and strong currents have for centuries caused countless shipwrecks. The skeletons of these ships have been found as far as 164 feet inland as the desert slowly inches westward toward the sea, reclaiming land that to fly over is magnificent to behold. Especially in late afternoon, when the coastal fog offers a sky-show of otherworldly drama.

To soar Sossusvlei is also to feel your senses come radically alive. For instance, above the dunes, where the atmosphere is devoid of moisture, hence distortion, clarity of sight is





A dune-climb is rewarded with a spectacular view

stunning. How sharp the colors! How truly defined the outlines! Fly here and journey through a sensory high.

Sossusvlei and its dunes are part of Namibia's Namib Naukluft Park, one of Africa's largest. In 19,215 square miles the park encompasses much of the desert and the dolomitic Naukluft Mountains, which rise 6,445 feet above savannah grasslands and gypsum and quartz plains. The Kuiseb River runs through, nourishing herds of mountain zebra, gemsbok and springbok (types of antelope) and ostrich. But the park's region where the dunes reign, magical Africa appears quite different. Sesriem Canyon, another Sossusvlei sight, is so-named because early African trekkers had to use six ("ses") leather thongs to get their buckets to water beneath the sands. Today the canyon's 100-ft walls create a cave- or tunnel-like fascination that whether seen from the air or via 4x4, a popular desert mode of transportation, remains something entirely awesome.

Soar Sossusvlei and come under a spell of nature's most strangely majestic creations. Fly Sossusvlei and enter into an experience of true wonder. Get aloft above Sossusvlei and let this remarkable African place "of no return" make perfect sense. For a land so stunning, for dunes so dazzling, will draw you deep, ever deeper into its embrace – an embrace of fascination that at least for a time, however long your flight, will have you wanting to soar among them forever.

For further information on Sossusvlei, visit namibian.org and namibia-travel.net

FLY AFRICA



4th Annual Flying Adventures AFRICA

This time we are planning a trip to East Africa

While there are still details to work out before we know the exact itinerary, the plan is to fly Cessna 182s and Cherokees in two countries, Kenya and Tanzania. We will be choosing five of the seven extraordinary CC Africa's Luxury Safari Lodges as our base camps. CCAfrica.com

This will be an opportunity for an incredible self-flying experience! We will have a local guide pilot in the lead plane to take care of our aircraft, flight planning and all other pertinent flying details. We will have 4x4 vehicles and highly experienced trackers to find us numerous wild animals: Lions, Cheetahs, Elephants, Giraffes, Hippos, Crocodiles, Wildebeests, Rhinos, etc. We will feast on Gourmet Meals, see Spectacular Scenery and live in the ultimate of Luxury Accommodations! To get an idea of what we do, check out the Exciting Itinerary of our 3rd Annual Flying Adventures Africa at FlyingAdventures.com/Africa.pdf

You will be joining the Publisher of Flying Adventures magazine on this expedition. The group will be limited to 8 to 10 couples depending on how many aircraft we obtain and the number of accommodations available in the small safari camps. The trip will be approximately three weeks in the spring (Autumn in Africa) of 2008.

If you are interested in joining us, please contact us

Africa@FlyingAdventures.com **626-618-4000**