

SKELETON COAST

Explore the dramatic stretch of hostile and remote coastline, named after the numerous whale skeletons and shipwrecks



1

Visit one of the largest Cape fur seal colonies in the world at the Cape Cross Seal Reserve

2

Experience the fascinating, desolate environment from sand dunes to salt pans

3

Explore what is left of shipwreck skeletons that met their fate on the treacherous Atlantic Coast

4

Discover the small wonder of the lichen fields and other desert-adapted plantlife

The Skeleton Coast is a 40 km by 500 km rugged coastal strip in the north-west of Namibia and boasts fascinating scenery, incredible desert-adapted plant- and wildlife, eerie shipwrecks and Africa's largest seal colony. This area is exceptionally remote, with its northern sections visited only by fly-in guests. Almost entirely deserted, the coastal stretch is studded by sun-bleached whale bones and ships that have been stranded over the decades because of thick fog, rough sea and unpredictable currents. In the south, Cape Cross Seal Reserve is home to up to 300,000 seals.

Despite the hostile environment, there are a number of wild animals: desert-adapted elephants, rhinos, desert lions, brown hyenas, jackals, giraffes, seals, oryx, kudus and zebras. There are also a number of plant and insect species, which thrive here solely on the moisture from the daily fog off the Atlantic Ocean.



SKELETON COAST FACTS



Cape Cross Seal Colony marks the spot where the first European set foot in Namibia in 1486. (left); Scenic flights offer views of the desolate coastline and the remains of wrecked ships (above)

1. In 1971 Namibia declared this 16,000 square kilometre (6,200 sq mi) area as the Skeleton Coast National Park, it stretches from the Ugab River to the Kunene River and measures roughly 40 kilometres wide and 500 kilometres long.
2. The southern part of Skeleton Coast Park, from the Ugab River up to Torra Bay, is freely accessible. From the entrance gate at Ugabmund and Springbokwasser a permit is needed and can be purchased at the gate. North of Mowe Bay is off-limits to visitors but flying by light aircraft gives a great insight into this unique region - and offers fantastic views of various shipwrecks along the coastline.
3. Skeleton Coast is named for the whale bones and seal bones that once littered the shore from the whaling industry, but there are plenty of ship carcasses too which supports the ghostly name.
4. More than a thousand vessels of various sizes litter the coast, notably the Eduard Bohlen, Benguela Eagle, Otavi, Dunedin Star and Tong Taw. The most recent shipwreck is a Japanese fishing vessel which ran aground near Durissa Bay in 2018, about 200 km north of Walvis Bay. All 24 crew members were rescued by Namibian authorities.
5. In 1486 as part of a search for a sea route to India, Portuguese explorer Diogo Cao erected a stone cross at what is now called Cape Cross, making him the first European to visit this area.
6. Cape Cross Seal Reserve supports 150,000-300,000 Cape fur seals, the largest seal colony in Africa. The sheer number of seals, their overwhelming smell and immense noise are impressive.
7. Rainfall rarely exceeds 10 millimetres (0.39 in) annually and the climate is highly inhospitable. However, the thick sea fog creates enough moisture to support many fascinating desert-adapted plant species including welwitschias, !Nara melons, several lithops succulent plants (often called "living stones"), brightly-coloured lichen and pencil bush (ink bush).
8. Black-backed jackal and brown hyena roam the beaches and you may see game such as gemsbok (oryx) and springbok. In years with good rainfall numbers increase which attracts predators such as spotted hyena, lion and leopard.
9. There is only one luxury lodge situated inside the Skeleton Coast National Park itself, this is Shipwreck Lodge accessible from Möwe Bay (the collection point). Bordering on the park is another luxury lodge, called Hoanib Skeleton Coast Camp, accessible only by fly-in. This lodge has access for activities into the Skeleton Coast National Park.

SKELETON COAST LANDMARKS

Cape Cross Seal Colony: One of the largest Cape fur seal colonies in the world with up to 300,000 Cape fur seals during breeding season. You can park close to the colony and walk over wooden platforms between the seals.

Henties Bay: About 70 km north of Swakopmund, Henties Bay is predominantly a tourist destination for anglers and 4x4 enthusiasts. With several shops and restaurants, its a good place to stock up on supplies and fuel before heading into the Skeleton Coast Park.

Shipwrecks: Namibia has thousands of shipwrecks strewn along its harsh coastline. Unfortunately, many shipwrecks are not accessible, or they have been completely destroyed by the sun, sea, and wind but a few are still within reach e.g. Zeila, Dunedin Star, The Winston and Suiderkus. Shipwrecks that occur further north than the Suiderkus can only be seen from the air. The northern section of the Skeleton Coast Park is a concession area and restricted to fly-in safaris.

Terrace Bay: Experience the remoteness and desolation of the Skeleton Coast at this coastal stopover. Expect very basic accommodation in this very remote part of the world. However, this quiet area gets surprisingly busy during local holidays and the main fishing season in Jan-Feb so plan your away-from-it-all trip accordingly.

Mowe Bay: Smooth-polished semi-precious stones are scattered among whale skeletons and shipwrecks dating back 500 years at Mowe Bay. From here independent visits to the area are strictly prohibited but fly-in safaris and other guided excursions can be organised.

Lichen Fields: Lichen are a complex life form - a symbiotic partnership between a fungus and an alga. These fascinating plants add a colourful tint to the otherwise bare and desolate surroundings in Lichen Fields along the Skeleton Coast.

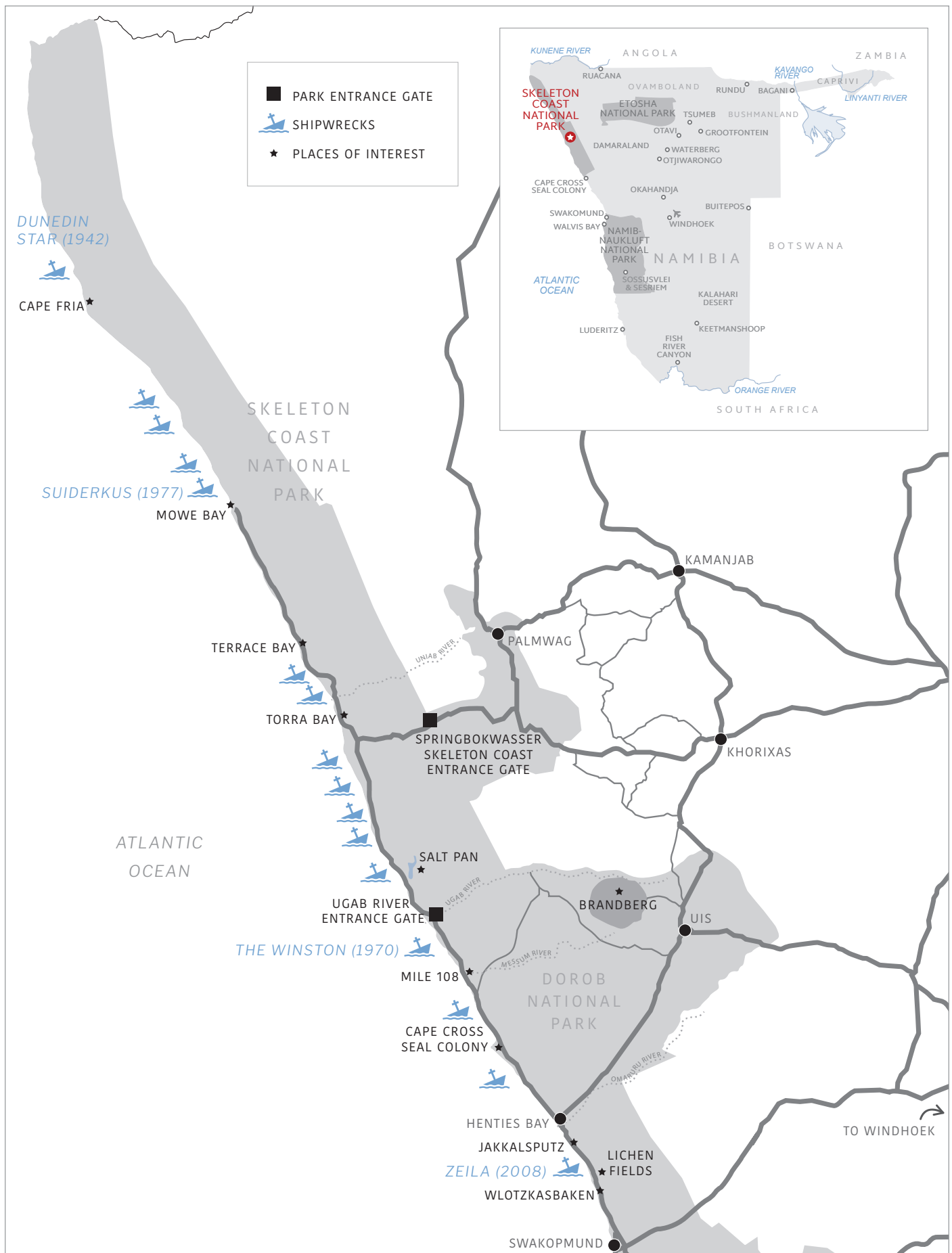
Salt Pans: There are several shimmering salt pans along the Skeleton Coast including the Agate Mountain salt pans which are best seen from above on a flying safari.

Entrance gates: The Skeleton Coast National Park has two entrances: the Springbokwasser Gate, located on the C39 from Damaraland; and the Ugab River Gate in the south on the coast. From there the C34 will lead you to Swakopmund via Henties Bay.

Explore the isolated and beautiful desert dunes of Namibia's wild Skeleton Coast.



SKELETON COAST MAP



SKELETON COAST DISTANCES

| | | | |
|--|-------|-------------|-------------|
| Swakopmund - Henties Bay | 70km | 1 hour | Tarred road |
| Henties Bay - Cape Cross | 60km | 40 mins | Salt road |
| Cape Cross - Ugab River Gate | 80km | 1 hour | Salt road |
| Ugab River Gate - Torra Bay | 110km | 1 - 2 hours | Gravel road |
| Ugab River Gate - Terrace Bay | 160km | 2 hours | Gravel road |
| Ugab River Gate - Mowe Bay | 240km | 3 - 4 hours | Gravel road |
| Ugab River Gate - Springbokwasser Gate | 140km | 2 hours | Gravel road |

SKELETON COAST WEATHER

Along the Skeleton Coast, the climate is desert but mild: it almost never rains, but the air is humid and there are often heavy fogs, mists and low clouds, especially in the early hours of the day. Temperatures are mild all year round, but with fog, humidity and wind, you can feel cold, especially in winter. Best visited during the warmer months from October to March when mornings are less foggy and its warmer than in winter.

| | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| AVERAGE HIGH °C (°F) | 20 (68) | 21 (70) | 20 (68) | 18 (64) | 18 (64) | 20 (68) | 18 (64) | 16 (61) | 16 (61) | 16 (61) | 18 (64) | 19 (66) |
| AVERAGE LOW °C (°F) | 15 (59) | 16 (61) | 15 (59) | 13 (55) | 11 (52) | 11 (52) | 9 (48) | 9 (48) | 10 (40) | 11 (52) | 13 (55) | 14 (57) |
| DAILY MEAN °C (°F) | 17.5 (63.5) | 18.5 (65.3) | 17.5 (63.5) | 15.5 (59.9) | 14.5 (58.1) | 15.5 (59.9) | 13.5 (56.3) | 12.5 (54.5) | 13 (55.4) | 13.5 (56.3) | 15.5 (59.9) | 16.5 (61.7) |
| AVERAGE RAINFALL MM (INCHES) | 1 (0) | 2 (0.1) | 2 (0.1) | 2 (0.1) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 1 (0) | 0 (0) |

The black-backed jackal along the Skeleton Coast are unselective scavengers of dead fish, birds and penguins and actively hunt and kill seal pups to survive this harsh environment.

