

FISH RIVER CANYON

An ideal destination for both solitude and adventure - explore this ancient geographical wonder on foot, on a bicycle, by air, or in an open safari vehicle.

1

View the sheer scale and beauty from one of the designated viewpoints

2

Incredible hiking from half-day walks to multi-day hikes

3

Take an exhilarating drive into the heart of the canyon in an open 4x4 vehicle

4

Spot wildlife including zebra, giraffe, oryx, ostriches and more

The major attraction in the southern-most reaches of Namibia is the Fish River Canyon, the **largest canyon in Africa**.

The area in and around the canyon is a conservation area and part of the Ai-Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. Although not specifically a destination for wildlife sightings, there is an opportunity to see mountain zebra, baboons, giraffe, kudu and various other antelope species. The Fish River area is home to over **100 endemic plant species and over 84 tree species**. You will come across drought-resistant plants like euphorbias, aloes, quiver tree and acacias.

Most of our visitors spend a few days as part of a self-drive holiday but the Fish River Canyon is also popular with hikers. Hiking options range from a gentle sunrise walk in the nature reserve to the monumental **85km five-day hike**. More geographical wonders further afield include the hot springs at Ai-Ais and the Giants Playground, Quivertree Forest and Mesosaurus fossils near Keetmanshoop.



FISH RIVER CANYON FACTS



The sheer scale and desolate beauty of the canyon may be a humbling experience (left and above)

1. Fish River Canyon, situated between the Namib and Kalahari deserts, is the largest (by volume) canyon in Africa. It covers 5,900 square kilometres, is 160 kilometres long, up to 27 kilometres wide and 550 metres deep in some places.
2. The beginnings of the canyon started 650 million years ago when flooding and plate movement formed a lowered area which the Fish River slowly eroded into a flat plain. Glaciation around 300 million years ago further deepened the canyon. With the separation of the continent Gondwana about 120 million years ago the African continent rose increasing the gradient of the Fish River allowing it to erode even deeper into the rock. Over 650 million years ago this mountainous area started eroding from continuous flooding from the ocean.
3. A large number of archaeological sites have been identified, ranging from colonial era to Pleistocene and earlier but they are largely unstudied.
4. The Ai-Ais Fish River Canyon National Park was recognised as a National Park in 1968. In 2003 it was joined with the Richtersveld National Park of South Africa and became known as Ai-Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park – the first cross-border conservation area for Namibia. The entire canyon and its surroundings are now enclosed by protected land.
5. The Fish River Hike is a five-day adventure covering a distance of 85km, this is only possible in the cooler months from April to September with a certificate of fitness. Hikers carry their own belongings and camp out in the wilderness. Other assisted hikes are available from private lodges in the surrounding areas. They offer guided hikes of varying distances from day hikes to overnight sleep-outs at set up camps.
6. The Fish River Canyon hosts an annual marathon - not for the faint-hearted, the 65km (Lite) and 100km (Ultra) technical courses will test an athlete's capabilities to the extreme.
7. The hot springs at Ai-Ais were discovered in the mid 19th century by a Nama herder while searching for lost sheep. Ai-Ais is at the end point of the Fish River Hiking Trail and offers an excellent place to relax after the long hike.

FISH RIVER CANYON LANDMARKS

Fish River Canyon Lookout (Main Viewpoint): This viewpoint offers the best (and most photographed) lookout over the expanse of the canyon. The view takes in the sharp river bend, known as Hell's Corner and is easily accessible by gravel road.

Hikers' Viewpoint: 3 km north of the main viewpoint and the start of the 85km hiking trail, a great spot to get a sense of the size of the canyon.

Viewpoints: Sunrise and sunset are the best times to see the canyon when the walls are glowing. Apart from Main and Hikers' there are several other viewpoints along the 20km gravel road alongside the canyon. These include Sulphur Springs (Palm Springs) - 7km along the road and accessible by 2WD, and Eagle's Rock - the southern-most viewpoint and only accessible by 4WD.

Kooigoedhoogte Pass: From the top of this pass you have an incredible view of Four Finger Rock.

Four Finger Rock: A rock formation comprised of four thick pinnacles that resemble more accurately a cow's udder, rather than fingers.

Rock Pinnacle: This prominent feature is an important landmark for hikers as it is visible from various points along the Fish River Hiking Trail.

Ai-Ais Hot Springs: Ai-Ais (pronounced "eye-ice") means "burning water" in the Nama language. These natural sulphurous hot water springs are found on the southern end of Fish River Canyon. They have a stable temperature of 60°C and push up at an amazing rate of 30 litres per second. There is a resort here offering a basic lodge and campsites.

Gondwana Canyon Park: This private nature reserve, established in 1996, covers an area of more than 125,000 hectares (1,250 square kilometres) and is home to giraffes, mountain zebras, ostrich and various antelope species as well as leopard. The landscape is plateau and wide open plains interrupted by dolerite dikes, granite hills and the occasional quiver tree.

*There are a range of hiking options available when you're in the area (below);
Iconic quiver trees (Aloe dichotoma) dot the landscape at the Fish River Canyon (right)*



FISH RIVER CANYON TIPS

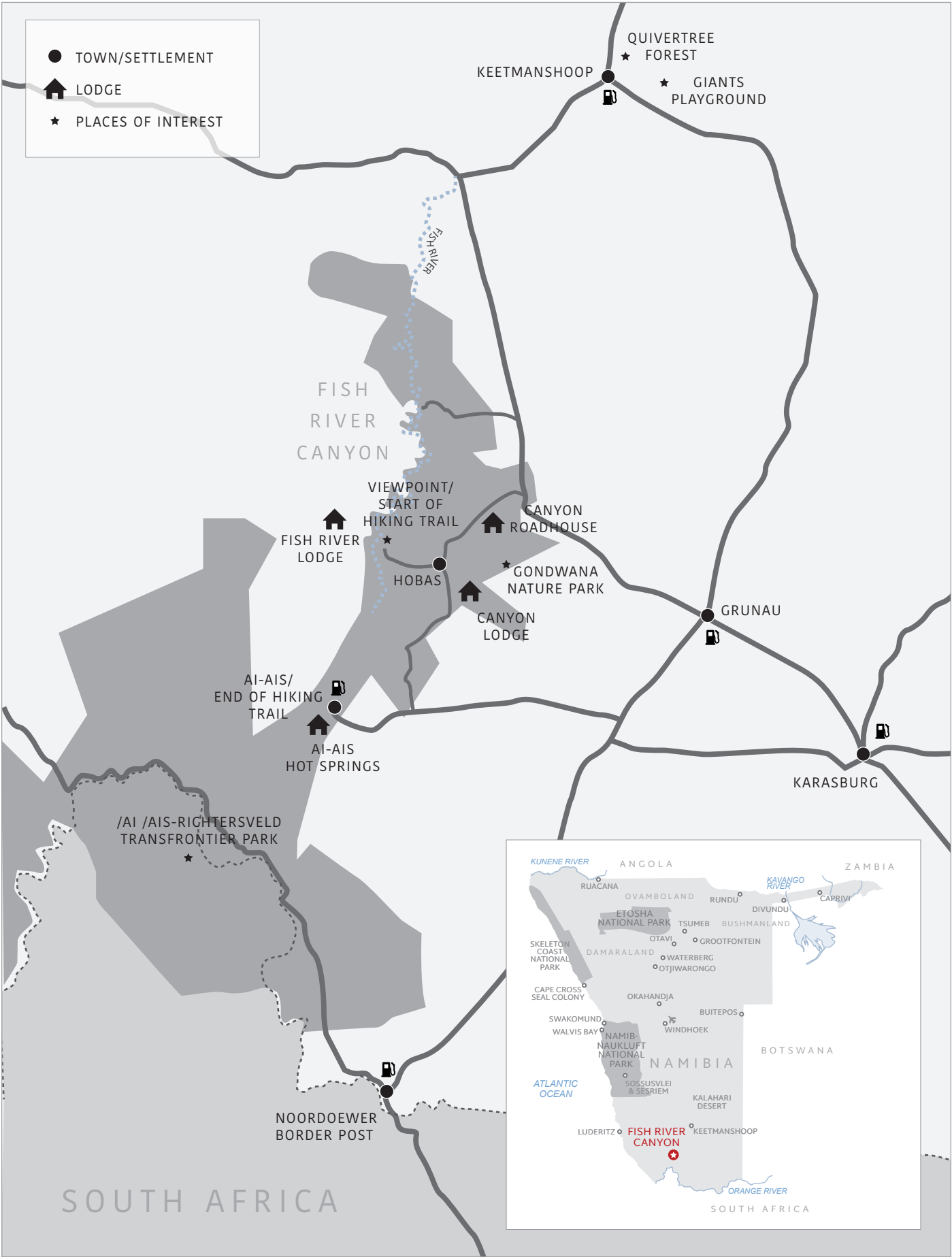
- The Fish River Canyon is not always included on a standard tour of Namibia due to its off-the-beaten track location. If you're in search of solitude, Fish River Canyon should be added on your itinerary. Getting to and from this area will lead you through some other stunning remote areas too.
- If combining Namibia with South Africa by road, this will likely include a stay in Fish River Canyon as the main attraction this far south of Namibia.
- Fish River Lodge, on the western side of the canyon, is the only lodge built on the precipice of the canyon with a view over the canyon itself. This is also the most luxurious lodge in the area. All other lodges and camps are a distance away from the canyon and require driving to the nearest lookout point to view the canyon.
- As with most other landscapes, early morning or late afternoon is best for photography when the light is softer and contrasts greater.
- There is no day hiking allowed in the Canyon but there are day hikes nearby in Canyon Nature Park and Gondwana Canyon Park.
- There is a small shop at Hobas which stocks a few essentials, snacks and cold drinks.
- It is a good idea to wear closed shoes as it is very rocky in some parts - and always wear sunscreen.

FISH RIVER CANYON DISTANCES

Windhoek – Fish River Canyon	645km	8 hours	Mostly tarred road, last section from the C12 on gravel
Keetmanshoop – Fish River Canyon	150km	2 – 3 hours	Mostly gravel road
Aus – Fish River Canyon	280km	3.5 – 4.5 hours	Partly gravel road, tarred from the B4
Luderitz – Fish River Canyon	405km	5 – 6 hours	Mostly tarred road with the first section on gravel
Sesriem – Fish River Canyon	550km	7 – 8 hours	Mostly gravel roads
Noordoewer – Fish River Canyon	165km	2 – 2.5 hours	Mostly gravel roads
Ariamsvlei – Fish River Canyon	250km	3 – 3.5 hours	Mostly tarred roads



FISH RIVER CANYON MAP



FISH RIVER CANYON WEATHER

Summer: The warmest months are January, February, March, November and December when the mercury reaches average highs of 36°C. This is also rainy season but, being a hot desert climate, you probably won't see that much rain. The summer days get extremely hot and humid so any afternoon thunderstorms will offer a welcome respite from the heat.

Winter: Between the months of April and September the climate is beautiful. The temperature is moderate and it only rains about 3mm each month. This is when the canyon is open for hikers, the rest of the time it would be too dangerous as it simply gets too hot and there is the danger of flash floods. Even though its winter, the midday temperatures can spike to a blistering 40°C. Evenings are generally mild, averaging minimum 10-14°C, although night time temperatures can go below 5°C.

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
AVERAGE HIGH °C (°F)	36 (97)	35 (95)	34 (93)	31 (88)	27 (80)	22 (71)	22 (71)	24 (75)	28 (82)	31 (88)	33 (91)	35 (95)
AVERAGE LOW °C (°F)	20 (68)	21 (70)	20 (68)	18 (64)	14 (57)	10 (50)	10 (50)	11 (52)	14 (57)	17 (63)	18 (64)	20 (68)
DAILY MEAN °C (°F)	28 (82)	28 (82)	27 (80)	25 (77)	21 (70)	16 (61)	16 (61)	18 (64)	21 (70)	24 (75)	26 (79)	28 (82)
AVERAGE RAINFALL MM (INCHES)	3 (0.1)	5 (0.2)	8 (0.3)	5 (0.2)	3 (0.1)	3 (0.1)	3 (0.1)	3 (0.1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)

