



Newsletter of E.J. Peiker, Nature Photographer and www.EJPhoto.com
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Namibia 2008

Namibia is a relatively new nation having just won its independence in 1990 after a long period of external rule, most recently Germany in the late 1800's and early 1900's and South Africa until 1990. It is primarily a desert nation located just north of South Africa on the Atlantic side of Africa. Due to its many cultures from years of foreign rule as well as many native tribes, Namibia has 13 different languages. The official language is English but in the cities German is also very prevalent and the most spoken language throughout the country is Afrikaans, a derivative of Dutch. Each of the tribes has their own language including several click languages where clicking and popping noises are a part of the vocabulary to differentiate words. Diamond mining is still a large industry as is tourism. Namibia is the only country on Earth that has environmental conservation written into its constitution. Namibia is mostly scorched earth type desert with very little rainfall except for some downpours during the rainy season. The interior is very hot during the day and cools off substantially at night. The coastal regions are cool with prevalent morning fog caused by the Benguela current which funnels cold water up the Namibian coast from Antarctica.

In September 2008 I joined an Andy Biggs African Safari to Namibia. In the sections to follow, my diary as I wrote it on the journey is available for your reading. The equipment I chose to take on this trip were a Nikon D300 for wildlife due to its 1.5x crop factor and a D700 for landscapes due to the full frame nature and high quality pixels of this camera. For lenses, I took the quintessential safari lens, the Nikon 200-400 f/4. For wide angles I took the Nikon 17-35 and 24-70 as well as the 70-200 for longer focal lengths and 1.4x and 1.7x teleconverters. As a backup lens I took Nikon's compact consumer grade 18-200 lens. I chose Nikon for this trip due to the 200-400 lens and the lighter weight of the Nikon D300 and D700 which put professional cameras in smaller bodies.

The text below is written in mixed tense (present and past). This is due to the fact that it is a diary – some things were written real time, thus the present tense and some were written at the end of the day or after the trip, thus the past tense.

Day 1 & 2

The first two days on the September 2008 Adventure to Namibia were spent in the close confines of two Delta 767 airliners. The first flew me from Phoenix to Atlanta. This was a very

old and marginally functional 767 where 2/3 of the screens did not work resulting in most of the passengers not receiving their safety briefing, a gross violation of FAA rules which, as a licensed commercial pilot, I dutifully reported to the flight crew which then had to start over with a manual safety briefing. Fortunately the larger 767 - 400ER used to fly from Atlanta to Senegal and then on to Johannesburg, South Africa was a much less run down and much better maintained aircraft.

After boarding the flight from Atlanta to Johannesburg, we were dealt a set-back as the airplane was too heavy for the available runway and temperature conditions. So a number of passengers, presumably the standbys, were asked to get off the plane. This was followed by a delay while their luggage was removed. We finally took to the skies for the uncomfortable 8 hour and 30 minute flight to Dakar, Senegal on the western most edge of the African continent. We landed in Dakar in a rainstorm and were informed, as expected, that through passengers to South Africa would not be allowed off of the plane. A security crew came through and inspected all luggage and tore apart every seat on the plane. This is to prevent people from planting something on the plane and then getting off in Senegal; an inconvenience but a necessary safety step. We then departed for another 8:30 flight to Johannesburg. By the time we got off the plane we had been on the same aircraft for 20 hours and 30 minutes. That is a long time to be confined to a seat designed for people well under 6 feet tall. Fortunately the plane was not as full from Dakar to Johannesburg so I was able to move to a seat where I had a bit more room due to having an empty seat next to me thereby increasing my comfort substantially. I really didn't get any sleep but did watch 6 different movies on the in seat entertainment system and on my laptop. They also had in-seat power but for some reason my Mac Book Air's touchpad did not work properly when using the in-seat power even though the laptop charged just fine. I was afraid that perhaps something had failed but when on normal power in the hotel room in Johannesburg, everything was fine.

I had a bit of a scare while waiting for my luggage in Johannesburg, as after an hour my bag had still not come out. A late arriving bag would be disastrous as the next flight from Atlanta isn't until the next night, a time by which we would already be 800 miles away in Namibia. I was finally relieved to see my bag coming out as the very last bag. I grabbed a cart, made it through South African Customs with no problems and went across the street and checked into the very nice but very expensive Hotel Intercontinental right at the airport. I finally got a chance to relax a bit and went to sleep easily around 8:30PM. the time difference between South Africa and Phoenix is 9 hours.

Day 3

I woke up at 4:00AM on a very cold and windy morning in Johannesburg and met up around 8:00AM with some of the participants in our Namibia adventure for breakfast. It was a traditional German style breakfast with Spitzle, Pretzels, cold cuts, as well as the more North American style foods such as Cereal, eggs, yogurt, etc...

At 9:00AM we headed back across the street to the International Terminal for our South African Airlines flight to Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia. The flight on South African Airways was much better than any US domestic flight with a full meal service on the short 1 hour and 50 minute flight and a flight crew that treated passengers with respect and dignity rather than the type of treatment, as if they were doing you a favor, that you tend to get on most US carriers.

The seats however were the most uncomfortable seats of any kind I have ever sat in. I am told that all South African Airways seats are very uncomfortable as they are all very straight up and have a concave shape to them. One would need an additional 4 inches of padding just to have the chair touch the small of the back.

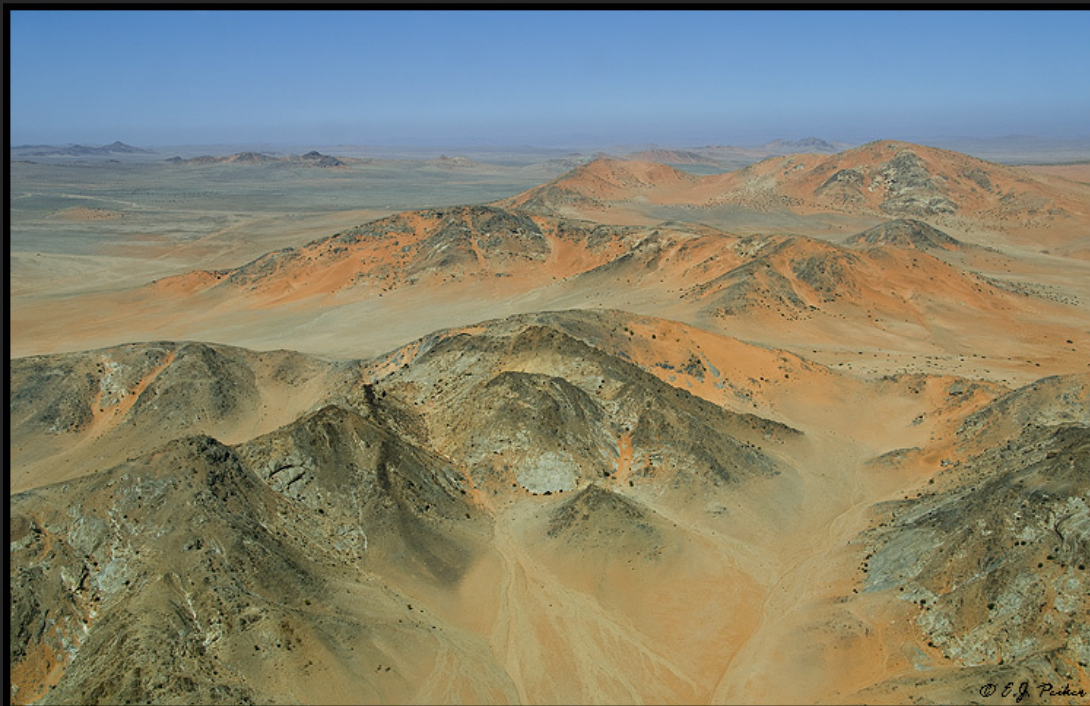


Himba Child, Windhoek Namibia (Nikon D300, 18-200mm)

Approaching Windhoek, the terrain reminded me of the North American High desert such as what is found in New Mexico and part of Nevada. After going through immigration and clearing customs we were whisked away to the Olive Grove Guesthouse near downtown Windhoek. It is a nice lodge with just a handful of attractive rooms. After meeting all of the participants in the Andy Biggs African Safari we went and did some walking around in Windhoek where I photographed the Christkirche (Christ Church), a real nicely maintained church, and Alte Feste (Old Fort) which is a fort built by the Germans that used to occupy this area in 1890 to protect their troops. We came upon a tribe of native women and children called Himba, dressed in their native garb which consists of only covering of the lower genitalia and the rest of their body is covered in Ochre. Twenty Namibian dollars (slightly less than \$3.00 US) gave us permission to photograph them with their young children. We ended the day with dinner back at the Olive Grove.

Day 4

I woke after 8 solid hours of sleep on Day 4 but a quick check of the temperature says it's only 38 degrees outside. I definitely did not come prepared for such cold weather but I think it is actually a bit warmer than 38. After a very good breakfast which included my favorite European style thin pancakes with berries and banana we headed to the smaller domestic/general aviation airport in Windhoek for our flight to Lüderitz on the South Atlantic coast. Our luggage was sent to Lüderitz on a Cessna 210 while the human cargo boarded a 14 seat Cessna Caravan. We started out flying south to an extinct volcano and then west into Lüderitz. The flight west was very scenic with the desert changing from the New Mexico or Nevada like high desert to the sandy dunes of a low desert with lots of blowing sand. At one point we flew over an area where the desert alternated between the traditional tan colored sand and a darker peach color. It was quite windy when we landed. Lüderitz is an old diamond mining town that was settled by Germans and its architecture and feel is still very German. After lunch at our new accommodations, the Lüderitz Nest Hotel, we embarked on a walking tour of Lüderitz where we photographed some of the colorful German architecture buildings. The day ended with dinner at the hotel.



Interior Namib Desert, Namibia (Nikon D300, 18-200mm)

Day 5

This morning, we left at 5:30AM for nearby Kolmanskop, an old diamond mining ghost town. German's occupied this area and mined for diamonds until it ran dry in the 1950's. They abandoned a small town of residences, a hospital, school, shop and numerous official

residences and business buildings that are now being reclaimed by the desert. There is some interesting photography inside the old abandoned buildings where sand has started to fill the rooms leaving behind an interesting merging of mankind and nature's grand reclamation project. This is in the form of sand dunes juxtaposed with doors and painted walls. While this is not the sort of thing I usually gravitate toward in my photography, it became an interesting exercise in composition and low light photography. At noon we went back to our hotel for lunch and a free afternoon and evening.

Day 6

Day 6 was a repeat in the morning of Day 5 with more time spent at Kolmanskop but it wasn't nearly as productive for me photographically as the day before. Prior to our first day there, the area had very strong winds which removed most of the footprints in the rooms of the abandoned ghost town. Yesterday there wasn't much wind so when we returned this morning most of the rooms had footprints all over the sand inside them that made it less desirable for me to photograph. I took the opportunity to go through the area where the process of diamond mining was described in detail. While it was very interesting and informative, it reinforced my disdain for diamond mining due to the large human toll as well as the toll on the land. Diamond mining has now proceeded to be done underwater and the sea floor is being sucked up and crushed to extract diamonds.



Namib-Naukluft National Park (Nikon D300, 18-200mm)

At noon we boarded our Cessna Caravan for a one and a half hour scenic flight to the Namib-Naukluft National Park and our lodge, the Kulala Desert Lodge, our home for the next three nights. The Namib-Naukluft National Park is home to the famous Red Sand Dunes or Sand Sea as they call it here. They go up to over 1000 feet in height. Upon landing it became

immediately obvious that we were no longer in the Benguala Current regulated cool coastal region of Namibia but in the hot and arid Namib Desert since the temperature was at least 30 degrees warmer with daytime temps even now, in late winter reaching over 100 degrees - no big deal for someone from Phoenix right? Well there is no air-conditioning anywhere so you can't really ever get out of the heat. The flight went up the coast which yielded a few aerial photos but unfortunately my window was very scratched up and I had a seat near the strut so shooting was difficult but I still got a few decent images. As we turned inland the light brown sand started to turn to the peach and red colored sand on the Namib-Naukluft area. The Kulala Desert Lodge is a guest lodge which has permanent tented huts in the middle of the Namib-Naukluft. It is completely isolated from any civilization and incredibly quiet. The only noises you hear are the sounds of birds and Geckos.

After a quick lunch we did our first drive to photograph the red dunes. This is what I came to Namibia for. This trip is the first use of the Nikon 70-200 f/2.8 lens for me other than a quick functionality check and focus check at home. I immediately thought that the lens was broken as the image in the viewfinder vibrated. Turning VR off calms everything down. I thought that the VR unit was malfunctioning which would not be the end of the world since I shoot everything from a tripod anyway. Another Nikon shooter in the group has the same lens so I tested it and it did the same thing. It then all came back to me, unlike the Canon 70-200 f/2.8 IS, the Nikon lens does not have tripod mode VR despite being a more expensive lens.

The sun set too soon and we ended the day with some drinks before driving back and then dinner back at the lodge. After dinner the hotel staff entertained us with traditional Namibian singing and dancing. This renewed my love of bongos. One of these days I'm going to have to buy one.



Sossusvlei (Nikon D700, 24-70mm)

Day 7

Morning came very quickly when our guides woke us at 4:00AM. The early wake up was to make sure we could get to the soda pan of Deadvlei where 600 year old dead trees on a white sun parched surface with the red sand dunes in the background are the major photographic attraction. I got some of the classic Namib desert shots here. Deadvlei can best be described as a mystical or even a spiritual place. It is dead silent here and the trees are the remains of a time past when plant life covered this valley floor. This is a place that I would like to be all alone at for a few hours. I tried very hard to convey the feeling I got here in my photographs. We photographed until the light got harsh around 8:30AM and headed back to the lodge.

After a little downtime and lunch, we headed back out into the dunes. Today is a very hot day and the temperature in our quarters is 95 degrees at mid day. Fortunately it cools off nicely at night. This afternoon we drove to Sossusvlei, an area with many red sand dunes and photographed them until sundown. I also took some advertising shots for Andy Biggs' new venture, Gura Gear, a line of backpacks designed specifically for the traveling photographer. The day ended again with drinks at sundown, although it seemed the bees were as interested in them as we were, and dinner back at the lodge with another set of African entertainment from the staff. Amazingly enough, half of the trip to Namibia is already over.



Deadvlei (Nikon D300, 70-200mm)

Day 8

A 5:00AM knock on the door to wake us up for our balloon ride across the Namib Desert began day 8. We arrived and boarded our hot air balloon just as the sun was rising. I was fortunate to be in the second balloon because it allowed for some great photography of the first balloon floating over the desert with the early morning light behind us. It was a very nice and calm morning giving us a nice long flight which culminated, as virtually all balloon flights do, with a champagne breakfast at the landing site. One member of our group has come down with the traveler's crud, most likely due to something he ate that his body has no defenses for so he was unable to go on the balloon ride. We offered the extra ticket to one of the staff members at the Kulala. Our hostess at every meal went with us and it was almost as fun seeing the grin on her face as we soared through the air as it was to see the magnificent landscape below us. The price for one of these balloon rides is nearly a quarter year's salary for these workers and therefore they could never afford to do this themselves. I took Malarone for the first time today in preparation for Etosha/Ongava in the following days. Unfortunately this made my stomach very crampy for much of the day.

Once again it is brutally hot today and the bad news is that by noon, three people have come down with traveler's crud stomach ailments. Fortunately it has not struck me so far and I am hoping it stays that way. I am sure there is some sort of commonality to what they ate but figuring it out has not been possible.



Balloning over Namib-Naukluft National Park (Nikon D300, 18-200mm)

In the afternoon we went a bit further into the Sossuvlei area than yesterday to a dune called Big Daddy. I got some nice scorched earth type shots in a dry lake bed with the red dunes behind. At the end of the day I climbed a large dune and was racing the sun. I wanted to get to the top before the sun set. This was a killer workout due to the 2 steps forward, one step back nature of dune climbing. Andy took some video of me doing the climb that I will hopefully get a copy of later. Being at the top of a large sand dune by myself in the silence of the Namib Desert and taking in the full 360 degree view with the sun setting was an incredible experience. On my way back down, after sunset, we finally had some nice clouds that turned a great shade of pink which made for some nice shots as well.

After, dinner, when I got back to my room to pack, I noticed that at some point I must have put at least two fingers on the front element of my 24-70 lens. This would explain off axis autofocus issues I have been having. I fear that all of the photo taken with this lens, which is greater than 50% for at least the last day will be scrap due to one half of the frame shooting through sunscreen. I am feeling a bit devastated by that and can only hope for the best. I won't know until I get home and there is no opportunity for redo as we leave for the dry lake pan of Etosha and the Ongava preserve tomorrow morning.

Day 9

This morning was departure time from Kulala. After a hearty breakfast, another Malarone (yuck) and goodbyes to the staff that took exceptional care of us, we boarded our Cessna Caravan. Thomas Knoll and I, the only two pilots even remotely qualified to fly this sort of aircraft besides our charter pilot have been riding in the copilot seat. Thomas took co-pilot duties in the first two legs in the previous days and today we had two legs and it was my turn. Unfortunately our plan to fly up the Skeleton Coast, something I was very much looking forward to, was stymied by low hanging coastal fog. We instead had to fly inland back to Windhoek to refuel. After that it was on to Ongava.

The Ongava tented Camp is phenomenal. We were greeted by the owner and found out that we had the whole camp to ourselves which means a private tented cottage for me. He also informed us that the water comes from a deep well and is perfectly safe to drink and that mosquitoes in the area do not carry Malaria. This is fantastic news because it means I can stop taking Malarone however I will continue to drink bottled water whenever possible. Finally, the tented cottages are solar powered and the whole camp, save the safari vehicles, have a very small ecological footprint.



One Heck of a Tent, Ongava

The cottages are first rate with oiled wood floors, tented sides, indoor and outdoor shower and all the comforts of home except Air Conditioning. Oh yeah, it's very hot here too but cools off very nicely at night. We are now 350 miles closer to the equator at 19 degrees South Latitude. Even on our ride to the camp we spotted much wildlife and I was blown away once we were in the camp. Large quantities of mammalian and avian wildlife abounds right here in the camp. As I type I see a Waterbuck, a Zebra and a Kudu out of the front of my tented cottage and Rock Hyrax are running all around. At lunch, an African Yellow-billed Hornbill kept us company and I have already seen dozen's of species of birds in the first hour that I have never seen before.

After settling in we went on our first game drive in the Ongava Preserve. This preserve is not real conducive to photography due to a lot of brush but we are told that tomorrow in Etosha, we will not be disappointed. I am still figuring how to best photograph from this type of Land Rover as it really has no good place for a bean bag or tripod. I did learn though as suspected that the Nikon 200-400 is an ideal lens for safari. Tonight I did get some nice shots of a baby Burchell's Zebra as well as seeing my very first Hartmann's Mountain Zebras – next to Grevy's Zebra's these are the most interesting looking Zebras to me. Unfortunately they fled before being able to take a photo..

We arrived back at camp around 8:00PM and as we were sitting down for dinner, a mom and young White Rhino came to the water hole just outside the outdoor eating area followed by several giraffes and an Oryx. As I sit here typing this at the end of the day, I hear dead silence interrupted by the sounds of African Wildlife. This is as it should be, no sounds of cars, no sounds of planes, no sounds of any kind except the wildlife and my fingers hitting the keyboard.

Day 10

After a good night's sleep I awoke at 4:30AM to get ready for our early morning game drive into Etosha. We went to a watering hole that had an amazing number of animals coming into it. There were Burchell's Zebras, Oryx, Black-faced Impala, Kudu, Sprinbok, Blue Wildebeest, Jackal, and more and they kept visiting the water hole over and over. It was awesome.



Burchell's Zebra, Etosha (Nikon D300, 200-400mm)

We rode back and had lunch and I found out that another of our group of 12 had come down with a stomach ailment. That makes 4 or 33%. I continue to be fortunate. In addition to the usual suspects at the watering hole right outside of our dining area, a Baboon appeared today. He

chased everything else away though.

In the afternoon we again went to Etosha and made it to two other watering holes. At the first we encountered "ghost" elephants. These are Elephants that appear almost white due to washing themselves with the whitish soil and heavily alkaline and white sediment laced water. There was radio chatter about 7 lions staking out another watering hole so we raced to it to find them completely ruling over the watering hole with many other species, especially zebras trying to get a drink but the lions would not have any of it. We watched the interaction of Lions and Zebras as well as Jackals patrolling the area until sundown.



Ghost Elephants, Etosha (Nikon D300, 200-400mm)

Upon arriving back in Ongava, I noticed that we missed our turn-off to our camp and asked the Land Rover Driver and Guide and got an inexact answer. Perhaps we were being kidnapped and taken to Zimbabwe or something... just kidding. Shortly after missing the turn we arrived at a bonfire with a whole outdoor African Barbecue set-up as a surprise by the staff for our group. We enjoyed time around the fire and an excellent dinner under the stars and a half moon in the middle of the African Bush - Awesome Once Again! Cameron and Wendy, are easily the best hosts I have ever run across anywhere.

As day 10 ends, it is hard to imagine that our time here is almost over with only one more full day in the bush before making our way back to civilization on Day 12.

Day 11

Day 11 is my final full day in Namibia. Some of the others are going on to see more of this country on their own, while others are going on to Botswana and an unlucky few of us that still

have corporate employers are starting their journey home tomorrow. So we had high hopes for the day, however the morning game drive into Etosha gave us little to be excited about while those who stayed behind tracking for Rhinos had a heyday with close encounters of the Rhino kind. We did stop at a waterhole and did some photography but it was backlit. This did give me a chance to test Andy's prototype contraction which I'll call the Frankenpod. It looks like it is put together with metal tinker toys, a monopod and some super clamps but in reality it was quite effective as a stable shooting platform from a safari vehicle. We also stopped to take a look at the humongous Etosha Pan which is so large you cannot see across it in any direction.

After lunch and some downtime during the extreme heat of the day, we went for another game drive but this time on the Ongava preserve. Here I finally did get to photograph some Rhinos although only briefly. I did get one very nice shot though. Meanwhile the other vehicles had very close encounters and got many photographs - story of my photographic life. On the return we did spot a couple of Rhinos after dark and I got to test the Nikon D700's ISO 6400 performance which is very noisy but much less so than anything at this ISO level that came before it. As we were leaving this spot we noticed a Lion stalking toward some Wildebeest. We tracked it until it got too dark to see and came back to the Ongava Tented Camp. I was able to photograph some of this at ISO 6400 on the D700 and the photos are usable – something unheard of just a year ago. The two Rhinos from the first night were back at the waterhole and several lions were also in the area. This turned into the most fascinating wildlife encounter I have ever witnessed - two Rhinos trying to protect their right to the waterhole from a pack of 7 lions. After a bit of jousting back and forth 11 more lions showed up bringing the entire Pride together. This included lions of all ages from an old mom all the way down to very young cubs that were just born this year. This caused the Rhinos to stand down and eventually leave. We witnessed this at a range of 50 to 75 feet for over an hour from the patio of our eating area. It was truly amazing.



White Rhinoceros, Ongava (Nikon D300, 200-400mm)

So while photographically, our last day was not as good as I would have hoped, the experiences of the wildlife encounters at the end of the day were once that I will never forget.

Day 12

The journey home commenced today. The first of 5 flights and three days in transit home were completed today. On the way to the dirt strip in Ongava we spotted the same two Rhinos that had the stand-off with the lions last night. We boarded a Cessna Caravan and flew to Windhoek International where we had a 3 hour layover for our South African Airways flight to Johannesburg on the other side of the southern tip of Africa. The 737-800 that we flew again had easily the most uncomfortable seats I have ever sat in - simply not made for biped vertebrates. I cannot see how any human cannot have a back ache even after a short 1:45 flight. Many passengers were complaining. Re-entry through customs into South Africa took all of about 30 seconds as my visa from two weeks ago was still good.

I am now back at the Joburg Airport Intercontinental hotel where I had dinner with one of the members of the safari group. I have a whole 24 hours here before my flight to the US. I could have booked my flight home for tonight but with just 3 hours, any delay would likely have had me miss my flight home. I downloaded Nikon View NX to my MacBook Air so I can finally review my images taken with the D700 as Apple does not yet support the D700 natively, something I was not aware of before I left.



Blue Wildebeest, Ongava (Nikon D300, 200-400mm)

Day 13 & 14

After a good night's sleep and a good breakfast, it was time to check out of the hotel. Since nothing is close to the Joburg Airport of interest, I spent the day in the Executive Lounge which my Hertz #1 Club Gold card got me into. At about 6:00PM we boarded the Delta 767 for the long flight first to Dakar and then on to Atlanta. I had an empty seat beside me for the entire flight to Atlanta which made the flight relatively comfortable. We arrived about an hour early into Atlanta and immigration and customs was again uneventful. The flight to Phoenix pushed back from the gate on time but we sat on the taxiway for an hour making us late into Phoenix. Once again this domestic plane's cabin was in a state of disrepair with my entertainment unit not working and my seat recline mechanism not working. There was no sleep to be had due to sitting in the midst of a group of people that knew each other and felt the need to shout to each other the entire flight as if they were the only ones onboard. Every time I go abroad, it becomes obvious that Americans in general are among the most inconsiderate of others on the planet and it is no surprise why we are not liked. The landing in Phoenix ended the 2008 Namibian Adventure.



Kudu, Etosha (Nikon D300, 200-400)

Epilogue

Namibia is a dry, arid land but a land which brings together many cultures peacefully and the level of stability that this country has achieved, especially for the African continent in just 18 years is really remarkable. Photographically, for desert landscapes, it has to rank among the top destinations in the world although its closeness to the equator makes for very short sweet light periods so one must be out and ready to shoot because time is very fleeting. For wildlife photography, it offers an amazing array of mammals and birds and they tend to concentrate into

very small areas of water due to the dryness of the land. It is not unusual to see 5 or even 10 species of large mammals interacting at the same time. This makes for many photographic opportunities but one must be ready to accept very harsh light made worse by the strong reflections from the light colored ground. For Antelope species, Namibia is awesome. Many of the other species that people come to Africa for including Elephant, Rhino, Leopard, Lion, and Cheetah are here but they are often difficult to find and/or photograph in good light. If I were to do it again, I definitely would want to spend some time in the North West part of the country including the Skeleton Coast which we had planned to do an aerial photo shot of but were unable due to coastal fog.



Dune 49, Namib-Naukluft (Nikon D700, 70-200mm)

This was my first major photo shoot using Nikon equipment since the film days. The cameras and lenses performed well with no malfunctions, lock-ups or glitches. I find the Nikon 17-35 to be on par with the Canon 16-35 II despite the later being a 10 year newer design. The Nikon 24-70 f/2.8 lens is superior to Canon's in all regards but the difference is not substantial. The Canon 70-200 f/2.8 (and f/4) are vastly superior to the Nikon 70-200 f/2.8 for vignetting. The lack of tripod mode VR on this lens is inexcusable in today's world of Image stabilization. The

200-400 f/4 lens is a phenomenal lens and is exceptional on its own and still very good with a 1.4x. With the 1.7x one can start to see some deterioration in image quality which can be mitigated by shooting at f/11 if there is enough light or the ISO is increased. The D700's high ISO performance is really phenomenal as I got useable Rhino shots in virtual darkness at ISO 6400. Finally, for a 11x zoom, the 18-200 is not bad and I used it for all of my photos from the airplane. Overall I am pleased with the Nikon gear and by the end of the trip I could do most things as fast with Nikon gear as I can with Canon. I have closely examined my photos from the day when I thought I had contaminated the front of my lens prior to shooting but it appears that it happened after as none of my photos are showing any blurriness.

Finally, a word about Delta Airlines which seems to be two completely different carriers when traveling domestically vs. internationally. The domestic flights are unfriendly, uncomfortable and just not a whole lot of fun. The international flights are much better with crews that seem to care a lot more, offer better service and planes that are more comfortable and in better condition. I have traveled on all US carriers that fly internationally in the last year and Delta was by far the best experience despite spending 20 hours on a single airplane twice in two weeks. Small things like an open snack bar at the back of the plane, in seat power, an entertainment system with 12 first run movies in an on-demand format and no charge to watch them make a huge difference. On the other hand, the flights between Phoenix and Atlanta are completely different experiences.



The End

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