

FROM DESERT TO SEA

Get ready for a wild adventure as NG KiDS heads to Namibia in southern Africa...



NG-KiDS Alex explores the desert!



There's scorching earth as far as the eye can see and in the distance a swirling tornado of sand, known as a dust devil, sweeps menacingly across the horizon. We're driving through the vast Namib Desert, and we've not seen another person for hours. It's no wonder – the desert's dry climate means that it receives just 1cm of rain per year and temperatures here can reach a whopping 50°C during summer!

Desert shipwrecks

You'd expect a desert like this to be far away from water, right? Well, the Namib Desert actually extends right up to the cold Atlantic Ocean (see pic, left)! We're heading to a treacherous stretch of this shoreline known as the Skeleton Coast – so called because of the number of shipwrecks here. We stare out of the window, stunned, as we drive past hundreds of ruined vessels in the sandy ship graveyard.

The desert runs right up to the sea!



Shipwrecks in the desert!



Pretty in pink

A much more cheerful sight greets us further down the coast – nearly 50,000 greater flamingos are feeding in a lagoon (a shallow area of salt water that's cut off from the sea by a sand bank). Their long, thin legs gracefully stride through the water as they submerge their heads, snacking on tasty worms, crabs, molluscs and algae. Incidentally, the birds get their candy-floss pink colour from the food they eat. Yum!



Sunfish are known locally as 'mola mola'!



DID YOU KNOW...?

Namibia is one of the world's least populated countries. There are only 3.1 people per km², compared to 271 in the UK!



Pelicans can carry up to 2kg of fish in one mouthful!



Heaviside's dolphins live in Walvis Bay – they're one of the world's smallest dolphins!

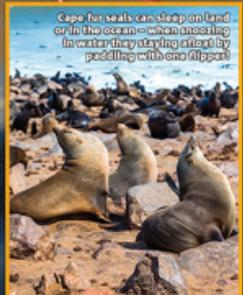
Ocean life

Boarding a catamaran at Walvis Bay, we're joined by a cheeky pelican (above), who perches proudly on the bow. Our captain tosses a tasty fish towards the 175-cm-long bird which it catches in its enormous pouch-like beak. From the boat we spot a giant grey fish lying lazily on its side near the water's surface (left). With its flattened body and two huge pointy fins, it's as tall as it is long – nearly three metres! "It's sunbathing," says the captain. "After hunting in deeper, colder waters they need to warm up – that's why they're known as sunfish!"

What a racket!

As the boat approaches a sandbank known as Pelican Point, we can hear what sounds like a crowd of rowdy football fans. Sprawled across the sand is a huge colony of 50,000 mooring Cape fur seals! The massive population is here because of a lack of natural predators in the area, such as great white sharks and orcas. A few of the playful creatures nimbly glide underwater before bobbing up behind our boat to say hello.

Taking in all the life around us, it's incredible to think that a few hours ago we were in a barren unforgiving desert!



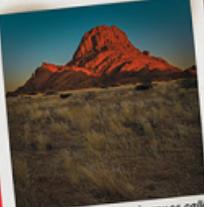
Cape fur seals can sleep on land or in the ocean – when floating in water they stay afloat by paddling with their flippers.



San people speak a language from the Khoé language family, which is made up of unique clicking sounds!

SAN SURVIVAL!

The San people, or Bushmen, of southern Africa have lived in Namibia for thousands of years, long before European settlers came to the country. Although many now live as farmers, until recently they led hunter-gatherer lifestyles, and the San still have a neat trick for storing water in the parched landscape. During the rainy season, they hollow out ostrich eggs. Fill them with water through a hole in the top, and then place a stick in the hole to close it back up. Then the egg is buried in the ground ready for any thirsty person that may pass by. Cool!



A towering red mountain range called Spitzkoppe dominates the horizon in the middle of the Namib Desert.



On an overhanging rock face near Spitzkoppe is a 6,000-year-old San painting of a rhino!