

# Namibia



## KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1990
Population:	2,171,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	2.0% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 105
Official language:	English
Time:	GMT plus 1–2hr
Currency:	Namibia dollar (N\$)

## Geography

Area:	824,269 sq km
Coastline:	1,570km
Capital:	Windhoek

Namibia in south-west Africa is one of the driest and most sparsely populated countries on Earth. It is bounded by the South Atlantic Ocean on the west, Angola to the north, Botswana to the east and South Africa to the south. The Caprivi Strip, a narrow extension of land in the extreme north-east, connects it to Zambia. Namibia comprises 13 regions (from south to north): Karas, Hardap, Khomas, Erongo, Omaheke, Otjozondjupa, Kunene, Oshikoto, Okavango, Omusati, Oshana, Caprivi and Ohangwena.

**Time:** GMT plus 1hr. The clock is advanced by one hour from the first Sunday in September to the first Sunday in April.

**Area:** 824,269 sq km (including Walvis Bay 1,124 sq km).

**Main towns:** Windhoek (capital, Khomas region, pop. 306,100 in 2009), Rundu (Kavango, 76,300), Walvis Bay (Erongo, 64,000), Oshakati (Oshana, 38,600), Swakopmund (Erongo, 32,400), Grootfontein (Otjozondjupa, 28,200), Katima Mulilo (Caprivi, 27,300), Okahandja (Otjozondjupa, 24,400), Otjiwarongo (Otjozondjupa, 22,600), Rehoboth (Hardap, 21,100), Gobabis (Omaheke, 19,100), Lüderitz (Karas, 17,700), Usakos (Erongo, 17,300), Keetmanshoop (Karas, 15,500) and Tsumeb (Oshikoto, 11,100).

**Topography:** The country has three broad zones: the Namib Desert to the west; the Kalahari Desert to the east; and the Central Plateau. The plateau, made up of mountains, rocky outcrops, sand-filled valleys and undulating upland plains, covers over 50% of the land area. It includes Windhoek, the capital, and slopes eastward to the Kalahari Basin and northward to the Etosha Pan, the largest of Namibia's saline lakes. The Skeleton Coast, from Swakopmund to the northern border, is a waterless stretch of high sand dunes pounded by a high surf, much celebrated in tales of the sea. The Kaokoveld Mountains run parallel, covering 66,000 sq km. Shifting

## did you know?

Frank Fredericks, born in Windhoek in October 1967, took the Commonwealth Games Men's 200 Metres record at the 1994 Games in Victoria, Canada.

With population density of less than 3 per sq km, Namibia is the most sparsely populated country in the Commonwealth and in Africa.

Namibia is one of the world's major producers of uranium.

The country has some 1,570km of coastline.

sand dunes of the Namib Desert spread inland for 80–130km, covering 15% of the land area.

**Climate:** Arid, semi-arid and sub-humid. Prolonged periods of drought are characteristic. There is little precipitation apart from rare thunderstorms in the arid zone of the Namib Desert coast, with rainfall rising to 600mm or more in the sub-humid north-eastern border with Angola and the Caprivi Strip. Rain falls in summer (October to April). The cold Benguela current gives the Namib Desert thick coastal fog.

**Environment:** The most significant environmental issues are the scarcity of natural freshwater resources and desertification.

**Vegetation:** Much of the terrain is grassland, or plains dotted with scrub. Namibia supports at least 345 different grasses and 2,400 types of flowering plant. Characteristic native plants are acacias, balsam trees, omwandi trees, fig and date palms, makalani palms, mopane (shrubs or trees), monkey-bread trees, marula trees, yellow-blossomed omuparara trees, violet-blossomed apple-leaf trees and shrubs such as the raisin-bush, coffee bush and camphor bush. Aloes, mesembryanthemums and other succulents flower on the Southern Namib dunes after rainfall. White-flowering ana trees flourish in dry river beds. Forest covers 9% of the land area, having declined at 1.0% p.a. 2000–07. Arable land comprises 1% of the total land area.

**Wildlife:** Namibia's wildlife is famous, particularly the exceptional range of bird species found in the wetlands. There are 201 recorded species of birds (2002), with 11 thought to be endangered. The pans in game parks provide drinking water for most of the typical African wild mammal species. The Etosha National Park, the country's most famous reserve and one of the largest in the world, contains lions, leopards, elephants, rhino and zebras. The government has a strong conservation policy, but game poaching in the reserves is diminishing stocks of many species. The Namibian seas are naturally rich in fish, and in seabirds which prey on fish.

**Transport:** There are 42,240km of roads, 13% paved. Two long-haul road projects were completed in the late 1990s: the Trans-Caprivi Highway and the Trans-Kalahari Highway through Botswana to South Africa. These arteries enable Namibia to provide landlocked central African countries with an outlet to the sea as well as greatly reducing the journey to Johannesburg.

The 2,400km railway network was established under German colonial rule and much-needed upgrading was carried out from the mid-1990s. Walvis Bay, the only deep-water port, which incorporates an export processing zone, is the main outlet for exports. Use of Lüderitz, Namibia's second port, has increased, due to a rise in fishing activities.

Air transport is important because of Namibia's size. There are more than 350 aerodromes and airstrips, with licensed airports in the main towns and mining centres, including the international airport some 40km from Windhoek.

## Society

### KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km:	3
Life expectancy:	62 years
Net primary enrolment:	89%

**Population:** 2,171,000 (2009); density is extremely low overall (2.5 per sq km) and 37% lives in urban areas; growth 2.2% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 27 per 1,000 people (43 in 1970); life expectancy 62 years (53 in 1970 and 62 in 1990).

The Ovambo and Kavango together constitute about 60% of the total population. Other groups are the Herero, Damara, Nama and the Caprivians. The San (Bushmen), who are among the world's oldest surviving hunter-gatherers, have lived in this territory for more than 11,000 years. The Basters, who settled in Rehoboth in 1870, stem from marriages between white farmers and Khoi mothers in the Cape. The 'Cape Coloureds', immigrants from South Africa, tend to live in the urban areas. Of the white group of approximately 90,000, about 50% are of South African and 25% of German ancestry, about 20% are Boer 'sudwesters' (longer-established migrants), with a small minority of UK ancestry.

**Language:** English, Oshivambo, Herero, Nama, Afrikaans and German. The official language is English, first or second language to only about 20%. Oshivambo is spoken throughout most of the north. The Caprivians speak Lozi as their main language. Afrikaans is widely spoken and is the traditional language of the Cape Coloureds and Baster communities.

**Religion:** Christians 80–90% (predominantly Lutherans), the rest holding traditional beliefs.

**Media:** Daily newspapers include *The Namibian* (in English and Oshivambo), *Namibia Economist*, *New Era* (government-owned), *Die Republikein* (in Afrikaans) and *Allgemeine Zeitung* (in German). *Windhoek Observer* is published weekly.

The Namibian Broadcasting Corporation provides public TV and radio services; several private and international TV channels are available via cable or satellite, and there are many private radio stations broadcasting in the country.

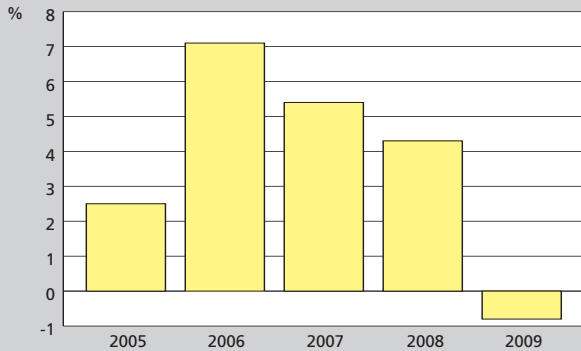
Some 41% of households have TV sets (2006). There are 239 personal computers (2007) and 59 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

**Education:** Public spending on education was 6.4% of GDP in 2008. There are ten years of compulsory education starting at age six. Primary school comprises seven years and secondary five. In 1993 English became the main language of instruction. The Namibian Constitution provides free education until the age of 16 or completion of primary education. The school year starts in January.

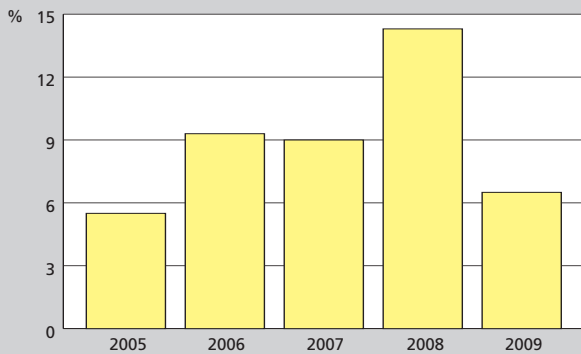
Tertiary education is at the University of Namibia, established in 1993. There is also a polytechnic as well as a technical college and four national teacher-training colleges. Namibia College of Open Learning provides open and distance learning. The female–male ratio for gross enrolment in tertiary education is 132:100 (2008). Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 93% (2008). There are extensive adult literacy programmes.

**Health:** 92% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 33% have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Tuberculosis and malaria are widespread in the north. Infant mortality was 34 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (129 in 1960). AIDS is a serious problem. In 2009, 13.1% of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive.

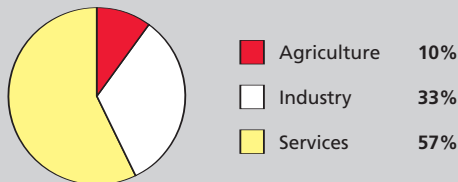
### Real Growth in GDP



### Inflation



### GDP by Sector (2009)



**Communications:** Country code 264; internet domain '.na'. Mobile phone coverage is good in the towns but patchy in rural areas. Internet connection is available in main towns; there are internet cafes in Walvis Bay, Swakopmund and Windhoek; and a good postal service.

There are 65 main telephone lines and 561 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

**Public holidays:** New Year's Day, Independence Day (21 March), Workers' Day (1 May), Cassinga Day (4 May), Africa Day (25 May), Heroes' Day (26 August), Human Rights Day (10 December), Christmas Day and Family Day (26 December). Cassinga Day remembers those killed in 1978 when the South African Defence Force attacked a SWAPO refugee camp at Cassinga in southern Angola. Africa Day commemorates the founding of the Organization of African Unity in 1963 (now African Union). Heroes' Day commemorates the start of SWAPO's armed struggle against South African rule and those killed in the struggle. Human Rights Day remembers those killed in 1959 when residents of a black

township near Windhoek resisted forcible removal to the present-day Katutura.

Religious holidays whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday, Easter Monday and Ascension Day.

## Economy

### KEY FACTS 2009

GNI:	US\$9.3bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$4,270
GDP growth:	3.7% p.a. 2005–09
Inflation:	8.9% p.a. 2005–09

**Overview:** Namibia's economy is driven by mining and fish processing. Since independence in 1990, exports of diamonds, uranium, zinc and fish products have grown strongly. Most people in rural areas of this vast country, however, remain largely unaffected by these activities. Government policy is to raise per capita income, to develop the private sector, and to encourage diversification into manufacturing activities, such as clothing and textiles, and eco-tourism. It is also committed to restraining growth in public spending and controlling inflation.

Having fallen short of the national development plan target of 5% p.a. in the latter 1990s and early 2000s – due to environmental factors such as drought and the finite stocks of fish – growth picked up from 2002 on account of increased diamond production, the opening of a new zinc mine and refinery, and increased textiles output. It averaged 5.7% p.a. during 2004–08. But in the face of the world economic downturn and consequent falls in demand for Namibia's minerals, the economy stalled in the latter part of 2008, stagnating in 2009, but recovering in 2010 (growing by about 4% over the year).

**Trade:** Exports of goods and services account for 42% of GDP (2008). Namibia's main exports are diamonds, fish, fish products, uranium, copper, zinc, gold, cattle, sheep, goats and animal products.

**Mining:** The sector is the largest source of export earnings. Namibia has great mineral wealth, including diamonds, uranium, copper, zinc, gold, silver, phosphate and oil. Zinc production rose rapidly from the mid-1990s. Onshore reserves of diamonds are becoming depleted, but offshore output has risen quickly, helped by new mining technology. The large Husab uranium mine is due to start production in 2014. Large offshore phosphate deposits have been discovered near Walvis Bay. Recent reports suggest good prospects of significant discoveries of offshore oil.

## Constitution

<b>Status:</b>	Republic with executive president
<b>Legislature:</b>	National Assembly
<b>Independence:</b>	21 March 1990

The constitution provides for a multiparty democracy in a unitary republic. The president is head of state and government and commander-in-chief of the defence force. Elected by direct universal adult suffrage at intervals of not more than five years, he or she must receive more than 50% of the votes cast. The president appoints the government, the armed forces chief of staff and members of a Public Service Commission, but the National Assembly may revoke any appointment. He or she can only serve

two successive directly elected five-year terms. The president may dissolve the National Assembly, and may also proclaim a state of national emergency and rule by decree, subject to the approval of the National Assembly.

Legislative power is vested in a National Assembly of 72 elected members, and up to six nominated but non-voting members, all members serving for a maximum of five years. The National Assembly can remove the president from office by passing an impeachment motion with a two-thirds majority. The prime minister is leader of government business in parliament.

An upper house, the National Council, is provided for in the constitution and was formally convened in February 1993. It consists of two members from each of the 13 regions, elected by regional councils and serving for a term of six years. The National Council has limited powers to review legislation passed by the National Assembly and can block bills.

The constitution includes 25 entrenched clauses regarding fundamental human rights and freedoms. There is no death sentence nor detention without trial and the practice and ideology of apartheid is expressly forbidden. Private property rights are guaranteed. Amendments to the constitution can only be made by two-thirds majorities of both houses.

## Politics

<b>Last elections:</b>	<b>November 2009 (presidential and legislative)</b>
<b>Next elections:</b>	<b>2014</b>
<b>Head of state:</b>	<b>President Hifikepunye Pohamba</b>
<b>Head of government:</b>	<b>the president</b>
<b>Ruling party:</b>	<b>SWAPO</b>

UN-supervised elections were held in November 1989. Ten political parties stood, including SWAPO, which gained 57% of the votes and 41 out of the 72 seats in the Constituent Assembly. In February 1990 Dr Sam Nujoma was elected by the Constituent Assembly to be the first president of an independent Namibia. Nujoma and SWAPO were returned to power in the 1994 elections. SWAPO won decisive majorities in the December 1994 elections, gaining 76% of the popular vote in the presidential and 73% in the parliamentary polls.

In late November 1998, parliament passed a constitutional amendment to allow Nujoma to serve more than two terms. Namibia's High Commissioner to the UK, Ben Uenga, resigned in protest against both the amendment and Namibia's military involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Uenga later formed a new political grouping which was registered as the Congress of Democrats (CoD).

However, the elections in November/December 1999 produced a clear win for both SWAPO and President Nujoma. Official results showed that Nujoma received close to 75% of the votes cast in the presidential poll, while Uenga took 11% and the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) candidate Kautuutire Kaura 10%. In the parliamentary contest, SWAPO took 76% of the votes and 55 seats, with the CoD (10%) and DTA (9.5%) each taking seven seats and in contention to be the official opposition, until April 2000 when the DTA formed an alliance with the United Democratic Front (two seats) and assumed the role.

In 2001 Nujoma announced he would not seek a fourth term of office and, at its 2004 congress, Hifikepunye Pohamba was chosen as the SWAPO candidate for the presidential election in November 2004.

During 2003 the government proceeded with the redistribution of land on a 'willing-buyer, willing-seller' basis, as guaranteed under the constitution. When the programme slipped due to shortage of finance, it targeted some 300 under-exploited farms with foreign owners for compulsory purchase.

The November 2004 presidential and legislative elections were won in landslide victories by Pohamba (76.4% of votes) and SWAPO (75% of the votes and 55 of 72 seats). Uenga received 7.3% of the votes in the presidential election and Kaura 5.1%, while in the legislative election CoD won five seats and DTA four.

Pohamba and SWAPO were again returned to government in November 2009 in another landslide. In the presidential election Pohamba received 76.4% of votes and his main challenger, Hidipo Hamutenya of the Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP), 11.1%. In the parliamentary election SWAPO won 54 seats (and 75.3% of votes) and the RDP 8 seats (11.3%).

## International relations

Namibia is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, African Union, Non-Aligned Movement, Southern African Customs Union, Southern African Development Community, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Namibia hosts the secretariat of the Southern African Customs Union; the SADC Tribunal; and the SADC Parliamentary Forum.

## Traveller information

**Local laws and conventions:** Drug taking and smuggling is illegal, and penalties for all drug offences are severe. Visitors must not photograph military sites or government buildings and should always seek permission before photographing local people or their property.

Diamonds and other protected resources should be purchased from licensed shops. Those convicted of illegal dealings in diamonds may face large fines or prison sentences. The purchase and export of other protected resources, such as elephant ivory, may be subject to restrictions.

Handguns are strictly prohibited in Namibia.

Visitors should dress conservatively. If visiting rural settlements, travellers should always follow the advice of a local guide.

Lightweight suits are the norm for business meetings. Prior appointments are always necessary. The best times for visiting on business are February to May and September to November. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0800–1700.

**Immigration and customs:** Passports must be valid for six months after the intended departure date, and visas are required by all except those from Australasia, North America, most of Europe, and some African and Asian countries. Return tickets are essential.

Visitors are advised to make a copy of the relevant pages of their passport and keep it on them at all times for ID purposes.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate will be required by all those arriving from infected countries.

Hunting rifles need a permit, issued by customs when entering the country.

**Travel within the country:** Traffic drives on the left, and car hire is available at the international airport, in Windhoek and in Walvis Bay. An international driving permit is required.

The speed limit is 60–80kph in urban areas, 80–90kph on gravel roads and 120kph on tar roads.

Flying is the most efficient way to travel the country. Eros Airport (Windhoek) is linked to all major towns via Air Namibia. Chartered flights are also available.

A luxury bus service connects all major cities from North Namibia to South Africa. Travel within Windhoek is limited and it is advisable to use a taxi service.

Rail services are generally slow and most trains run overnight. There are two dedicated luxury train services – one connecting with Uptington in South Africa, and the other a weekly connection between Windhoek and Swakopmund that crosses the Namib Desert.

**Travel health:** Comprehensive health insurance is recommended and all current vaccination requirements should be checked well before travel. Polio vaccinations need to be up to date.

Malaria is endemic in northern Namibia. Visitors will need protection against malaria, and should take insect repellent and



## History

The San (Bushmen), who are among the world's oldest surviving hunter-gatherers, have lived in this territory for over 11,000 years.

In the 19th century, taking advantage of tribal conflicts, Europeans acquired land from chiefs in return for weapons. The British authorities in the Cape annexed the Penguin Islands in 1866 and Walvis Bay in 1878, in response to a request for protection from missionaries. Germany declared a protectorate in 1884 over a 20km-wide belt of land from Lüderitz to the Orange river, and then gained control of the interior. The inhabitants were relegated to 'native reserves' from 1898 and a 1905 German decree expropriated all Herero land and prohibited Herero people from keeping cattle. This led to the Great Resistance War, 1904–08, during which a large proportion of the Herero and Nama population was massacred by the German military. Pass laws were introduced in 1907, as was the institutionalisation of migrant contract labour. Diamond and copper mining began in 1908–09.

During the First World War, German South-West Africa was occupied by South Africa; after the war South Africa extended its control to the northern Namibian communities, helped by the Portuguese rulers of Angola. The Allied Powers refused to allow South Africa to annex the country, renamed South-West Africa (SWA). Instead, South Africa became the designated power under a League of Nations mandate.

Following the founding of the UN in 1945, South Africa refused to convert its mandate into a UN trusteeship. In 1949, 1955 and 1956, disputes between South Africa and the UN over SWA were taken to the International Court of Justice.

A series of petitions to the UN from black leaders in SWA sought to end South African rule. The first black nationalist movement, the South-West Africa National Union (SWANU), was set up in 1959 with the support of the Herero Chiefs Council. In 1960 the South-West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) was founded, Ovambo migrant workers forming the base of its membership. SWAPO launched a guerrilla campaign inside Namibia, first clashing with South African police in August 1966. In October 1966, the UN terminated South Africa's mandate and called for it to withdraw from the country, formally named Namibia in 1968.

The International Court of Justice ruled in 1971 that South Africa's administration was illegal.

In 1977 a UN contact group comprising the five Western members of the Security Council – the UK, France, the US, Canada and West Germany – began to negotiate plans for Namibia's independence directly with South Africa and SWAPO. In 1978 South Africa announced its acceptance of the contact group's settlement proposal. However, in May that year, South African forces attacked SWAPO's refugee transit camp at Cassinga in southern Angola, leaving 600 dead.

Independence discussions continued for ten years, in the course of which South Africa made several further attacks on SWAPO bases in Angola. In 1981 South Africa demanded that Cuban troops (which were in Angola assisting the Angolan government in a civil war against UNITA rebels) should withdraw from Angola, and made this a condition of its agreement to the UN plan.

At the same time, South Africa began to ease its grip on Namibia, allowing a 'transitional government of national unity' (a coalition of six parties) control over internal affairs from June 1985.

In December 1988, two agreements were signed: one between South Africa, Angola and Cuba, creating the conditions for implementation of the UN plan, the second between Angola and Cuba, setting out a timetable for withdrawal of Cuban troops. A formal ceasefire came into effect in April 1989; this was followed by clashes in northern Namibia between SWAPO and South African forces, resulting in the deaths of some 300 SWAPO fighters.

Nonetheless, progress towards independence continued through 1989. The interim government was dissolved and by September 43,000 exiled Namibians had returned home. Many SWAPO members had been in exile for 27 years. Namibia achieved independence on 21 March 1990 and became the Commonwealth's 50th member.

In 1977 South Africa had annexed Walvis Bay, Namibia's only deep-water port, together with a surrounding 1,124 sq km enclave and the 12 offshore Penguin Islands. Walvis Bay remained a subject of dispute until March 1994, when it and the islands were returned to Namibia.

suitable loose-fitting clothing to discourage mosquito bites. There is a risk of rabies; bilharzia is present. Cholera cases occur in rural northern Namibia.

Tap water is normally chlorinated. Bottled water is available and is advised for the first few weeks of the stay. Mains water in rural areas should be boiled or sterilised before use.

**Money:** American Express, Diners Club, Mastercard, Visa and Cirrus cards can be used at most businesses and at some cash machines, though some may not be accepted at petrol stations. Taking travellers cheques in South African rand or US dollars will avoid extra exchange rate charges. The South African rand may also be used as currency. Banking hours are Mon–Fri 0900–1530 and Sat 0900–1100.

There were 929,000 tourist arrivals in 2007.

## Further information

Government of Namibia Network: [www.grnnet.gov.na](http://www.grnnet.gov.na)

Commonwealth Secretariat: [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)

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