

This week's dream: Namibia's empty desert plains

When an “unseasonal deluge” turned the Australian desert “into a carpet of flowers”, the producers of the new Mad Max film had to find a new location for their movie, says Amanda Linfoot in *The Times*. They settled on Namibia, and the arid gravel plains outside Swakopmund on the Atlantic coast – a seaside town built by German colonisers in 1892. It’s nicknamed “Little Bavaria” for reasons that become clear when you see the architecture – cute clock towers, gables, and a prison that resembles an Alpine hotel. Unsurprisingly, it’s hugely popular with German tourists, who feel right at home.

Just south of here, a short drive away on Namibia’s empty roads, you’ll find Pelican Point Lodge, on a remote peninsula stretching out into the sea, with the wild Atlantic on one side, and the lagoon formed by Walvis Bay – Namibia’s only natural harbour – on the other. It’s a “quirky” place. Each morning, you’re woken by a “throaty” dawn chorus provided by the colony



The magnificent dunes at Sossusvlei

of cape fur seals that live on the shore. Nature abounds – but it’s all set against a foggy commercial harbour, with a backdrop of electricity pylons and uranium mines. It feels “a long way” from the giant pinkish-red dunes for which the southern Namib desert is famed, and they are indeed five hours from here – but the drive, across empty plains, “is a joy”.

Little Kulala, a luxury camp with standalone climate-controlled thatched rooms, is described as the gateway to Namibia’s Sand Sea. From here, it is a 45-minute drive to the magnificent dunes that surround the salt and clay pans of Sossusvlei. The largest is “Big

Daddy”. It’s around 325 metres tall, and tricky to climb – but it’s worth it for the views it affords over Deadvlei (dead swamp): a “bleached white clay pan” surrounded by dunes and “scorched skeleton trees”. *The Ultimate Travel Company* (020-3582 9235, www.theultimatetravelcompany.co.uk) has nine-day self-drive holidays from £3,405pp, including flights and vehicle hire.

Hotel of the week



The Headland, Fistral Beach, Newquay

There’s an air of “Victorian asylum about this Gothic pile”, sitting on a cliff overlooking the Atlantic, says Jonathan Prynne in *The London Evening Standard*. Familiar to viewers of the film version of Roald Dahl’s *The Witches*, the hotel has undergone a major refurbishment in recent years. It now has 96 “tastefully bland” rooms plus 39 self-catering cottages, and public spaces are all “on a monumental scale”. The views, of course, are fantastic. In the restaurant, the menu is steadfastly local, and though the service is slow, it is always friendly. It may look forbidding, but The Headland is “a jolly place to stay”.

01637-872211, www.headlandhotel.co.uk. B&B from £89.

Getting the flavour of...

Outdoor swimming in King's Cross

It has been dubbed “London’s hottest new attraction”, but in fact, it’s probably the “coolest”, says Adrian Bridge in *The Daily Telegraph*. The temperature of the water in the new swimming pond behind King’s Cross Station is a distinctly chilly 13°C. Still, it’s an “extraordinary” place for an open-air dip. Officially named “Of Soil and Water: King’s Cross Pond Club”, the pool – which will remain in situ for two years – was conceived as an art installation, enabling swimmers to “engage with nature” in an urban setting. And there is indeed a “thrilling juxtaposition” between the tranquillity of the pond, fringed by plants, and the sight of blokes in hard hats labouring away “within touching distance”. For information on opening times and admission prices, visit www.kingscrosspond.club.

The ugly side of Vienna

Most people think of Vienna as a “handsome city”, says Maddy French in *The Guardian*. But a new tour of the Austrian capital eschews all the “imperial palaces and pretty squares” in favour of some rather less prized architecture. The Ugly Walking Tour aims to show a different side to the imperial city – a “gritty, urban, contemporary” side. It takes in the spectacularly “gaudy” Black Death memorial, as well as six “gigantic Nazi anti-aircraft towers” that loom over the city

yet are “ignored by most tours”. Then there’s the “purple flowery façade of Leopoldsgasse 39”, which stands out as a “beacon of individualism”. Its murals of crying women are said to represent the artist’s love life – apparently it wasn’t very “successful”. *Tour costs €5pp. Visit www.spaceandplace.at for more information.*

Going wild on Vancouver Island

The “totally wild” five-star Clayoquot Wilderness Resort campsite on Vancouver Island offers luxury tents and “kick-ass” facilities in a stunning location, says Melinda Stevens in *Condé Nast Traveller*. Comfort-minded urban adults will relish the “proper bathrooms and proper chefs”, and the sight of their children quickly shedding “their city preciousness” in this “outdoor wonderland”. The atmosphere is “remarkably relaxed”, and activities on offer include paddle boarding, zip lining, tree climbing and fishing. There are also bears and cougars about the place. “Tiny toddlers get scooped up by cowgirls on horseback”, while their older siblings cling to the sides of motorboats riding “crazy swells” in pursuit of whale pods. It’s a “thrilling adventure” that “seems to have no limit”. *Bespoke holiday company Brown & Hudson (020-3350 0110, www.brownandhudson.com) has seven nights from £14,975 for a family of four, all inclusive.*

Last-minute offers from top travel companies

Pembrokeshire rural haven

Hill Top Farm Cottage, a 5-star cottage near the village of Martletwy sleeping 6, is available for a week’s stay from £599. 01437-772760, www.coastalcottages.co.uk. Arrive 20 or 27 June.

Far East cruise

Fly to Singapore for a 2-day stay, then cruise from Thailand to Hong Kong on Royal Caribbean’s Legend of the Seas. 16 nights from £1,499pp incl. flights. 0800-953 4963, www.cruise1st.co.uk. Depart 7 Nov.

4* New York and Vegas

Stay 3 nights at the Lexington New York City, then 4 nights at the SLS Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, from £1,099pp room only, incl. flights. 01293-735831, www.hayesandjarvis.com. Depart 20 June.

Mont Blanc milestone

Celebrate 150 years of mountaineering during a 7-night stay at the Chalet Hotel Sapinière Chamoniix from £379pp half board, incl. flights. 01483-791114, www.inghams.co.uk. Depart 10 June.