

SECTION 6: GUIDING



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Why is good guiding important?

Whilst many of the overseas tourists who visit Namibia are on their first visit here, an increasing number are return visitors.

This means that guides need to provide ongoing, accurate and entertaining information at all times: these days, it is unacceptable and unethical for guides to hope that they will get away with minimal knowledge.

Therefore, and in order to meet the goals of Namibia's **eco award** system, guides should be Namibian citizens who have access to both formal

and in-house training. They should have a positive attitude towards their profession, which will result in great service as well as on-going learning.

The guide should be also be well versed in a wide variety of subjects and have a clear understanding of the nature of your operation.

Finally, they should adhere to a clear Code of Conduct for guides.

Training

There is no single route to becoming a professional guide. Passion for nature and people is the only real qualifier. However, the following training options are currently available in Namibia and the region;



A good guide is friendly, helpful, knowledgeable and attentive, without being overpowering or overly familiar. Achieving this unique combination of attributes requires specialist training and years of experience

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University Degree in Science: There are three to four year degrees available at UNAM and all southern African universities—these are recognized by the Namibian Qualifications Authority (NQA).

Some Namibian guides have degrees, which enables them to interact on an intellectual basis with their guests.

Whilst university trained guides may be able to talk with authority on issues such as natural selection, evolution, genetics etc. a good scientist is not necessarily a good guide. In any case,

university graduates would require specific further training in communication, guest skills and service before they could work as a guide.

Nature Conservation Diploma/ Tourism and Hospitality Diploma: Three to four year diplomas are available at the Polytechnic of Namibia and other southern African institutions—these are recognized by the NQA.

Diplomas offer a combination of lower intensity academic training and practical conservation skills. A

Nature Conservation graduate will be academically proficient in wildlife and veld management, ecology and conservation, but would require further training in service and guest relations.

NATH (Namibian Academy for Tourism and Hospitality): Three levels ("badges") of combined theoretical training and practical components are usually completed part-time at the candidates own pace.

The goal:

- To ensure credible guiding that aims to create awareness and promote knowledge of Namibia's unique social, cultural and natural environment
- To guarantee a professional level of guiding which fulfills industry standards and norms of service and behavior



In addition to formal training courses, guides need on the job training—usually provided by more experienced guides. © P.Tarr

Training continued....

The NATH courses are aimed at “tour” guides, whose function is usually to drive groups of guests around Namibia in buses.

Topics of study are wide ranging and include ecology, history, plants, geology, astronomy, photography and many others.

NATH courses are not yet recognized by the NQA, but probably will be by 2007.

Obtaining NATH badges is the most well known route of study for Namibian tour guides. A reasonably high level of academic ability is required.

FGASA (Field Guides Association of South Africa): There are three levels of specialization. Theoretical training is usually completed part-time at the candidate’s own pace, or full time through a Field Guiding School.

FGASA courses are chiefly aimed at field, not tour guides. Field guides are lodge guides working in big game areas.

Not many Namibians take this route of study as it is South African orientated where its highest level is regarded as a diploma.

South African Wildlife College: This college is based in the Kruger National Park, catering mostly for Nature Conservation students, although prospective guides can also attend. SAWC offers a conservation diploma as well as a number of shorter courses.

Wilderness Safaris and NADEET: These courses are offered on an *ad hoc* basis in Windhoek or in rural areas. At entry level, they are aimed at lodge and local guides (not “tour” guides) who do not have the academic ability or opportunity to pursue theoretical training, but who are eager to enter the profession. Therefore, they are practical and skills based, focusing on knowledge as well as hospitality skills.

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Mentoring: learning from and watching an experienced guide is by far the best way for a young guide to learn the skills of the trade.

If your establishment already has a qualified and experienced guide, send the apprentice out with him/her as often as possible. A decent library of reference books also stimulates guides to further their knowledge.

Quiet periods should be utilized to study, complete small assignments and build capacity.

A well qualified, experienced and skilled guide is a major asset to any establishment

Code of Conduct

Some people are “born to guide”- they have a balanced outgoing personality, a love of nature and an ability to relate easily to guests from all walks of life.

Because they are so keen, their knowledge and confidence in their ability is good. Furthermore, they are responsible, have an easy sense of humour, and are liked and trusted by guests from the moment they meet.

However, the guides you employ will

seldom have all of the above attributes: they are developed over many years of practice, training and careful nurturing. It is important therefore to have a set of guidelines which the guide can internalize and adhere to. The contents of this “Code” should become second nature to the guide.

There is a recognized 21 point code drawn up by the Tour Guides Association of Namibia (TAN), and incorpo-

rated into national unit standards for guides.

However, it is appropriate for each establishment to develop a Code of Conduct which suits your particular needs, and which would include these 21 basic principles.

Code of conduct: vehicles and vehicle preparation

Whether your transport is an aircraft, boat, quad bike or motor vehicle, the guide must ensure that it is in good and safe working order before every trip.

At best, a breakdown will be very embarrassing and inconvenient, and a reflection of poor service.

At worst, it could be life threatening and conceivably the end of your business.

Before departing on an activity, the guide must ensure that:

- The vehicle is serviced regularly;
- The vehicle is clean;
- There is sufficient (and spare) fuel and preferably two spare tyres;
- The correct tools are available;
- Bird/plants/mammals and other field guides are available, as well as relevant maps;
- There is reliable communication with the lodge/office e.g. two-way radio;
- A First Aid kit is available;
- On a boat, life saving equipment is available;
- The seats are comfortable, and clean;
- There are adequate steps and railings provided so people can support themselves;
- There is some form of shade (otherwise the guests must know to bring hats);
- There is adequate drinking water and other refreshments;
- There is enough bug repellent available (preferably not aerosol);

- The vehicle/boat is carefully balanced and not overloaded.

Driving/piloting: the guide should enhance the quality of the experience by delivering a full **safety talk** before departure on an activity. This talk would include some of the points listed above, as well as:

- Introduce himself and learn the names of his guests;
- Explain the intended route to be undertaken, the approximate time it will take, and points of interest along the way;
- Make sure the guests have everything they need (sunscreen, hat, cameras, film etc);
- Make sure everyone is comfortable and safe, and
- Explain rules and procedures (talking, littering, smoking, on-board safety, emergency procedures, toilet etiquette, communication with local people, behavior in the presence of wildlife etc.), and park rules (if applicable) e.g. don't get out the car, no off-road driving.

Once on the activity, the guide should:

- Drive/pilot safely, slowly, predictably and smoothly. He should observe all speed limits, and have regard for guests comfort and safety at all times, and
- Be aware of guest needs e.g. toilet breaks, water breaks, smoke breaks, photography, looking at animals and views, stretching the legs.

Quad bikes: these have become very popular in recent years. Under

controlled professionally guided circumstances, they offer a fun alternative to conventional guided experiences.

Uncontrolled, they are noisy, polluting, highly destructive to fragile environments, dangerous to guests, have a lasting effect on the land in terms of tracks, and have a devastating effect on ground nesting birds (e.g. the Damara Tern).

Best practice requires a highly responsible approach to the use of quad bikes.



Quad bikes can be fun, but their use must be very carefully considered © Wilderness Safaris



Rules and safety permitting, guests should be given an opportunity to stretch their legs and explore the surroundings.

© Wilderness Safaris

Interacting with wildlife and the environment

Many tourists still think “safari” means “Big 5”.

This is seldom the case in Namibia.

It is the responsibility of the guide to interest the guests in the endemic and special species of the area, as well as the unique points of interest locally available.

An all-round nature experience will therefore include birds, reptiles, plants, insects, geology and many other subjects.

While doing so, the guide should:

- Maintain a safe distance. This will not compromise the comfort of the guests or the animals, and will always allow an animal an obvious escape route;
- Never interfere with an animal's normal behavior e.g. mating, hunting, sleeping, feeding;

- Never park on a game path, or too close to a drinking spot;
- Never allow feeding of animals;
- Turn off the vehicle engine as often as possible;
- Discourage loud and excessive talking, and prevent unruly guest behavior;
- Create a special viewing experience e.g. make use of hides,

guided nature walks, look out spots, water holes, mekoro (dug out boats), night drives (provided the spotlight does not interfere with normal animal activity e.g. the light must have a red filter and must never be shone directly into the animals eyes), and

- Try something safe but unusual e.g. donkey cart rides, horse trails, balloon rides.



Tourists usually want to get as close as possible to wildlife. The key objective is to provide good photo opportunities without intruding on the animals personal space

© Wilderness Safaris

Interacting with local people



Tour operators and their guests must not infringe upon the rights of local people. Tourists are keen to meet locals, but visits to villages must be carefully planned to avoid conflicts and enhance mutual benefits. © P.Tarr

All establishments, their guides and their guests should show respect to the people on communal land with whom they do business and interact with.

A respect for local customs, lifestyles and expectations should be encouraged.

The guide is responsible for teaching the guests the do's and don'ts with regard to acceptable behavior, for example:

- Etiquette of photographing the people;
- Respecting people's

privacy and personal space;

- Which areas of the village can be accessed.

This is particularly important on 'cultural tours' where groups such as the Himba are visited.

Guides should only visit villages once a specific agreement has been reached between the establishment and the community.

This agreement should define:

- visiting times;
- Fees;

- permitted activities;
- trading rules (e.g. buying of crafts, currency, bargaining);
- access routes and parking areas, and
- use of facilities (e.g. toilets, water, shade).

If local guides are available, they should be used, since they will best understand the needs of the community. It is important to support local initiatives and they will be able to facilitate discussions between guests and community members.

Interacting with authorities and other groups

In some cases, the guide will need to interact with other groups of tourists, or with community, Parks, or national authorities. In such cases the guide should:

- remain polite, helpful and courteous;
- refrain from making negative

remarks about third parties he is dealing with, and

- explain to his guests what he is doing, since the discussion may be in a foreign language.



Even poor people have pride—tourists must be sensitized against insulting local people, especially those offering items for sale © P.Tarr.

Town and settlement guiding

If your establishment is in a town/settlement, you may need to outsource the guided activity. If so, you should ensure that the supplier of the guided activity:

- Is trained;
- is registered with the NTB;
- has passenger insurance on his vehicles;
- uses vehicles that are safe, clean, registered, well maintained

and are in good order, and

- behaves according the accepted minimum standards of the guiding profession, as laid out in this document.



Even nature-loving tourists like to see something of the town or city. Be sure to give them a balanced view—don't just show the "posh" suburbs and shops © P.Tarr

Advancing your guide's skill and performance

It is recommended that you promote your guides skills development by:

- grading/evaluating him on a regular basis, and asking guests to do the same;
- arranging visits to other tourism establishments so the guide can learn from other guides;
- encouraging him to engage in further training;
- helping him to apply to guiding organizations e.g.TAN, and
- ensuring he has a current First Aid certificate.



The tourism industry is increasingly competitive and sophisticated. Developing skills and competencies amongst all levels of staff is essential. Moreover, skills should be rewarded with promotion and improved remuneration © P.Tarr