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My kind of town: Windhoek

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Tony Park loves Windhoek because it's clean, orderly and awash with good beer.

Why Windhoek?

Namibia's Windhoek is the nicest capital city in Africa, which is a bit like being the prettiest warthog in the pack. However, it's the only African city I spend time in as a destination - rather than a place to shop or get things done. The Germans ran South West Africa (now Namibia) from 1884 to 1915 and they left an indelible mark. Clean, orderly and awash with good beer, Windhoek still has more than a touch of the Teutonic.



'If you've come this far, get out on safari to the Skeleton Coast, Etosha National Park or the wilds of the Namib Desert'

What do you miss most when you are away? The beer. The Germans might not have been the most enlightened colonial rulers, but they do brew good lager. My favourite's named after the city itself, but if you really want to blend in as a local, drink Taffel.

What's the first thing you do when you return?

I arrive by road, and it's a long, hot drive from anywhere. First priority is a half-litre of that Windhoek Draught, out of the tap and in a chilled glass, drunk beside a body of fresh water large enough to immerse myself in.

Where's the best place to stay?

The Windhoek Country Club. Pioneers Park (00264 61 205 5911; www.legacyhotels.co.za), where a double room costs £110, including breakfast. This resort and casino is borderline tacky, but it has a ring-shaped pool with a flowing current, so you can sit on a lilo and grab another beer from the waiter as you cruise past.

Where would you meet friends for a drink?

Joe's Beerhouse, 160 Nelson Mandela Avenue. Africa's best pub doesn't look like much from the outside - just a walled compound in an industrial area - but inside it's a sprawling, eclectic oasis of junk, antiques, and curios.

Where are your favourite places for lunch?

As above, though it's only open for lunch Fridays to Sundays. Bring an appetite and tackle the eisbein or gemsbok (oryx) fillet. I also like Mountain Eagle Spur, in the Maerua Lifestyle Centre on Centaurus Street. "Spur" is a South African-owned chain of Wild West-themed steak houses. After weeks on safari, sometimes only a cheeseburger will do. If you happen to be there in October, grab a bratwurst from a sausage vendor - Windhoek stages its own mini Oktoberfest.

And for dinner?

O Portuga, 151 Nelson Mandela Avenue. The only place in the world I break my don't-eat-seafood-more-than-50 miles-from-the-coast rule. Excellent Portuguese dishes, including garlic clams with pasta, and seafood kebabs. Then back to Joe's Beerhouse (yes, it really is that good).

Where would you send a first-time visitor?

Out of town to the Daan Viljoen Game Park. It's a small reserve populated with a variety of antelope and other non-threatening creatures. Unlike most African national parks you can walk in this one and it has a nice campsite.

What would you tell them to avoid?

Christuskirche. If you want to see ornate old German churches, go to Germany. Windhoek's a nice place to wander around, but if you've come this far, get out on safari to the Skeleton Coast, Etosha National Park or the wilds of the Namib Desert.

Public transport or taxi?

Windhoek's only the size of a biggish country town, so put on your hat and sunscreen and walk wherever you want to go. Probably the most dangerous thing you can do anywhere in Africa is ride in a minibus taxi, the preferred mode of local public transport.

Handbag or moneybelt?

Rightly or wrongly I feel safer and more at ease in Windhoek than any other African capital I've visited. However, get a cab or drive yourself if you're going out at night.

What should I take home?

There are arts and crafts for sale in the Post Street Mall, but the farther you travel from Windhoek, the better deal you'll get for wooden curios, handmade jewellery and cute little Herero dolls wearing the same 19th-century-inspired dresses of the Herero women. Boys of all ages will like the carved Land Rovers, and wooden helicopter gunships, sadly inspired by the civil war of the 1980s. If you're going on safari, visit Cymot - 4x4, camping and outdoors specialists - at 60 Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue, and load up on gadgets.

And if I only have time for one shop?

Dare I mention Joe's Beerhouse again? It has a curio and souvenir shop, so you can shop and drink at the same time. You've tried the beer and seen the town, so buy the T-shirt.

- Australian author Tony Park spends five months of the year in southern Africa. His latest novel is *African Sky* (Pan, £6.99)