



The Hoanib Valley Camp, Namibia © Michael Turek

We had landed four days earlier in Sesfontein, a remote town encircled by orange granite hills. It's a two-hour flight from the capital, Windhoek. "The route we're going," says Dewald von Solms, our young pilot, as he ushers me and my wife through customs, "you can see just how much nothingness there is." From the windows of his Cessna 210, a propeller plane fitted out like a classic car with ageing leather fittings and mock mahogany ashtrays, vast landscapes unscroll 10,000ft below us. There are tarmacked roads, then dirt roads — then, the nothingness. We land in a field of white-gold grass gently going to seed, as the sun begins to set.

The road to the Hoanib Valley Camp traverses a dry, grey riverbed, two-and-a-half hours along what feels like an endless cattle grid. Our guide is Nico Uararavi, who grew up in Sesfontein: the camp is a joint venture between the local community and safari outfit Natural Selection, and hires almost exclusively from the closest towns. For the next three days, Uararavi will drive us up rocky passes, through stone canyons and across golden plains, each landscape seemingly infinite, in search of the desert-adapted lion, elephant, rhino and giraffe who wander through them. In this time, we will pass only two other vehicles.