



Don't Follow Me into Namibia's Sand Dunes



Carrie Hampton

You can follow me anywhere now that I've visited over 250 safari lodges and top to bottom of Namibia, but back when I was a mere Africa travel novice (+20 years ago), you would have been and idiot to trust me



Dont follow me into Namibia's Sand Dunes

...Here's why

Location - the Namib Desert, Sossusvlei, Namibia: the final 5km deep sand track leading to the famous Sossusvlei sand dunes in one of the most beautiful but unforgiving deserts on earth. Only accessible with a 4x4 which I did not have

Here's What Happened: having decided to walk the last 5km I missed seeing the sign saying '*Hints To Visitors*', with such obvious tips as

-Wear shoes not sandals - the sand gets extremely hot

-Take water

-Do not go near Gemsbok - these are fast and dangerous wild animals

Within 100 metres I turned back to replace my open sandals with walking shoes, then once again for a larger water bottle. I came face to face with the third item listed during my unscheduled off-piste walkabout

Mistake Number 1. When I spied hikers way ahead of me traversing the dunes I figured they had found a shortcut, so I followed them. What fool would leave the path in a desert where each sand dune looks alike and each horizon offers ever more breathtaking nothingness. It soon became apparent that these crazy walkers were doing their own thing and I was following them



For a moment, I felt a nauseous fear in the pit of my stomach, but the Girl Guide in me had noted the position of the sun in relation to the track and I was pretty sure I could get back to it. The solitude was immeasurable and my place in the great scheme of life, took on a curious insignificance



Mistake Number 2: Feeling very vulnerable in this vast wasteland, I suddenly realised I was being watched. Quite alone in the shade of a single thorny Acacia tree there stood the Gemsbok - the one from the postcard. Taking a few steps closer to this magnificent unicorn (at least that's what it looked like side-on), I marvelled at her long, exquisitely twirled, pointy black horns. I became close enough in fact, to appreciate that I could be impaled at any moment. Was she feeling cantankerous or did she always look down her nose and snort like that? With that pit of the stomach feeling for the second time that day, I retreated still physically intact but questioning how I had turned into a supreme idiot

My joy at stumbling across the track churned up by 4x4's was only superseded by a mirage that looked like a Pajero. The air-conditioned tourists within thought I was quite mad strolling around the desert in 40°C, and invited to accompany them for the remaining 4-kilometre drive to Sossusvlei

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As we rounded a curve and entered the great dry Sossusvlei pan, surrounded by giant orange dunes, I saw the lone Camelthorn tree from the picture postcard. The Gemsbok was missing from the scene, but I knew exactly where she could be found

