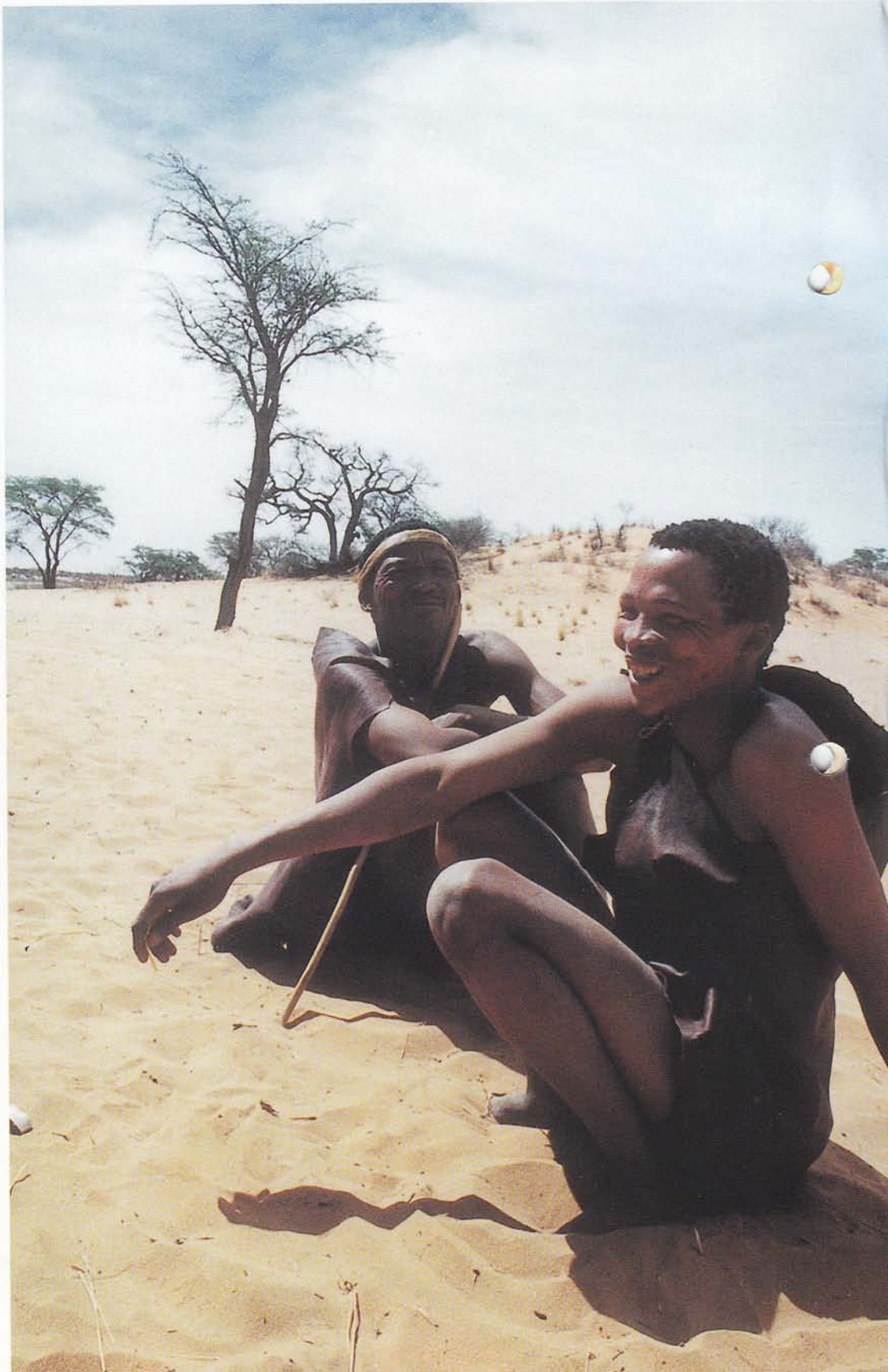


# SHONGOLOLO EXPRESS

A TRAIN JOURNEY WITH A DIFFERENCE

AS we watched an Asian man eating cornflakes with a fork at the safari hotel in Windhoek, we realised that our journey on board the Shongololo Express would require that we adapt to different cultures and adjust our mind-sets for an adventure into the unknown.





It rained for the first time in two years as we meandered through the impressive parliamentary gardens and visited the oldest church in Windhoek. Our guide, Dave, patiently informed us of the history of the city and pointed out places of interest. To be honest, we were not really interested in museums and secretly contained our excitement about the train.

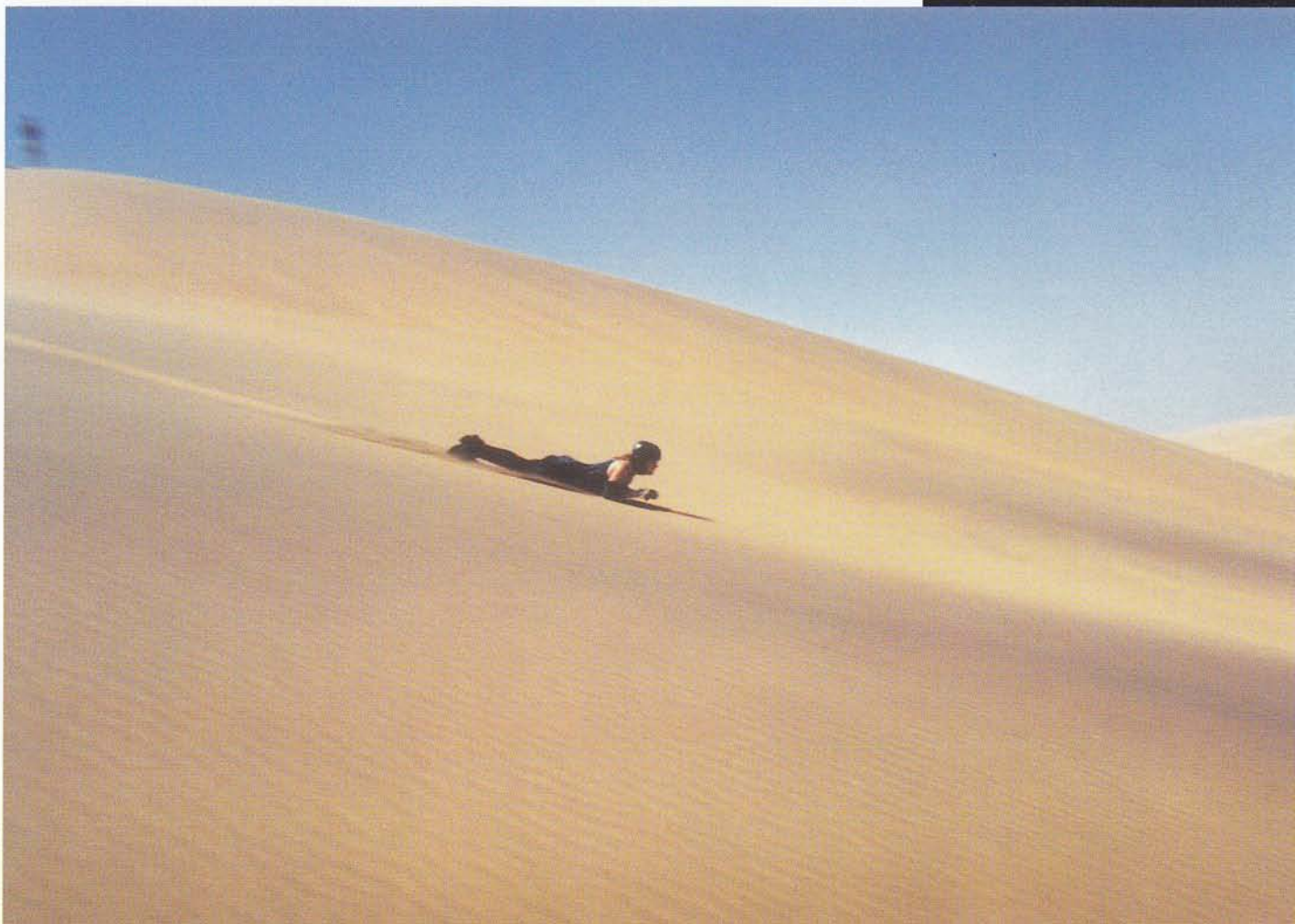
Our first day was spent travelling through the unruly landscape between Windhoek and Sossusvlei. The long journey was tiresome, but well worth it. We enjoyed the contours of the Seisreim Canyon and later the colours of the impressive dunes of Sossusvlei. As most of the other guests opted for a drive through the dunes, we decided to relax under a shelter, cooling down with

huge slices of watermelon.

We spent the night at the starlit Karos Lodge. The meals were enjoyable and the hosts gracious. The venue afforded us the opportunity of meeting the other guests who were to share the experience of journeying by train through Namibia.

We were bursting with anticipation when we arrived at Aus and finally set eyes on the train. Delightfully decorated, the train boasted a welcoming bar and entertainment area. So far, the Shongololo Express had exceeded all our expectations. We ventured into the little town of Aus and discovered a charming hotel with pool tables and a delightful audience. We didn't mind spending the first night in a stationary train as the pleasure of socialising with our fellow

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trian-mates made up for it!

The next day was spent in the charming little town of Luderitz. The desert area surrounding Luderitz is known as the 'Sperrgebiet', the forbidden territory, made famous by its diamond-rich alluvial deposits. We couldn't resist scanning the ground, anxiously looking for a stray diamond or two! After visiting the usual tourist attractions, we were given the freedom to wander around the town, taking pictures and enjoying the fresh sea breeze. Our next stop was the well-known ghost town of Kolmanskop. The place had an eerie silence and the spirits of people long gone still lingered in the sand-washed houses. Overlooking the desert plains before us, we wondered what kind of people had called this harsh land, home.

We soon headed back to the train, suppressing our excitement as the train began to move. I can recall with amusement, 68 people all sticking their heads out of the windows, bidding the locals farewell. The novelty

of a travelling hotel soon dawned on us and we were all soon taken up with the sheer luxury that the train afforded us.

The guides were the life of the party. Constantly entertaining us and never tiring of answering the endless questions of the curious guests. Hans, the train manager needs a special mention as his endurance and dedication to please was unsurpassed, not to mention his sharp sense of humour!

After a party at the bar the night before, we were less equipped for the day ahead, especially since it involved waking at the crack of dawn to attempt to capture sunrise at The Fish River Canyon. Spectacular views greeted us, though sunset would probably have been a better option (considering our state!).

The small towns that we visited all had their own special charms but the most exciting attractions were the breath-taking Quiver tree forest and the intriguing maze at Giant's Playground. The rest of the trip was





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made up of fun in the sun with new found friends and peaceful sleeps in the train as it gracefully transported us through the desert by night.

The highlight of the trip was without a doubt, Swakopmund. An adrenaline-junkie's paradise. Sand-boarding on the dunes and quad- biking through the desert trails is an experience that should not be missed. There is nothing to compare to racing down the dunes at top speed and then the delight of watching those who didn't quite get it right! We were assured, however, that the sport is perfectly safe and that one needed no experience whatsoever. The quad-bikes were more reassuring and is definitely the best way to conquer the daunting dunes.

We were unfortunately not able to venture further than Swakopmund due to time constraints but let it be known that the 8 days spent in the desert was more enlightening than we could ever have hoped for . Wherever your interests lie, Shongololo's daily choice of excursions will provide you with an action and information packed day. From gaming in casino resorts to game watching in Etosha National Park , you can travel from culture to nature and back again. Excursions are structured around local highlights, ecotourism, culture, heritage and adventure. So, looking for a bit of luxury, some incredibly funny people and the beauty of Namibia all rolled into one, the Shongololo Express is most definitely the answer!

Special Thanks to:  
Leon for his generosity  
Hans "Big Chief" for his charm and unending patience  
Dave for just being Dave  
The Getaway Guy for showing us what not to photograph or write about!  
All the chickens (guides) for their h' mour and good spirits

-by Olivia Roach

