

# Sossusvlei

## Sossusvlei Namibia

The Sossusvlei is perhaps the highest sand dunes in the world. Situated in Namibia, these dunes are as high as 300 meters. The Sossusvlei cover a great expanse of almost 500 square kilometres of the mighty Namib Desert, which is considered to be one of the oldest deserts by many geologists. Literally meaning 'the gathering place of water', the Sossusvlei is actually a clay pan which holds rain water to form a lake. This pan retains water for a long time due to the high clay content and this attracts a large crowd from people all over since it is a rare sight.

Specifically speaking, Sossusvlei is only a circular shaped depression filled with water in the heart of the Namib Desert. Also known as the 'Vlei' the Afrikaans word for pan, it is the place where the dunes come together, causing the Tsauchab River to stop its course. Most often, the river does not flow this far because it is dry. But a surprise bout of rainfall could turn this dead Vlei into a spectacular lake flanked by ruddy and sparkling dunes. But now, the gigantic dunes are also considered to be a part of the Sossusvlei and the dunes as well as the Vlei come under the area of the Sossusvlei.

The dunes surrounding the pan have an impressive history of formation. It has been said that the residue or sand from the Orange River were carried all the way to the western coast of Africa and deposited into the mighty Atlantic Ocean. The strong currents of the ocean moved this material towards the north and replaced them back on to the land. By this constant re-deposition, dunes began forming on the coast and were shifted further inland by winds. The sand deposited on the windward side makes the dune flat, while the leeward side is considerably steeper. However, the patterns on the dune vary according to the direction and speed of the wind and these dunes have taken a million years to be developed. The Sossusvlei today is ever changing and evolving.

The Sossusvlei may be known for its vast expanse of giant dunes, but what makes them even more impressive is their colour composition. The presence of iron oxides in the sand coupled with innumerable particles of garnet gives the dune its brilliant hue. The shades vary according to the age of the dunes, and the older the dune the brighter the sand's colour. These varying shades of red are the highlight of the Sossusvlei and they define the stark beauty of the Namib Desert. The dunes do not

look the same at different times during the day, as the sun plays on the colour of sand. The Sossusvlei is a hub for several die hard photographers who have captured and immortalised the timeless beauty of the dunes and the Vlei.

The Sossusvlei is a formidable, enormous and stunning region of deposited sand causing the particles to form dunes for thousands of centuries. The dunes that surround the clay pan and the pan itself are the pride of the Namib Desert and are a major tourist attraction.