—GUESTNOTE—

Sven Thieme

A New Year, a new experience of Namibia through our eyes

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As we enter 2026, global travel is undergoing a fundamental shift. Travellers increasingly seek destinations offering an escape and significance, places where vast landscapes meet authentic culture, where sustainability shapes the experience and where every journey creates lasting impact. Namibia stands perfectly positioned at this intersection.

The numbers tell a compelling story. Tourism arrivals have shown robust growth throughout 2024 and 2025, supported by enhanced connectivity through routes like Discover Airlines' direct Frankfurt service and expanding regional access. But statistics reveal only part of the picture. Recent industry analysis suggests tourism's true contribution to Namibia's economy approaches 17% when accounting for direct, indirect and induced spending—far beyond the 2% captured in official accounts. As Cirrus Capital describes it, tourism is the engine of Namibia's economy. This is the moment when that engine accelerates.

At O&L Leisure, world-class hospitality means creating experiences that honour our landscape, empower

our people and position Namibia as Africa's premium experiential destination. Our vision is anchored in excellence at every touchpoint, investment in people and communities, environmental sustainability and celebration of Namibian culture. These are operational imperatives guiding every decision.

Our portfolio spans Namibia's most sought-after destinations, from the coastal elegance of Strand Hotel Swakopmund and the dunes of Sossusvlei to wildlife-rich lodge landscapes. Each property is tailored to showcase its unique environment while delivering consistently exceptional experiences across diverse traveller needs.

Our current expansion and investment programme reflects confidence in Namibia's trajectory. We're adding capacity and elevating it. Strategic upgrades ensure we meet expectations of increasingly discerning international travellers while creating spaces where Namibian families and business visitors feel equally valued. Through our Leisure Club membership programme, we're making premium hospitality accessible to guests, fostering pride in experiencing our country's finest offerings.

This positions us to capture opportunity across multiple segments: experiential travellers seeking transformative journeys, regional business visitors requiring reliable excellence and guests celebrating life's important moments. In a crowded African tourism market, Namibia possesses distinct advantages. Our wide, open spaces offer room to breathe, reflect and truly disconnect. Safety and political stability provide the foundation for comfortable exploration. Our conservation commitment creates intimate, sustainable wildlife encounters.

But our greatest differentiator is our people. Namibian hospitality carries warmth and authenticity that cannot be manufactured. At O&L Leisure, we invest heavily in skills development and employment, understanding that exceptional experiences are delivered by authentic, caring and passionate teams. Every international guest benefits from this investment; every Namibian we employ contributes to building a more prosperous nation.

Leisure Tours extends this impact, creating integrated travel experiences that benefit communities nationwide while ensuring visitors access the full breadth of Namibia's offerings.

With opportunity comes responsibility. As one of Namibia's leading hospitality operators, O&L Leisure shapes how the world perceives our destination. Every guest becomes an ambassador based on their experience. This drives our relentless focus on quality, consistency and innovation.

The industry's wide-ranging touchpoints, from aviation and gastronomy to logistics and suppliers, create economic impact far beyond accommodation statistics. As discussed at this year's Travel Namibia Festival, improving data collection around tourism's true contribution remains essential for strategic planning and investment attraction.

Leading O&L Leisure through this pivotal period fills me with profound optimism. I know that tourism can create opportunities for young Namibians starting hospitality careers, assist small businesses supplying our properties, support communities where we operate and lets international visitors discover our extraordinary country.

The challenge is clear: grow responsibly, maintaining what makes Namibia special while building capacity to welcome more visitors. Train skilled professionals. Invest in infrastructure and experiences. Balance commercial success with environmental stewardship and community benefit.

This is the work that excites me. This is the era we're building toward.

As 2026 unfolds, I invite both international travellers and Namibian residents to experience our country with fresh eyes. Discover the stories embedded in our landscapes, the warmth of our people and the innovation across our hospitality sector. If you are planning your first visit or rediscovering your own backyard, 2026 promises experiences that echo long after departure.

At O&L Leisure, we're ready to welcome you to world-class hospitality rooted deeply in African soil. Experience Namibia through our eyes. The new era of Namibian tourism is here. And the journey ahead looks extraordinary. Enjoy this month's read.