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# *Mountain Biking Through Namibia*

As tourism cautiously opens up and visitors become more comfortable with travelling, the appeal of being out there on a mountain bike, exploring Namibia, is a smart choice for the explorer in you

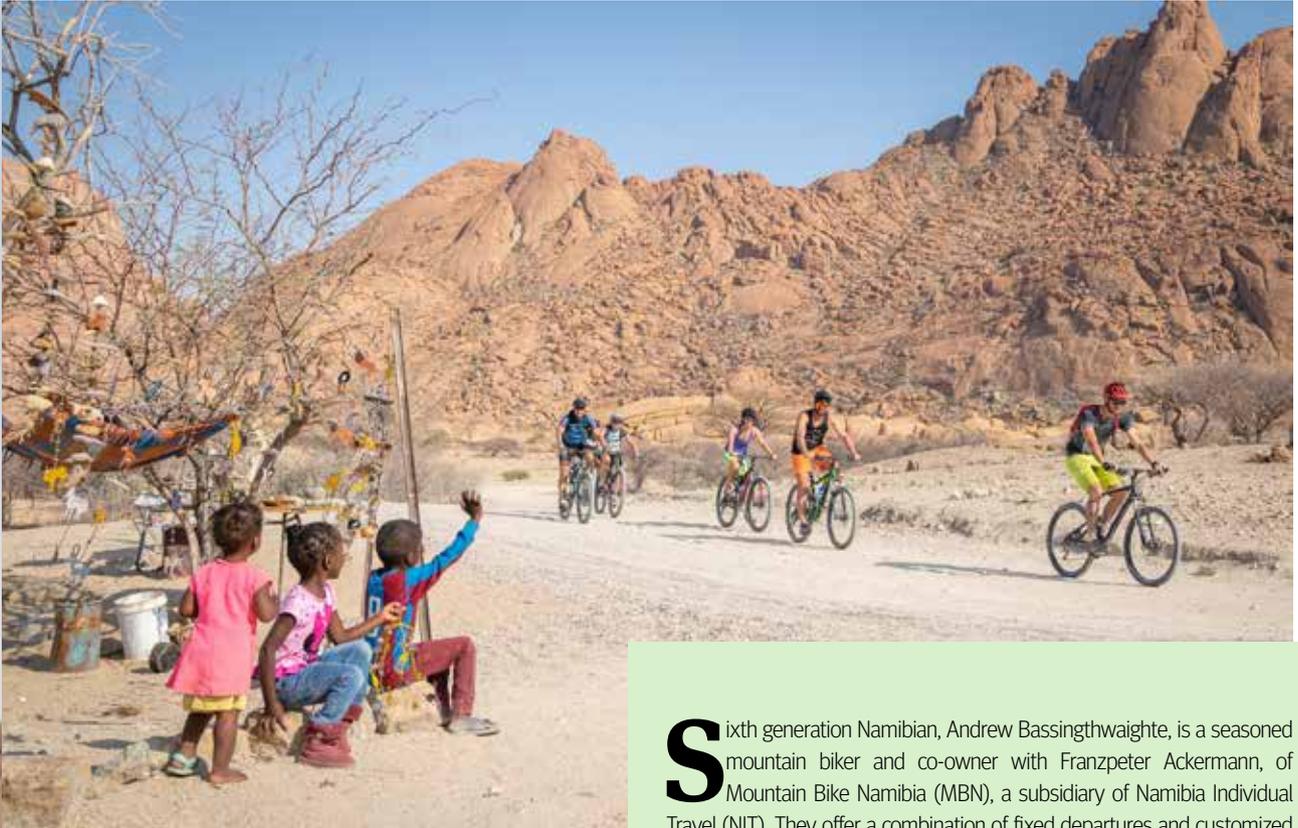
Edited: **Anne Schaffer**

Photographs: **Supplied**

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The fastest measured speed of riding a bicycle on a flat surface is 133.75 km/h.



**S**ixth generation Namibian, Andrew Bassingthwaighe, is a seasoned mountain biker and co-owner with Franzpeter Ackermann, of Mountain Bike Namibia (MBN), a subsidiary of Namibia Individual Travel (NIT). They offer a combination of fixed departures and customized bike tours annually. Andrew's thoughts on biking it through Namibia, are clear, "Travelling by bike through this vast natural paradise is unique in that you can go further than when you hike or walk, but you don't have the noise of other people, a car, a motorbike. You can cover a reasonable distance per day, say 30km to 80km, and you're self-propelled. Importantly, it's eco-friendly, so nothing damages the environment." He added, "I think that during these Covid times, a bike tour is pretty ideal, as you get out there, social distance, away from the masses. It's healthy, with an element of adventure... but not much risk."

This doesn't mean their trips don't use vehicles at all: "For example, we also do a traditional Namibian safari, but bike those stretches which are fun. They might be trails, 4 x 4 tracks, or quieter dirt roads. The idea is to move onward with the vehicle to a new area, bike there, then continue again in the car. Some of the riders travel the road from one place to the other."

It's the flexibility which is really appealing. MBN does different itineraries, often customized for those who want to choose exactly what they want to do, how far they want to bike, how easy it should be: "It means we can take along any cyclist with a reasonable fitness level. The fixed departure tours are ones that guests can book onto - these travel the classic Namibia route, departing from and returning to Windhoek, then out to Spreetshoogte, Sossusvlei, Namib Naukluft Park, Swakopmund, Spitzkoppe, Damaraland, Etosha, and the Waterberg area."

The idea is that guests can bike at their own pace, and be of different fitness and skill levels: "Having said that, in Damaraland or on Palmwag Concession where there may be wild animals, we stick together as a group. But generally, when we bike somewhere like the Moon Landscape, we have a guide in front, with the main group and then a vehicle 'sweeping' from the back. We may allocate five hours for the ride, so those who reach Goanikontes/the destination first can take it easy, while the others catch up. It works out well as one tends to stop, look at something, take a photo - some folks want to go for it, even doing an additional ride, or completing the main ride really quickly."



They aim to ride in the mornings – 60km on a good gravel road, or 35km on a more challenging trail - so those who want to do a bit more, can usually squeeze another ride into the afternoon.

Cyclists only carry their water, perhaps a few snacks. The back-up vehicle provides everything else, assists with repairs, and if somebody is struggling, they can always catch a ride in the vehicle.

Andrew says his usual guests are aged 40 plus: “These are generally the people who appreciate nature, the quieter places. The Europeans who travel with us are often close to retirement age or already retired.

Michelangelo asked Andrew a few specific questions:

**How fit do you need to be?**

“Quite fit - to be able to complete a 40km ride on a good road back home in one go. But as guests can load up and continue in the tour vehicle if they like, it’s not so important. And fitness improves fairly quickly once they are on tour with us and ride every day.

**Your guides accompany the cyclists?**

We usually have the bike guide/main guide and an assistant/driver. The idea is that someone always bikes with the guests. The two staff assist with loading bikes, doing the ‘dirty’ work, making sure all is in order.

**What size is the group?**

We do private tours from two guests, but for group tours, we like to have 8-14 guests or so to make it fun for all. We also do charity rides - these groups can be around 20 to 30 guests but the character of this kind of trip is different, more leisurely, riding from one place to another, visiting projects and so on.

**How long are your usual trips?**

Usually around two weeks, the time to see a reasonable amount of Namibia. But we do trips from three or more days when guests want to add a biking part to their tour - we travel to meet them, do the biking, and they continue on their way (self-driving or on a guided tour).





Almost 28 sets of LEGO are sold every second during the Christmas season.



#### **Do they hire bikes from you?**

We have bikes to rent - Scott Spark 960 29-inch room full suspension bikes. We have slightly wider, puncture-proof tyres, making it a breeze to get through rough or thorny terrain. We have special bike carriers and trailers that carry all equipment, luggage and bikes.

Our bike mechanic does the bike handover, and prepares the bike for a specific person. The guests often bring their own saddle and/or pedal along to be more comfortable. The bike guide and assistant assists with bike repairs/maintenance along the way.

Some guests do bring their own bikes.

#### **Where do you stay?**

The usual trips are a combination of lodges and camping, usually mid-range accommodation. But we offer all levels, so we sometimes have luxury lodge bike tours and sometimes, mostly camping bike tours. The idea is to get close to nature - north-west Namibia is ideal for biking and this means a secluded campsite might be the most interesting/suitable. We cook well when camping (guests usually clap after dinner)....but we also eat at lodges and have picnic lunches along the way, somewhere under a tree in the middle of nowhere, kind of special.

#### **What about the social side of things?**

The four fixed departure tours for 2021 (see website) is where couples/guests get to meet each other, share the common interest, biking. This leads to a positive vibe/team feeling, as it is a bit of a challenge safari - some parts are more difficult, technical and, after a long day, there is a certain euphoria in our bike groups that you do not find on a normal 'sitting' safari. The rural communities enjoy a guest arriving on a bike – it's a friendly way of arriving, one is welcome, is a topic of discussion, and an ideal opening to get talking to someone/getting to know the people in the country.

#### **What do people like the most about your trips?**

They like the alone-in-nature feeling, the getting-off-the-beaten track, the experiencing the silence and no people around feeling, just them and nature, the views, the animals they see along the way, the local people they bump into. ❄

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