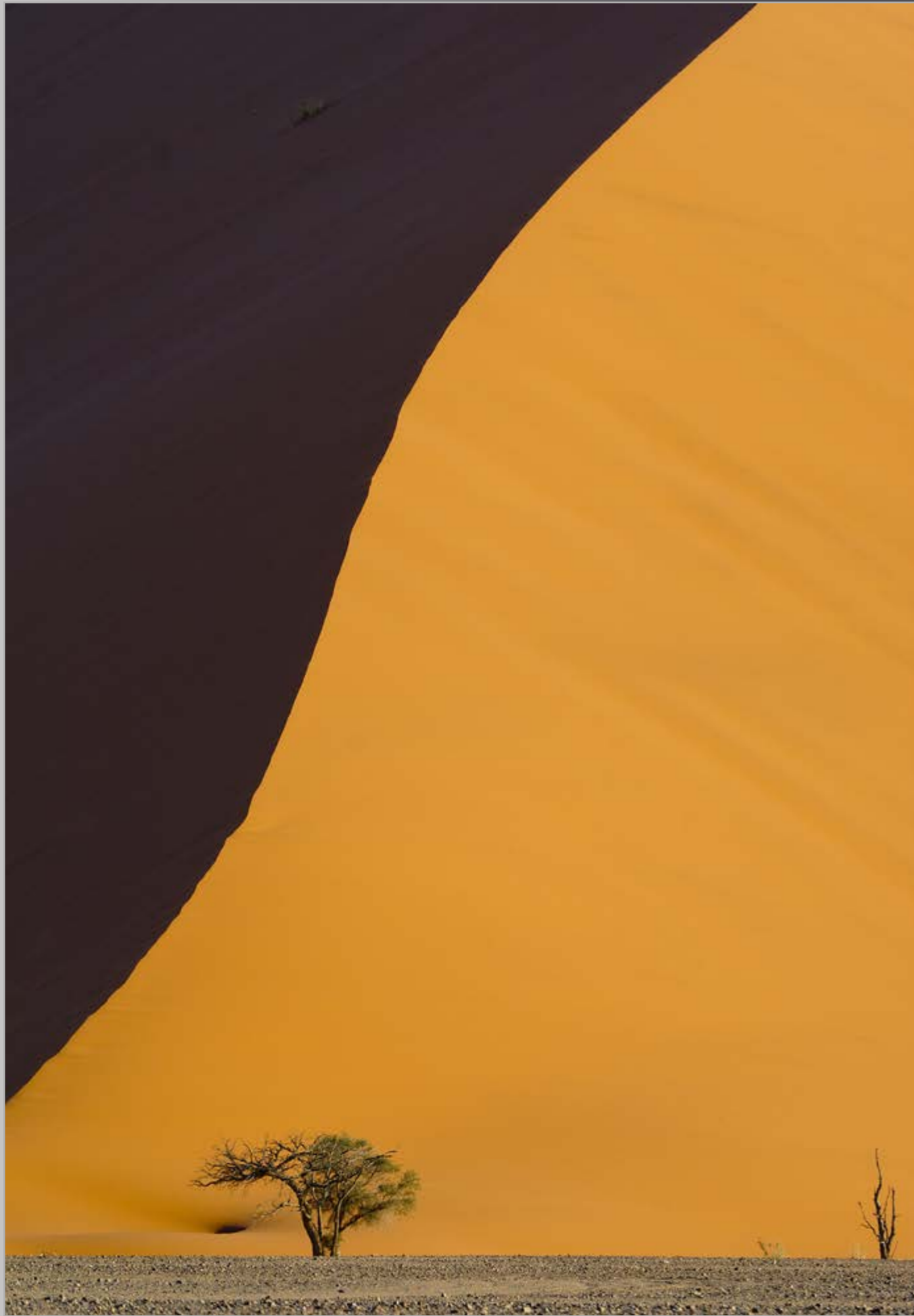




A landscape photographer's dream land with its red and orange towering dunes and the ever-changing play of light and shadow upon them



Access to the Sossusvlei area of the Namib-Naukluft National Park is from the Sesriem gate, which is located in the surroundings of the eponymous canyon. From Sesriem, a 60 km tarmac road leads to Sossusvlei proper.



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Namibia's Sossusvlei embodies some of the planet's most spectacular landscapes, and its desert environment is a photographer's paradise where dramatic colors, patterns and light reign supreme. It has seen to be believed - the chromatic shades of the gigantic dunes can change completely from one second to the next, in a dizzying and endless carousel of shifting colors and light-and-shadow patterns. In its strictest sense, Sossusvlei (sometimes written Sossus Vlei) is a salt and clay pan surrounded by high red dunes, located in the southern part of the Namib Desert, in the Namib-Naukluft National Park. The name "Sossusvlei" is however often used in an extended meaning to refer to the surrounding area (including other neighbouring vleis such as Deadvlei and other high dunes), which is one of the major visitor attractions of Namibia. The name itself is of mixed origin and roughly means "dead-end marsh". *Vlei* is the Afrikaans word for "marsh", while *soossus* is Nama for "no return" or "dead end". Sossusvlei owes this name to the fact that it is an endorheic drainage basin (i.e., a drainage basin without outflows) for the ephemeral Tsauchab River. The Sossusvlei area belongs to a wider region of southern Namib with homogeneous features (about 32.000 km<sup>2</sup>) extending between rivers Koichab and Kuiseb. This area is characterized by high sand dunes of vivid pink-to-orange color, an indication of a high concentration of iron in

the sand and consequent oxidation processes. The oldest dunes are those of a more intense reddish color. These dunes are among the highest in the world; many of them are above 200 metres, the highest being the one nicknamed Big Daddy, about 325 metres high; however, the highest dune in the Namib Desert area, Dune 7, is about 388 metres high. The highest and more stable dunes are partially covered with a relatively rich vegetation, which is mainly watered by a number of underground and ephemeral rivers that seasonally flood the pans, creating marshes that are locally known as *vlei*; when dry, these pans look almost white in color, due to the high concentration of salt. Another relevant source of water for Sossusvlei is the humidity brought by the daily morning fogs that enter the desert from the Atlantic Ocean. Fauna in the Sossusvlei area is relatively rich, comprising several small animals that can survive with little water, including a number of arthropods, small reptiles and small mammals such as rodents or jackals; bigger animals include antelopes (mainly oryxes and springboks) and ostriches. During the flood season, several migrant bird species appear along the marshes and rivers. Much of the Sossusvlei and Namib fauna is endemic and highly adapted to the specific features of the Namib. Most notably, fog beetles such as the Namib Desert Beetle have developed a technique for collecting water from early morning fogs through the bumps in their back.

A classic shot taken daily by hundreds of visitors - and yet each image is unique and completely different from the others, as light conditions continuously change.



The Sossusvlei area is characterized by high sand dunes of vivid pink-to-orange color, an indication of a high concentration of iron in the sand and consequent oxidation processes. The oldest dunes are those of a more intense reddish color, but their color's perception changes with light conditions.





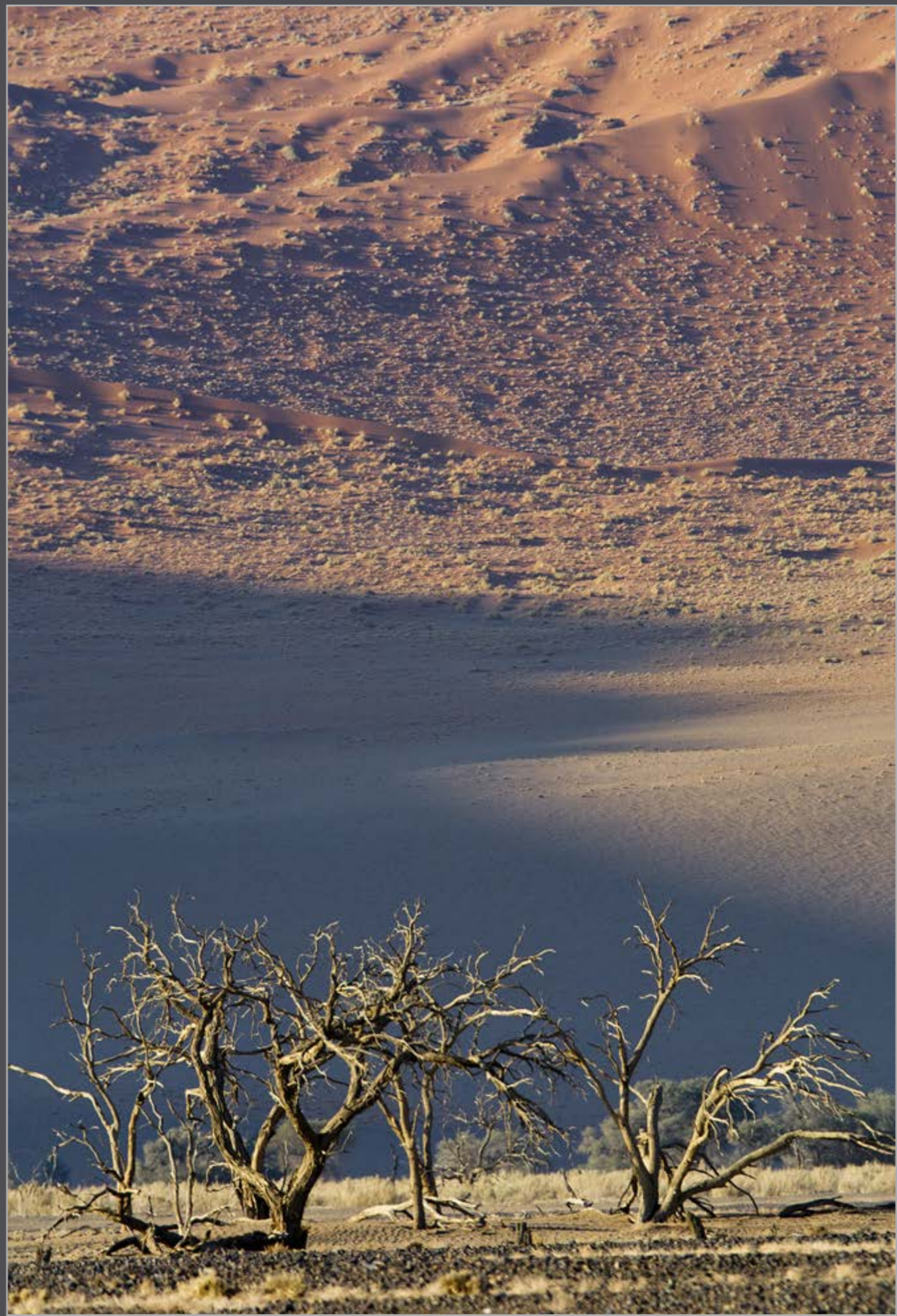
Due to its surrealistic landscapes, Sossusvlei is one of the most photographed places in Subsaharan Africa. The area has been the setting of a number of commercials, music videos, and movies, especially of the fantasy genre; one of the most well-known examples is the thriller *The Cell* (2000) starring Jennifer Lopez.





Deadvlei is another clay pan, about 2 km from Sossusvlei. A notable feature of Deadvlei is that it used to be an oasis with several acacia trees; afterwards, the river that watered it changed its course. The pan is punctuated by blackened, dead acacia trees, in contrast to the white of the salty floor of the pan and the orange of the dunes.







Since Sossusvlei is possibly the foremost attraction of Namibia, much has been done by the Namibian authorities to support and facilitate tourism in the area. The asphalt road was built in the early 2000s to connect Sesriem and Sossusvlei's 2x4 parking, and it is one of the very few non-urban metalled roads in Namibia.



Numerous places of accommodation are found along the border of the National Park, between Sesriem and the nearest settlement, Solitaire. Recently, accommodation has been built inside the Park. It is also possible to take scenic flights over the dunes, either with small planes or in hot air balloons.





Deadvlei is a white clay pan located near the more famous salt pan of Sossusvlei. Also written DeadVlei or Dead Vlei, its name means "dead marsh" (from the Afrikaans *vlei*, a lake or marsh in a valley between the dunes). The pan also is referred to as "Dooie Vlei" which is the fully Afrikaans name.



Deadvlei has been claimed to be surrounded by the highest sand dunes in the world, the highest reaching 300–400 meters (350m on average, named "Big Daddy" or "Crazy Dune"), which rest on a sandstone terrace.





The barren, arid, hostile environment of the Sossusvlei is home to several beautiful species, including relatively large-sized grass-eaters such as Oryx and Springbok. This is a Gemsbok *Oryx gazella*.







“Squashing” perspective by the use of a telephoto or a zoom in the 80-400mm range will provide interesting photographic results when portraying the ever-changing play of light and shadow in the dunes of Sossusvlei.



A small herd of Gemsbok *Oryx gazella* - notice the juveniles at the right.



Cape sparrow or mossie *Passer melanurus*.



Greater Kestrel or White-eyed Kestrel *Falco rupicoloides*.



The relatively sparse vegetation at the feet of the gigantic dunes and the skeleton-white dead tree trunks littering the landscape offer mesmerizing visual variations to the barren desert environment of the area.



Both wide angle and zoom lenses can be used with brilliant results here - our preference goes to the latter however, as zooms allow to isolate landscape details without having to keep the sky, a distracting factor in this case, in the frame.



The Sossusvlei towering sand dunes along the tarmac road offer unique camera opportunities thanks to their ever-changing play of light and shadow. This is a place where even raw amateurs can get spectacular photographic results during a single day visit.





Driving along the tarmac road offers unique photographic possibilities, as the light and color patterns on the surrounding sand dunes changes constantly. In fact, one could spend the whole day in a single spot and without shooting the same image twice.