

## Rafts, Rapids and Runs! Discover the Orange River

Written by {ga=micheller}

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To the Bushmen it was known as “*eGariiep*,” the Great River. Early adventurers called it “*die Grootrivier*.” Contrary to popular belief, its name has nothing to do with its colour... In 1777, at a time when the Dutch were laying claim to the Cape, Robert Jacob Gordon, a Dutchman of Scottish descent named it “*Oranjerivier*” in honour of Prince William of the Royal Dutch House of Orange (Oranje).

**The Orange River** is certainly South Africa’s greatest river. Rising in the Maluti Mountains of Lesotho and following some 2250km to the Atlantic Ocean in the west, it is the 39<sup>th</sup>

longest river in the world. The great bulk of its water comes from its source, the Caledon River and its tributary, the Vaal. It has been dammed in two places.

The Gariiep Dam near Colesburg covers an area of 374sq kilometers, has the capacity of 6000 million cubic meters of water when full, and generates 320MW of hydro electric power. Vanderkloof Dam downstream holds 3000 million cubic meters of water and generates 220MW of hydro electric power.

The river forms part of the international borders between South Africa and Namibia, and between South Africa and Lesotho, as well as several provincial borders within South Africa. Although the river does not pass through any major cities, it plays an important role in the South African economy by supporting agriculture, industry and mining.

As befits a great river, The Orange River carries one of the sixth largest waterfalls in the world. The Augrabies Falls can be found just below the town of Kakamas in the Northern Cape and is one of the natural wonders of Africa. The name means “*place of great noise*” and is an enormous spectacle to behold.

Moving in a westward direction from Augrabies via the Orange River Gorge, Onseepkans and the historic settlement of Pella with its desert cathedral, the river reaches the Richtersveld where it is forced to change course and head north. In the region of the Orange/Fish river confluence, this weakness is breached and the river is able to continue westwards through the Northern Cape coastal plain and finally spill out into the chilly currents of the Atlantic Ocean

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between Alexander Bay and Oranjemund on the Diamond Coast of South Africa and Namibia.

It is in the Richtersveld area that the Orange River plays host to South Africa's most popular River Run adventures. These river trails yield big excitement with little danger. Rapids reach a grade of 2 to 2.5 along the stretch between Noordoewer and the Fish River Junction. (Rapids are graded between 1 and 6, from gentle to impossible)

These river safaris range from 3 to 6 days and cover about 20 kilometers per day. Expect to sleep under the stars and enjoy a close-up view of the spectacular surrounding wilderness only accessed by the river. Enjoy spectacular desert sunsets, stunning rose-coloured mountains, unusual rock formations and evenings around the campfire. There is an abundance of 276 species of birds along the way and one may be fortunate to see and hear the call of the famous fish eagle. Other animals found in this remote area include baboons, vervet monkeys, and leguans. You may also be lucky enough to spot wild desert horses as they come down to the water's edge to drink.

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