

Introduction to Gobabeb - Namib Research Institute

The [Gobabeb - Namib Research Institute](#) is an internationally recognised research and training institution in Namibia. For over 60 years, Gobabeb has been conducting environmental and ecological research in the Namib Desert. Environmental education and practical science training is a cornerstone of Gobabeb’s mission: to be a “catalyst for gathering, understanding, and sharing knowledge of arid environments”.

Internships are a significant contributor to making Gobabeb a vibrant, independent research hub. Here, we outline the details of the Gobabeb internship programme—how to apply, what to bring, and what to expect. A stay at Gobabeb is a memorable and rewarding experience and we hope you apply!

Where is Gobabeb?

Gobabeb is in Namibia in southwestern Africa, located at the coordinates 23°33’43.31”S, 15°02’30.34”E. You can find us on Google Earth. We are located in the Namib Desert, within the Namib-Naukluft National Park. Gobabeb is ideally situated at the convergence of three distinctive Namib ecosystems: the massive dunes of the Namib Sand Sea (a World Heritage Site); the gravel plains, rocky desert and inselbergs of the Namib peneplains; and the riparian woodlands along the ephemeral Kuiseb River. The nearest town is Walvis Bay, 120 km away.



The campus at Gobabeb consists of long-term research installations, laboratories, offices, staff and visitor accommodation, and educational facilities.

Who lives at Gobabeb?

Gobabeb is home to a diverse group of people, including scientists, students, interns, and members of the local Topnaar (≠Aonin) community. Generally, 15 to 20 people reside here at any given time: permanent staff, long-term MSc and PhD students, and short-term interns. “Gobabebians” come from all around the world—Namibia, southern African countries, Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

Gobabeb is an isolated community. The nearest shops, convenience stores, and restaurants are located in Walvis Bay. Interns have a once-a-month opportunity to visit Walvis Bay to attend to personal affairs and for supplies.

What do interns do?

An internship at Gobabeb is meant to be a learning experience. Interns are expected to contribute 45 hours of work per week, and they receive two days of leave per month. When interns apply for a placement at Gobabeb, they are interviewed and accepted based on the organisation’s current activities and projects. If deemed appropriate, an intern may also work

on a self-proposed project. Bespoke projects can be considered but would be dependent on resource availability.

Advertised intern positions are based on the organisation's needs, and as internships become available. Unsolicited, general internship applications are also always considered, but acceptance is dependent on accommodation availability. In general, interns work primarily on one aspect (environmental monitoring, training and outreach, or on a specific project). As such, it is important that your application highlights your field(s) of interest and areas of experience, so that we may match your skills with an appropriate placement.

As a Gobabeb intern, you will be working for the organisation, helping in its operations. Every intern has an individual project, but interns are also expected to assist with outreach (hosting visiting school groups, conducting station tours, creating demonstration materials, developing information products, producing social media content, etc.). Interns are also expected to help with long-term environmental monitoring (e.g., weather and atmospheric data, invertebrate and vegetation monitoring, large mammal distribution). Training and mentoring in specialised sampling techniques is provided. All interns undergo a two-week induction upon arrival to familiarise new intakes with all Gobabeb operations and procedures.

We also seek to help interns develop professionally. Do not hesitate to inform us if you have a specific skill, interest, project or fascination that you may wish to pursue. We will try to accommodate your interests, as long as they can be fit into our programmes and operations.

In addition to our biology, geology and other science interns, Gobabebian alumni also include journalists, photographers, artists, community activists, writers and other desert-loving and sand-loving personalities. Professionals within these areas of speciality (e.g., film-makers) often visit Gobabeb, giving you an opportunity to meet them and make connections.

While we expect you to gain practical experience through your work, you should also strive to experience Gobabeb's multicultural and multidisciplinary milieu, including visiting researchers, attending talks, participating in self-organised excursions, camping in the dunes or on the plains, etc.!

What accommodation is available for interns?

Interns are housed in bedrooms in "Old House", in caravans (trailers) or, if available, other rooms. Old House is the long-standing intern centre. There are three bedrooms, a communal kitchen, dining room, TV room/library, and several showers and toilets. Bedding and towels are provided. All interns are responsible for their own meals and cook in the communal kitchen in Old House.

Old House is self-governing. Over the years, Gobabeb interns have established a set of rules for residents to follow.

- **Dishes:** Each person is expected to wash his/her dishes and pots/pans by the end of each day. This ensures that clean dishes are available all week. Once the clean dish rack is full, we all take it upon ourselves to help unload it and pack away the kitchen.
- **Refrigeration:** Each person is allocated fridge and freezer space, usually shared. Each person is responsible for managing and keeping his/her fridge space clean.
- **Cleaning:** We have a rotating/weekly chores list that includes cleaning the dining room, TV room, surfaces, floors, and laundry. You are expected to complete your designated chore by Saturday evening and the chore wheel will rotate on Sunday. As a new intern, you will not be put on the list until after your first week.
- **TV:** Old House has a TV and DVD player for general use. Old House members pay the bill for the cable TV's (DSTV) service. If the bill isn't paid, satellite television will not work. Residents are also responsible for the annual TV license fees.

- **Dues:** N\$70/ month (paid to Old House president). This money is used for communal cleaning and cooking supplies as well as paying for the DSTV bill.

The expansion and upgrade of staff and intern accommodation is a priority for Gobabeb. Post-graduate student accommodation has recently been constructed for longer-term student associates. Caravan accommodation is usually provided at no cost, whereas there are rates levied for “premium” accommodation, if available.

Are interns paid?

An internship at Gobabeb is a privilege, not a job, and interns are expected to contribute voluntarily to this internship experience. Under certain circumstances, Namibian citizens may be offered a stipend, but this will depend upon available funds, and will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Internships for international students are non-paying positions.

What does an internship cost?

Interns are charged a once-off administrative fee. Foreign nationals doing any length internship are charged an intern registration fee of N\$2,500 that goes towards administrative and logistical support.

Interns residing in Old House are expected to contribute a monthly fee of N\$70 to a pool that covers communal cooking and cleaning supplies and monthly bills for cable television. There is also a N\$10 per load fee for using the on-site washing machine. There is no dryer, but there are plenty of clotheslines and the desert sun does quite a good job of drying clothes!

Interns are responsible for their own meals, refreshments, recreation, off-station transport, medical costs, and personal insurance. Interns usually obtain all their supplies during monthly “town trips” to Walvis Bay.

Foreign interns are also responsible for work visa/work permit costs, where applicable. Special internship packages may be negotiated for applicants from Gobabeb’s institutional and academic partners.

How do interns stay in touch?

Gobabeb has an MTC cellular tower on site, but it currently is 2G service, which is adequate for voice calls and SMS, but not higher-end streaming. Good internet service is available through a dedicated microwave link to Namibia’s telecommunications network.

Interns with other cell providers may choose to bring an unlocked mobile phone and get a local SIM card and enough phone credit before leaving for Gobabeb. Airtime vouchers are available to purchase at reception.

When you come on board as a Gobabeb intern, you are provided a gobabeb.org email account. This account will be active while you are resident at Gobabeb, and for a limited time after you leave. You should retain your personal email accounts.

Gobabeb maintains a post office box in Walvis Bay for regular mail. It is checked approximately once every two weeks. You can receive personal mail and parcels/care packages through this box, but you should be mindful of the likely delays.

Most international courier services (DHL, FedEx, TNT, etc.) have agencies in Walvis Bay that regularly interact with Gobabeb for research material shipments. As with our post-office box, parcels or packages addressed to Gobabeb are collected only when there is a need to visit Walvis Bay. Usually this is once or twice per week.

Gobabeb's contact information can be found on Gobabeb's web site (<https://gobabeb.org>).

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What about computers?

There are station computers available, but normally you will be expected to bring your own laptop computer. You will connect to the internet and our internal server through an Ethernet connection or WiFi. If your computer does not have an Ethernet port, we recommend purchasing an inexpensive Ethernet adapter. Although our internet service was recently upgraded, it still must serve our entire community, and priority use is for station-related traffic. We discourage downloading large files, music, or videos.

How does laundry work?

Gobabeb has a washing machine that all staff members can use for N\$10 per load. You will log your use on an available sheet, and you can pay your bill in reception. You are expected to purchase and use your own laundry soap (for automatic washing machines only). This machine serves the needs of everyone on site, so please be respectful of others' needs. Remove your clothes as soon as soon as possible once your wash cycle is complete. Do not remove other's clothes from the machine to make room for your own.

The washing machine imposes a large load on our energy supply, so only do laundry when you need to – during daylight hours - and consider hand-washing clothes when possible. There is no automatic dryer – hang your clothes on the lines to dry. If the sun is shining (it probably will be!), clothes dry very quickly! Ironing laundry is prohibited.

What about visas for international interns?

International interns **must** obtain a three-month (renewable) work visa to come to Gobabeb. Longer-term stays will require a one-year work/study permit. Even though most foreign visitors can obtain a 90-day tourist visa at the port of entry, tourist visas do not cover foreign visitors coming to work at Gobabeb. Internships, even if not remunerated, are regarded as “work” by the Namibian immigration authorities. Do not try to enter Namibia without a valid work visa in hand: you may be detained by the Immigration authorities if you do and Gobabeb will not be in a position to intercede on your behalf.

International interns are responsible for obtaining their visas and/or permits, and for all pertaining fees. Your request for a visa will require a letter of recommendation from Gobabeb. You will also incur visa costs, currently N\$1,100 for a three-month visa. Applications can now be submitted online – see <https://eservices.mhaiss.gov.na/> .

An alternate option is to apply through an immigration agent in Namibia. Gobabeb can recommend suitable consultants, who are very familiar with the procedures as these evolve and can give you up-to-date information. There would, however, be additional service fees when using an agent.

Be mindful that processing a visa / permit application can take anywhere from 10 days to several weeks (permits take several months), so it is imperative that you apply early.

You will likely need the following notarised documents to apply for a work visa. Gathering these can also be a lengthy process which can further protract the application process.

- Passport photo
- Scan of valid passport with at least six months before expiry
- Scan of terminal degree
- CV
- Support letter from Gobabeb

Work or study permit applications for periods of more than six months in Namibia **cannot be submitted online**. In such instances, it is advisable to work through an agent to facilitate and follow-up on your behalf. Permit applications require additional documentation: police clearance certificate; medical report, radiological report etc.

Please note that Namibian Embassies or High Commissions abroad may offer conflicting advice. We strongly recommend that information regarding entry requirements is verified by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security in Namibia. Gobabeb's advisories in this regard are aligned to MHAISS instructions, and we have long-term experience in facilitating international internships.

How does money work?

Namibia's currency is the Namibia dollar (NAD). The Namibia dollar (NAD) is tied to the South African Rand (ZAR). Both currencies are legal tender throughout Namibia. Other currencies are NOT accepted but can be exchanged for legal tender (NAD or ZAR) at banks or registered currency exchanges. Black market currency exchanges are illegal in Namibia.

For foreign visitors, there is no need to bring large sums of cash money. Automatic teller machines can be used to draw Namibia dollars from your home accounts. Bank and credit cards are also widely accepted by shops and businesses throughout Namibia. Foreign interns should arrange ahead of time with their banks or credit card agencies for card use in Namibia and emergency contacts to resolve card use issues.

How do interns get around?

Gobabeb maintains a vehicle fleet strictly for purposes of station-related work. Longer term interns may be authorised to use a Gobabeb vehicle provided the driver has a valid driver's license, it is to be used for station-related work, and the driver can manage a manual transmission (stick shift), or is trained in the use of quad bike (Gobabeb provides the training).

We will provide transport to and from the Walvis Bay International Airport as needed for work-related trips.

We will provide monthly 'town trips' to Walvis Bay for grocery shopping and other personal errands. We drop interns off at one or two convenient locations, but otherwise, interns are responsible for getting around Walvis Bay if needed.

You might also be able to take advantage of infrequent service journeys to Walvis Bay. Please liaise with the Office Manager in this regard, because there are often individuals going to town who might give you a ride or pick up something for you if you need it. We discourage interns approaching Gobabeb guests directly for such favours.

In case of a medical emergency, Gobabeb will provide transport to the nearest, suitable health care services .

Casual visits to town for routine purchases or recreation are unlikely if you do not have a private car or personal rental. These will be at your own expense.

What can interns do for leisure?

Gobabeb maintains a swimming pool and a basketball/volleyball/tennis court. There is also a sand/beach volleyball court in the dry riverbed, as well as a rough soccer field. Old House has a television and DVD player. Old House also has an extensive library, several board games and card games but if you have a favourite game, we recommend bringing it! Books are also available from Gobabeb's research library. Additionally, there are many scenic and safe areas to hike and explore around the campus or, if you have our own mountain bike that you can bring along, cycling is a popular pastime. Bring your own music, musical instruments, books, sports gear and other entertainment and feel welcome to share, where feasible. The desert also provides ample scope for those keen on photography, and interns are encouraged to contribute observations to online social media platforms, like iNaturalist.

How do I live in the desert?

Gobabeb has an arid climate, and as such temperatures are extremely variable. Temperatures may range from mid-40s (degrees Celsius) to nearly freezing – any time of the year! Bring clothes for all weathers. The Namib is a desert, so copious amounts of sunscreen, a water bottle, and a hat are essential. It is also quite remote, so make sure you have personal medicines and hygiene products.

Living in the Namib-Naukluft National Park gives us easy access to nature and the unique wildlife here, but it also means that we live closely with all the creatures that inhabit the desert. We must understand and respect the creatures with which we share this beautiful place, so be conscious of your surroundings and keep an eye out for organisms that might harm or be harmed by you.

It is recommended to wear shoes and use a torch when walking at night. The most common, scary creatures we see around are scorpions and solifuges, which are not aggressive and mostly harmless. Sometimes we see snakes, but not very often. If you do encounter a snake, back away slowly and tell someone (i.e., Old House President) what you saw and where you saw it.

What is the electricity situation?

Gobabeb is 'off the grid': electrical power is supplied through a large network of solar panels, battery storage, and a backup diesel generator. Voltage is 220 VAC 50-60 hertz.

Namibia uses southern African 3-pin power outlets. Adaptors for common 2-pin power supplies are readily available. Foreign interns from the US, UK, Asia and Europe will have to purchase plug adaptors for themselves. If you have multiple chargers or power supplies, the best solution may be to bring a multiplug power strip from your own country and fit it at Gobabeb with a local 3-pin plug.

Most power supplies for computers and other electronic devices are universal, that is they can be plugged into either 120 VAC or 220 VAC plugs. Check your power supply's specifications (usually located on the back of the supply) to see whether it is universal. If it is not, you will have to purchase a voltage adaptor as well as a plug adaptor. Gobabeb does not supply voltage adaptors.

For battery powered products, we recommend you bring enough rechargeable batteries to have at least one set of spare batteries for all your equipment.

Gobabeb's electricity plant provides adequate power for living and working comfortably. However, its supply is finite, and conservation is the general rule at Gobabeb. High-demand personal appliances such as hairdryers, electric heaters or electric blankets; electric kitchen utensils, electric irons and other forms of non-essential electric products are not allowed. Turn off your computer screens when you leave the office, unplug appliances and/or turn the wall

switch off when you are finished using them. Instead of using the overhead lights in the office, consider opening the window and working by the beautiful natural light of the Namib!

Is there enough safe water?

Gobabeb obtains its water from a borehole in the Kuiseb River aquifer, so there is ample safe water available for drinking, cooking, washing, and personal hygiene. A reverse osmosis plant converts the rather salty borehole water into drinkable demineralized and good-tasting water, which is distributed throughout the station by underground plumbing.

Like our electricity supply, we practice water conservation as much as possible. Take short showers, turn off the tap when you brush your teeth, make sure the tap doesn't drip, use the ½ flush when appropriate, cover the swimming pool after use, etc. Be conscious of your water use. Even though we have a good water source on site, water is still a scarce and valuable resource in the desert. And always make sure you drink enough of it!

What about first aid?

If you are hurt or sick, we have a very basic first-aid kit on site. If you have particular medication needs, you should ensure you have adequate personal supplies on hand.

The nearest resident medical staff are at a clinic at Utuseb, some 60 km downstream from Gobabeb. The nearest hospitals and pharmacies are 120 km away in Walvis Bay. The services of a government-sponsored travelling clinic that regularly passes the institute to serve the local community is available but erratic. World-class medical practitioners and hospitals are available in Walvis Bay and Swakopmund.

As in life, Gobabeb interns must take personal responsibility for their own safety. The following rules should always be kept in mind:

- If you go out biking, camping, exercising, hiking, or working, tell somebody where you are going and when you expect to be back.
- Do not handle wild animals if you are not trained and authorised to do so.
- Do not ingest any plant material that is unfamiliar.
- Keep your distance from snakes, scorpions, spiders, and wild mammals, however cute and photogenic.
- Don't be stupid!!! Do not take unnecessary risks that may lead to injury. Gobabeb is remote and in a wilderness area.
- Any adventure sports you engage in will be at your own risk, so make sure you have the right training and equipment.
- Protect yourself – drink water, use sunscreen, wear a hat, and **drink water!!!**

In case of a medical emergency, senior management on site should be contacted immediately to arrange for evacuation or transport to a medical facility.

What about food and supplies?

The main message to keep in mind is self-sufficiency. You will be able to buy supplies and food only once a month during one of the monthly town trips. You may be able to send a list of supplies for another staff member to purchase when they have to go to town for some official duty, or sometimes for you to go with such an opportunity if arranged ahead of time. But the rule of thumb should be provisions to last you a month.

Here is a suggested sample shopping list for four weeks:

- Starches – mealie meal, pasta, rice, etc.
- Sugar (2.5 kg)
- Flour (5 kg)
- Yeast (10 packets)
- Fresh vegetables that last (potatoes - big pack, onions, pumpkin, etc.)
- Fresh fruit that last (apples, oranges, etc.)
- Eggs (around 15-30)
- Bread
- Fresh vegetables for 1-2 weeks – tomatoes, peppers, lettuce, cucumber, etc.
- Frozen vegetables, meat, fish
- Canned items
- Packet Soup
- Cool drink or squash mix
- Long-life Milk (min. 6 boxes)
- Coffee and Tea
- Cooking oil
- Vinegar
- Spreads (butter, jam, honey, cheese etc.)
- Spices (any you prefer, we have some here for public use)
- Breakfast cereal or porridge
- Snacks and comfort food
- Toilet paper
- Personal hygiene products
- Personal medicines and first aid
- Laundry detergent
- Personal vices (soda, wine, other poisons)
- Torch (Flashlight) batteries and other consumables
- Dishwashing materials
- Salt
- Matches for gas stoves and ovens

Gobabeb has greenhouse facilities for cultivating vegetables and herbs, for those with green fingers and a penchant for fresh produce.

How should I arrive in Namibia?

Interns are responsible for getting to Walvis Bay, where Gobabeb staff will pick them up for transport to the institute. Generally, we will not provide transport from Windhoek or other locations in Namibia.

There are bus services between Windhoek and Walvis Bay (passing through Swakopmund), the main ones being McClune's Shuttle and InterCape Mainliner. Ask about schedules and tickets at your hostel or check out these companies' websites.

International interns should preferably book their flights with the final destination of Walvis Bay International Airport. There are limited flights between Cape Town, or Johannesburg and Walvis Bay, so early booking of flights is essential.

If you used an agent to obtain your visa through a consultant, you will have a scanned copy of the visa, which you can present at Passport Control at your port of entry. While passing through Namibian passport control, be sure to stress that you will be volunteering. If you arrive at Windhoek, you should get a large square stamp in your passport, and the officer will write in by

hand in your passport the details of your visa. If you arrive at Walvis Bay, you may be directed to the local office of Home Affairs for the visa stamp. The officer will also stamp the visa letter. Keep this paper, as it is proof in lieu of your passport that you are in Namibia legally.

In Windhoek, convenient, budget hostel-type accommodation is available. If you arrive in Windhoek by air, take a taxi from the airport to the hostel; some more upmarket hotel chains have free, courtesy pick-up at the airport.

If you obtained your entry permission through an immigration agent, you may want to meet with them and have them look over your passport to ensure that everything is in order and settle outstanding payments.

Other things to keep in mind?

- You can exchange foreign currency at the airport when you enter the country.
- You should plan to do your shopping in the last town you are in before coming to Gobabeb. Generally, this will be Walvis Bay. You should buy enough supplies for four weeks, so make a list of what you need before the time.
- Gobabeb has mobile phone (MTC cell) coverage, but roaming is expensive. Bring an unlocked mobile phone and get a local SIM card and enough phone credit before leaving for Gobabeb.
- Electricity at Gobabeb is available 24 hours. High voltage personal appliances are not permitted at Gobabeb (toaster, hairdryer, kettle), so no need to bring them!
- The tap water is potable and tastes very good thanks to our reverse-osmosis filtration unit.
- Mosquitoes do occur at Gobabeb, but it is not in a malarial zone.
- Gobabeb is 120 km from the nearest town. Please take note that opportunities to go to town are limited.

If you have any additional questions about Gobabeb, please contact our Office Manager at admin@gobabeb.org.