

South Africa Travel Guide

Introduction

South Africa has been billed as 'a world in one country', and any visitor who has experienced its delights, from the jumble of Johannesburg, the northern city built on gold mines, to the sophistication of Cape Town in the south, to the sunny laid back beaches of Durban in the east, is bound to agree.

Throughout the second half of the 20th century South Africa was regarded by most of the world as a pariah state where the ruling white minority passed a range of draconian laws to subdue and enslave the black majority. All this changed in 1994 with the release from prison of world-renowned freedom fighter and icon of the oppressed, Nelson Mandela. A new age of democracy was ushered in, and South Africa was suddenly revealed to the world in her beautiful true colours: a rainbow nation with a kaleidoscope of cultures and a host of attractions to enthral and entrance visitors.

A decade later tourists are flocking to sunny South Africa in droves, particularly to the Western Cape with its magnificent scenery, beautiful beaches, majestic mountains and green winelands.

The Republic, comprising the southern tip of Africa and surrounded on three sides by the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, offers a taste of the African experience with the chance to visit traditional tribal villages, game reserves and sprawling townships. At the same time it also offers all the pleasures of a first world holiday experience, with luxury hotels, sophisticated shopping, exciting theme parks and clean beaches. Have breakfast in a New York-style deli; lunch in an African shebeen; cocktails on a sunset cruise; and dine in style in a fine British colonial restaurant. This is all possible in a South African city.

It is not only cultural diversity that makes South Africa magical. The country has a wealth of animal and plant life scattered across its varied climactic zones from desert to snow-covered mountains, forests to grasslands and mangrove swamps. Historically, too, there is plenty to discover, from the fossils of ancient hominids, to the pioneering spirit of the Dutch 'voortrekkers' and the settlement of the Eastern Cape frontier by the British colonialists.

Passport / Visa requirements for South Africa: A valid and acceptable passport or travel document for your intended stay; At least two blank pages in your passport for endorsements; A valid visa, if required; Sufficient funds to pay for your day-to-day expenses during your stay; A return or onward ticket; Yellow fever certificates if your journey starts or entails passing through the yellow fever belt of Africa or South America. [More information.](#)

International Airports: <http://www.airports.co.za>

O.R. Tambo International Airport (JNB) –

The airport is 14 miles (22km) east of Johannesburg.

Cape Town International Airport (CPT) –

The airport is 13 miles (20km) east of Cape Town.

King Shaka International Airport (DUR) –

The airport is 22 miles (32km) north of Durban.

Duty Free: South African Customs regulations afford visitors to the country the opportunity to bring in certain goods without incurring duties and value added tax (VAT). On arrival, you can take the green 'nothing to declare' channel if you do not exceed these allowances of personal effects per person: - 200 cigarettes; 20 cigars; 250g of cigarette or pipe tobacco; 50ml perfume; 250ml eau de toilette; 2 litres of wine; 1 litre of alcoholic beverages. In addition to personal effects and the above consumable allowances, travellers are allowed new or used goods in accompanied baggage to the value of R5 000 or R25 000 if arriving from Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia or Swaziland. A traveller is entitled to these allowances once per person during a period of 30 days after an absence of 48 hours from South Africa. The tobacco and alcohol allowance is not applicable to persons under the age of 18 years. If you have goods in excess of these allowances, take the red channel and declare your items. Here you will be billed at the applicable rates by representatives of South African Customs. [More information.](#)

Time: Local time is GMT +2.

Language: South Africa has 11 official languages, including Afrikaans, English, Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho. English is widely spoken.

Electricity: Electrical current is 230 volts, 50Hz. Round, three-pin plugs are standard.

Climate: South Africa is a large country and has diverse climactic regions, but in general the weather is sunny and hot in the summer months (December to April), and mild during winter (May to November). Winters in the Cape are cold and wet, and snow falls on the mountain ranges here and in Natal. Gauteng and the northern areas experience thunderstorms regularly during evenings in the summer months, and winters are usually warm during the day and cold at night.

Money: South Africa's currency is the Rand (ZAR), which is divided into 100 cents. Money can be exchanged at banks, bureaux de change and the larger hotels. ATMs are widely available (there is a daily limit for cash withdrawals) and major international credit cards are widely accepted. Visitors should be vigilant when drawing cash from ATMs, as con artists are known to operate there. Travellers cheques and some

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foreign currencies are accepted at larger hotels and shops, but commission is charged, otherwise all commercial banks will exchange them.

Travel Health: If you're an adult, you won't need any inoculations unless you're travelling from a yellow-fever endemic area (the yellow fever belt of Africa or South America), in which case you will need certification to prove your inoculation status when you arrive in South Africa. It is recommended that you have the required inoculations four to six weeks before you travel to South Africa. A yellow fever inoculation certificate only becomes valid 10 days after inoculation – after which it remains valid for 10 years. Hepatitis B inoculations are recommended for children up to the age of 12 who have not completed the series of injections as infants. Booster doses for tetanus and measles can also be administered.

There is a malaria risk in the low-lying areas of Limpopo and Mpumalanga (including the Kruger National Park), as well as north-eastern KwaZulu-Natal, and precautions are advised when travelling to these areas. There is a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Tap water is safe in urban areas but sterilisation is advisable elsewhere, as there are periodic outbreaks of cholera in the poor communities of rural South Africa, particularly in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, and Limpopo provinces. Drug-resistant TB has been reported throughout the country. Food poisoning is rare. Medical facilities in South Africa are good, but medical insurance is strongly advised as private hospitals expect cash up front and public hospitals are best avoided.

Safety Information: Safety is an issue and visitors to South Africa should be aware of the country's high incidence of crime. Although this tends to be concentrated in pockets throughout the country, for example in the township areas, opportunistic crime is fairly widespread. Travellers should always be aware of these risks and exercise the necessary precautions. Doors should be locked when driving and one should not walk alone at night in city streets, isolated beaches or remote areas. Visitors should avoid hiking alone. It is worthwhile noting that the South African authorities do give high priority to the protection of tourists. Power outages are common throughout the country.

Local Customs: South African culture and etiquette in urban areas is very Western. While standards of dress vary, beachwear is not to be worn off the beach, and nude sunbathing is only permissible in a very few designated areas. While in African townships it is frowned on for women to wear pants or shorts and homosexuality is frowned on, whereas it is legal and

acceptable in all other areas. Although locals may complain loudly about the country and government, they will take offense if a foreigner is critical. Racism is a sensitive issue, however interracial relationships are widely accepted. South African racial terminology differs from what is acceptable in North America: the terms 'black' and 'white' are appropriate for those of African and Caucasian descent, respectively. 'Coloured' refers not to black Africans, but those of mixed African and European descent and is not considered an offensive term. South Africans are friendly and hospitable, and will often go out of their way to assist tourists who need help.

Tipping: Restaurant waiters earn a livelihood from the tip. 10% is expected for good service, if a service charge is not included in the bill. Tipping for services rendered is widely anticipated by porters, taxi drivers and petrol attendants. Golf caddies should be tipped accordingly. 'Car guards' will offer to look after your parked car; they are usually immigrants from neighbouring countries looking for work and will expect anything from R2 upwards on your return.

Business: South Africa's multicultural status means that business etiquette may vary with different people, and according to individual sectors, though it is most often similar to dealings in Europe and the United States. Although there are 11 official languages, English is the primary language of business. It is best to dress formally for initial meetings. Generally South Africans are regarded as relaxed and informal with regards to introductions and the handling of business cards. Shaking hands is common for both men and women. The giving of gifts is uncommon and unnecessary. Business hours are generally 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday with an hour taken over lunch from 1-2pm.

Communications: The international access code for South Africa is +27. The international dialling code out of South Africa is 00. Dialling from South Africa: e.g. 0044 to United Kingdom. For more [international dialling codes](#)

GSM mobile phone networks providing 900 and 1800 frequencies serve the country. Mobile service providers offer very cheap 'pay-as-you-go' Sim cards, which are a good option for visitors staying for some time. Internet cafes are widespread. Card and coin operated pay phones are also widespread.