

Rainbow Nation

Information about South Africa

South Africa is located at the southern tip of Africa. It is bordered by Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Swaziland and Lesotho (which is completely surrounded by South Africa). It is a vast country with widely varying landscapes and has 11 official languages, as well as an equally diverse population. South Africa is renowned for its wines and is one of the world's largest producers of gold. South Africa has the strongest economy in Africa, and is an influential player in African politics. In 2010, South Africa hosted the first Football World Cup to be held on the African continent.

If you want to travel in southern Africa then South Africa is a good place to start. While you can fly into any country in southern Africa, most flights will route through South Africa anyway. South Africa is also a good place to get used to travelling in the region (though some would argue that Namibia is better for that). Of course South Africa is not only a jumping off point, it is itself a superb destination rich in culture, fauna & flora and history.

Outsiders' views of South Africa are coloured by the same stereotypes as the rest of Africa. Contrary to popular belief, South Africa is not devastatingly poor with an unstable government. South Africa is to a large extent two countries within one. On the one hand it is a first world state, especially the major cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg, and on the other hand it is under-developed and has large scale poverty. South Africa is one of the most unequal countries in the world where opulence and severe poverty can often be observed together. The rural part of South Africa remains among the poorest and the least developed parts of the world and poverty in the townships can be appalling, progress is being made. The process of recovering from apartheid, which lasted almost 46 years, is quite slow. In fact, South Africa's United Nations Human Development Index which was slowly improving in the final years of apartheid, has declined dramatically since 1996, largely due to the AIDS pandemic, and poverty levels appear to be on the increase. South Africa boasts a well-developed infrastructure and has all the modern amenities and technologies, much of it developed during the years of white minority rule. The government is stable, although corruption is common. The government and the primary political parties generally have a high level of respect for democratic institutions and human rights.

Geography:

Situated at the southern tip of Africa, South Africa has a landmass of 1 233 404 km² edged on 3 sides by a nearly 3000km coastline washed by the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic. It is bordered in the north by Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and also wraps itself around two independent countries, the Lesotho and Swaziland.

Capitals:

South Africa has 3 capitals: Cape Town (Legislative), Pretoria (Administrative and Bloemfontein (Judicial)).

Political system:

A well-known fact about South Africa is that since 1994 we have enjoyed democratic government, the apartheid policies of the past overthrown. Our constitution is regarded as an example to the world, and enshrines a wide scope of human rights protected by an independent judiciary. The country is headed by a State President, Jacob Zuma, of the African National Congress (ANC).

Economy:

A lesser-known fact on South Africa is that it has achieved steady economic growth in gross domestic product (GDP) since the late 90s. The country, regarded as an emerging market, has a well developed financial sector and active stock exchange. Financial policies have focused on building solid macroeconomic structures. The country's central bank is the Reserve Bank.

Tourism:

Since the demise of apartheid, international tourist arrivals have surged, making tourism one of the fastest growing sectors. The tourism industry is well-established with an exciting sector of emerging entrepreneurs. The country is strong on adventure, sport, nature and wildlife travel and is a pioneer and global leader in responsible tourism.

Population:

The South African population of more than 47m people is extremely diverse. Africans are in the majority, approx. 80% of the population, followed by the white population approx. 4,4m; the coloured population approx. 4,2 million and the Indian/Asian population at approx. 1,2m.

Currency:

South Africa's currency is the rand, which offers visitors great value for money. The rand comes in a range of coins (R1 = 100 cents) and note denominations of R10, R50, R100.

Climate:

South Africa has a temperate climate and is known for its long sunny days, hence the title: 'Sunny South Africa'. Most of the provinces have summer rainfall, except for the Western Cape (winter rainfall). Winter is from May to August; Spring from September to October; Summer from November to February and Autumn is from March to April.

Communications:

South Africa has an exceptionally well-developed communications infrastructure. A number of cell-phone providers provide national coverage and there are well-established landline phone networks. Internet and Wi-Fi are easily accessible in most urban areas.

Provinces:

There are 9 provinces in South Africa, namely: Eastern Cape, Free State, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal; Gauteng, North West, Northern Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga

National Symbols:

The South African flag is a much-loved symbol of patriotism and other significant national emblems include: National bird: blue crane; National animal: the springbok; National fish: galjoen; National flower: protea and National tree: the yellowwood.

Languages:

South Africa is a multi-lingual country and there are 11 official languages including: English, Afrikaans, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. Composed by Enoch Sontonga in 1899, the Xhosa hymn 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika is South Africa's national anthem

Religions:

Almost 80% of South Africa's population is Christian. Other major religious groups include Hindus, Muslims, Jews and Buddhists. A minority don't belong to any of the major religions. The Constitution guarantees freedom of worship.

Water:

Tap water is potable. However, ensure that you take bottled water with you when travelling to remote rural areas and the bush.

Animals and Plants:

South Africa has been declared one of the 18 megadiverse destinations in the world. As a pioneer and leader in responsible tourism, South Africa has numerous conservation projects to protect its natural heritage - travellers can support and take part in many of these projects. The country is home to the famous Big Five (rhino, elephant, lion, leopard and buffalo).

Electricity:

The South African electricity supply is 220/230 volts AC 50 HZ. With a few exceptions (in deep rural areas) electricity is available almost everywhere.

Airports:

The 3 major international airports in South Africa are: OR Tambo International Airport (Johannesburg), Cape Town International Airport and King Shaka International Airport (Durban) as well as 90 regional airports including the Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport (KMIA) in Nelspruit.

Travel by Road and Rail:

South Africa has an extensive road infrastructure including national highways and secondary roads. Speed limits are set at 120 kilometres on highways; 100 kilometres on secondary roads and 60 kilometres in urban areas.

Entry requirements:

South Africa requires a valid yellow fever certificate from all foreign visitors and citizens over 1 year of age travelling from an infected area or having been in transit through infected areas. For visa requirements, please contact your nearest South African diplomatic mission.

Health and safety:

South Africa is well-known for its medical skill since Professor Christian Barnard performed the first successful heart transplant in 1967. There are many world-class private hospitals and medical centres around the country, especially in the urban centres. Most of South Africa is malaria-free, but always check with the game reserves you're planning to visit and take precautions if necessary. Make sure you have the latest safety tips from the establishment where you will be staying and take common sense precautions as you would when travelling.

History:

The tip of [Africa](#) has been home to the Khoisan (collective name for Hottentot (Koi) and Bushmen (San) people for thousands of years. Their rock art can still be found in many places throughout South Africa. It is estimated that Bantu tribes may have started to slowly expand into the northernmost areas of what is today [Southern Africa](#) around 2,500 years ago and by around 500 AD the different cultural groups as we know them today had been established in the lush areas to the north and east of the what is today known as Eastern South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The desert and semi-desert areas of the Western and Northern Cape provinces, as well as the western parts of the Eastern Cape province remained unsettled by the Bantu as the arid climate, limited seasonal rainfall, sparse vegetation and scarcity of natural sources of water could not sustain large migrations of people and herds of cattle, cattle being the primary livestock reared by the Bantu and fulfilling numerous cultural and economic functions within the tribal society (cattle served as a rudimentary currency and basic unit of exchange with a mutually agreeable value between bartering parties, thus fulfilling the function of money). The "Khoisan" existed in these areas as nomadic hunters, unable to permanently settle as the movement of desert game in search of dwindling water supplies during winter months determined their own migration. Not until the "Boers" (see next paragraph) moved into these areas and established boreholes and containment ponds could any permanent settlements be established in these areas. Today, with more reliable sources of water and modern methods of

water conservancy the agricultural activity remains limited mainly to sheep and ostrich ranching as these animals are better suited to the sparse feed and limited water.

The first Europeans to reach South Africa were the Portuguese, who named the end of the country "Cape of Good Hope" in 1488, when they managed to sail around it to reach India. Permanent European settlement was only built at Cape Town after the Dutch East India Company reached the Cape of Good Hope in April 1652. In the late 1700s, the Boers (Dutch for farmers) slowly started expanding first eastward along the coastline and later upwards into the interior. By 1795, Britain took control of the Cape, as a consequence of the Napoleonic wars on the Dutch, in 1820 a large group of British settlers arrived in the region. In 1835, large numbers of Boers started out on the Groot Trek (the great migration) into the interior after becoming dissatisfied with the British rule. In the interior, they established their own internationally recognized republics. Some Boers were initially able to get along with the locals (as with the Tswana) and in other areas Boers clashed badly with native populations (especially the Zulu). On 16 December 1838, a badly outnumbered Boer unit slaughtered over 3,000 Zulus at the Battle of Blood River in what is now KwaZulu-Natal.

Two wars for control over Transvaal and Natal were fought between the Boers and the British in 1880 and 1899. The second war occurred after British settlers flooded into the area surrounding Johannesburg known as the "Witwatersrand" (white water escarpment) in response to the discovery of gold in 1886. The Second Boer War (Afrikaans: Die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog or 'Second War of Independence') was particularly unpleasant, as the British administration contained the Boer civilian population in concentration camps. Thousands of Boer civilians died in the camps from starvation or disease. Boer farms, livestock, crops and homesteads were also largely destroyed.

After peace was restored by the 1902 Treaty of Vereeniging, the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910, consolidating the various Boer republics and British colonies into a unified state as a member of the British Commonwealth. In 1961, the Republic of South Africa was formed and SA exited the Commonwealth. Meanwhile, during the early 20th century, a number of Afrikaner thinkers began to articulate a philosophy of white supremacy. This philosophy was given a theological foundation by the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, which preached that there would be no equality in church or state.

In 1948, the Afrikaner-dominated National Party came to power and began full implementation of its long-cherished dream of white supremacy, at the expense of blacks and coloureds. In addition, the NP sought to promote Afrikaner culture at the expense of English culture and either co-opted or marginalized English-speaking whites.

The NP introduced numerous apartheid laws during the 1950s which mandated classification of all persons into arbitrary racial categories (which in many cases resulted in nonsensical results since interracial couplings had been occurring in the country for over 300 years and siblings within the same family could end up in different "races"); limited the vote to white persons (previously, coloureds were able to vote in the Cape Province which made up most of the country's territory); mandated segregation of all public amenities (and ensured that non-whites always got the inferior ones); and divided both cities and the countryside into "group areas."

All adult citizens were required to carry a "passbook," a kind of internal passport. Non-whites had to obtain special permission from whites to be present in white-only areas. Police (who were always white) could demand to see non-whites' passbooks at any time, arbitrarily strike out the holder's permission to be in a white-only area, and then promptly arrest, fine, and imprison the holder for being present in a white-only area without permission. Some existing districts (such as Sophiatown in Johannesburg and District Six in Cape Town) were either too prosperous or too racially integrated from the government's perspective; they were summarily re-designated as white-only and all non-white residents were summarily evicted.

As the Cold War took shape in the early 1950s, the NP attempted to justify apartheid as necessary in the face of an alleged communist conspiracy to take over South Africa. The NP's focus on anti-communist propaganda was particularly ironic, as South Africa under the NP ended up with a much higher level of state control of the economy than the vast majority of anti-communist countries. Many state-owned enterprises were later spun off into private enterprises after the end of apartheid.

In order to fight communism, state censorship was omnipresent, and the freedoms of speech, press, and public assembly were all vigorously suppressed. The technology of television was also banned and suppressed. It was reluctantly allowed into the country only after South Africa suffered the embarrassment of being one of the few countries where the November 1969 moon landing could not be watched live, even by its wealthiest citizens.

However, apartheid was never one unified program. It existed in a state of constant tension between those Afrikaners who envisioned most of the country completely purged of non-whites and those Afrikaners (particularly businessmen) who recognized that it would take decades, if not centuries, to either create enough white children or import enough white immigrants to provide a sufficiently large labour force which would make up for the eventual long-term expulsion of all non-whites from South Africa's cities.

As a result, on the one hand, all non-whites were designated as citizens of one of several quasi-sovereign national "homelands" (known as "bantustans") which were intended to be like Native American reservations in the United States, but on a much larger scale. (Like Native American reservations, the homelands were usually allocated to the worst-quality land, while whites were allocated the best-quality land.) On the other hand, the government forcibly relocated urban non-whites into areas on the edges of South Africa's cities (Cape Flats near Cape Town and Soweto near Johannesburg) where whites could use them as cheap labour. Those non-whites, then, had to put up with lengthy, miserable commutes on overcrowded trains and taxi vans into white-controlled areas (where their permission to remain could be revoked at any time) and work for wages that were a pittance compared to those available to similarly qualified white employees.

The African National Congress (ANC) initially resisted all these developments with non-violent protests. The ANC managed to score a handful of legal victories during the 1950s, as the South African judiciary still had many fair-minded judges appointed by the previous United Party. Many of those judges still respected the rule of law and were willing to give a fair hearing to a well-reasoned legal argument even if they personally despised the defendant on account of his race. In 1960, a breakaway group of former ANC members formed the Pan Africanist Congress under the leadership of Robert Sobukwe, who attempted to organize protests against the hated pass laws. An outnumbered police unit panicked and fired into a crowd of unarmed protesters at Sharpeville. As a result, the NP declared a state of emergency and used it as an excuse to tear up the remaining shreds of the rule of law in South Africa. ANC leadership correctly recognized that the ANC would soon be banned (along with all other anti-apartheid political organizations) and would no longer be able to openly operate within South Africa as a political organization. Therefore, the ANC founded an armed wing called Umkhonto we Sizwe ("Spear of the Nation", known as MK for short) to implement a program of domestic sabotage and terrorism. In 1963, a police raid at a farm in Rivonia enabled the government to seize enough evidence to arrest and convict a large number of ANC and MK leaders (including Nelson Mandela) in 1964, at what was later known as the "Rivonia Trial."

The apartheid regime's power peaked during the late 1960s and 1970s, after the anti-apartheid resistance had been brutally crushed. During that era, South Africa's white citizens enjoyed the fruits of strong economic growth and rapid infrastructure development in the form of the highest-quality lifestyle in Africa (that is, nearly equivalent to First World living standards), and were content to keep quiet and not ask too many questions.

The ANC and MK quietly rebuilt themselves in exile, trained numerous operatives, and began to launch new domestic uprisings and terrorist attacks. At the same time, the black majority's frustration with their miserable situation continued to build. It finally boiled over and exploded in the form of the famous Soweto uprising of 1976, followed by the Black Consciousness Movement. South Africa's prisons were soon flooded with a new generation of BCM radicals. Ironically, BCM caused the government to shift to a more lenient approach towards the older generation of ANC-MK activists, because it had its hands full with suppressing BCM activists.

By the early 1980s, the United States had finally overcome its own historical experiments with white supremacy and racial segregation, and was no longer willing to tolerate the apartheid regime. Thus, the international community belatedly began to turn against South Africa, by implementing strict weapons and trade embargoes. South Africa was banned from the Olympic

Games and most other international sporting competitions. Many international celebrities, such as Bruce Springsteen, noisily boycotted South Africa, composed protest songs attacking South Africa, and harshly criticized any performer or athlete who was willing to perform or play in South Africa.

Simultaneously, by the late 1980s, many white moderates began to recognize that change was inevitable. International sanctions and internal strife were beginning to take a severe toll on South Africa. White moderates recognized that white supremacy could not be indefinitely maintained through the naked use of force, and allowing black rage to keep building would only result in an even more explosive endgame similar to what had happened in many other African countries (e.g., Algeria). On the ANC side, black moderates had already long recognized that taking revenge by expelling all whites from South Africa was neither just nor wise. (In his famous speech at his 1964 trial, Nelson Mandela noted that he had fought both "white domination" and "black domination.") They recognized that for better or worse, South Africa was the only home which most white South Africans had ever known, and any peaceful resolution would have to accommodate that fact. From a purely pragmatic perspective, the white monopolization of the best educational resources had resulted in a situation where the vast majority of qualified executives and professionals capable of operating a modern industrialized economy were white. Summarily expelling those professionals and executives risked creating a huge economic disaster (as had occurred in many other African countries during the decolonization process), and would do nothing to improve the long-term prospects of the black majority.

Accordingly, white moderates within the security service and the National Party itself began to quietly reach out to ANC leaders to find common ground and negotiate how to dismantle apartheid. The actual process began with the freeing of political prisoners in 1990. The freeing of Nelson Mandela from Victor Verster Prison near Cape Town on 11 February 1990 was covered live on television around the world.

Political violence worsened badly during the early 1990s as extremists of all kinds and races attempted to derail the peace talks at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) in favour of their own deranged visions of the future of South Africa. Thousands of people were murdered in riots or terrorist attacks. Regardless, in 1992, 73% of the voting white population voted in a referendum in support of the abolishment of apartheid.

During this terrible and dangerous period, the CODESA negotiations became gridlocked and stalled numerous times; then the parties backed off and tried a new process on 1 April 1993 called the Multi-Party Negotiating Process (MPNP). A few days later, the assassination of popular political activist Chris Hani on 10 April 1993 threatened to push South Africa to the brink of civil war. That night, Mandela gave a televised speech which was later seen in retrospect as "presidential" in terms of his ability to calm the country's severe racial tensions. In turn, Hani's death became a catalyst for pushing all sides back to the bargaining table.

The MPNP ultimately led to the enactment of a new interim constitution at the end of 1993 and then the nation's first truly democratic election in April 1994, in which all SA adult citizens were allowed to vote regardless of their ethnic and cultural background. Former political prisoner Nelson Mandela was selected as the country's first democratically elected president. The ANC won a 63% majority and proceeded to form a Government of National Unity with the NP.

As part of the peace talks, it was recognized that once apartheid was abolished, it made no sense to allow its opponents to continue to maintain their own paramilitary resistance forces. Accordingly, a process was set up in 1994 by which the various guerilla units (including MK units), as well as bantustan defence units, were all integrated into the South African Defence Force, which subsequently became the South African National Defence Force.

In 1996, the interim constitution was replaced with South Africa's current constitution. The ANC solidified its control over the electorate in subsequent years. The National Party subsequently withered away; its remnants joined with other opposition parties to form the current opposition, the Democratic Alliance.

Proviences

South Africa is divided into 9 provinces, they are:

Pretoria the administrative capital of the country. Johannesburg is the seat the provincial government, also the economic heart of Africa and the most common entry point into Southern Africa.

Western Cape

Cape Town, the mother city, the legislative capital and seat of Parliament, with famous landmarks as Table Mountain and the Cape of Good Hope. The winelands near Stellenbosch, the Whale Coast along the Overberg, Agulhas where the Atlantic and Indian Ocean meet and the Cape Floral Region. The Garden Route, one of the top destinations, running along the Southern Coast from Mossel Bay to Port Elizabeth, with cities like Knysna and ostrich capital Oudtshoorn.

Eastern Cape

The remainder of the Garden Route, known as the Tsitsikamma. The former homelands, the Wild Coast, spectacular coastlines without the tourist crowd. Superb beaches in Port Elizabeth, East London and Jeffreys Bay, the surfing mecca of South Africa. Great parks like Addo Elephant National Park and Tsitsikamma National Park.

Northern Cape

Capital Kimberley, famous for its diamonds and the "Big Hole". Biggest province with fewest people, Upington is the second big city, a good base when exploring the Kalahari desert, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and the Augrabies Falls on the Orange River. Also Ai-Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park and the semi-desert Karoo.

Free State

Capital Bloemfontein which also hosts the Supreme Court of Appeal, the highest court in non-constitutional matters (the Constitutional Court is in Johannesburg since 1994). The world heritage site Vredefort Dome, remnants of the largest and oldest meteorite impact crater.

KwaZulu-Natal

Durban, the largest city in the province and second largest in South Africa and popular coastal holiday destination for South Africans. The Drakensberg mountain range, if you like hiking and also the Tugela Falls, the world's second highest waterfall.

North West

Rustenburg, famous for Sun City and Pilanesberg Game Reserve

Mpumalanga

Capital Nelspruit, gateway to Mozambique and southern section of the Kruger National Park. The Drakensberg Escarpment with the Blyde River Canyon is the third largest Canyon in the world.

Limpopo

Capital Polokwane (formally known as Pietersburg) a good jump off point for visits to the northern parts of the Kruger National Park and Zimbabwe.

Cities

Pretoria- The administrative capital of South Africa

Bloemfontein- Location of the Supreme Court of Appeal, the highest court in non-constitutional matters. The Constitutional Court in Johannesburg became the highest court in constitutional matters in 1994.

Cape Town- The legislative capital and seat of Parliament. A world-class city named for its proximity to the Cape of Good Hope. Also within a stone's throw of South Africa's winelands.

One of the most beautiful cities in the world, nestled between the sea and Table Mountain, it is a popular summer destination by both domestic tourists and those from abroad.

Durban- Largest city in KwaZulu-Natal, third largest in South Africa and popular coastal holiday destination for South Africans.

Newcastle- 3rd largest city in KwaZulu-Natal, 10th largest in South Africa and Capital of Northern KZN. Famous for Steel Production, Coal Mining, Heavy Industry and is South Africa's Textile Industry Capital.

Johannesburg- The economic heart of Africa and the most common entry point into Southern Africa.

Kimberley- Capital of the Northern Cape Province. Famous for its diamonds and "Big Hole".

Polokwane- Capital of Limpopo (*formerly known as Pietersburg*) and a good jump off point for visits to the northern parts of the Kruger National Park and Zimbabwe.

Port Elizabeth- Coastal city in the Eastern Cape with Addo Elephant National Park located close by.

Upington- Located in the arid Northern Cape province, this city is a good base when exploring the Kalahari desert and the many national parks located in the Northern Cape.