

Overview of South Africa

South Africa has been billed as 'a world in one country', and offers visitors myriad delights, from its spectacular landscapes and wildlife, to the cosmopolitan vibe of its cities and the fascinating history of its people.

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, South Africa was regarded by much of the world as a pariah state where the ruling white minority passed a range of draconian laws to subdue 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 revealed to the world in her true colours: a rainbow nation with a kaleidoscope of cultures and a host of attractions to enthrall and entrance visitors.

More than a two decades later, tourists are flocking to sunny South Africa in droves, particularly to the Western Cape with its magnificent scenery, beautiful beaches, majestic mountains and verdant winelands. Johannesburg remains the commercial capital of the nation, and is also the gateway to the Kruger National Park and other major game reserves.

Comprising the southern tip of Africa and surrounded on three sides by the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, South Africa offers a taste of the African experience while at the same time offering all the pleasures of a first-world holiday experience, with luxury hotels, wonderful food and pristine beaches. Travellers can have breakfast in a New York-style deli, lunch in an African shebeen, cocktails on a sunset cruise, and dinner in a world-class restaurant.

It is not just the dramatic landscapes and natural beauty that make South Africa magical. Historically, too, there is plenty to discover, from the old African kingdoms, to the pioneering spirit of the Dutch Voortrekkers and the settlement of the Eastern Cape frontier by the British colonialists, and of course the more recent history of the apartheid state and the liberation struggle.

With its winter sun, an easy overnight flight and little time difference, South Africa is particularly popular with European visitors, but it welcomes all travellers with open arms and truly has a whole world to offer them.

Key Facts

Language:

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

Passport/Visa:

Passports should be valid for at least 30 days beyond the period of intended stay. An onward or return ticket is required, as is evidence of sufficient funds. Note that visitors to South Africa must have at least one blank (unstamped) visa page in their passport, each time entry is sought; this page is in addition to the endorsement/amendment pages at the back of the passport. However, nationals of countries that require a visa before travelling to South Africa, must have two blank pages in their passport - one for issuing a visa prior to departure and one for stamping at the port of entry when entering South Africa. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources. The South African Immigration Authorities do not accept loose leaf temporary travel documents. Note that South Africa's immigration laws have changed dramatically over the last two years, and there may be some confusion as to the correct procedure.

Currency:

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 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. All commercial banks will exchange foreign currency.

Electricity:

Electrical current is 230 volts, 50Hz. Round, three-pin plugs and round, two-pin plugs are standard.

Travel to South Africa

Overview

South Africa is a sightseer's paradise, with plenty to see and do no matter the traveller's interests, time frame, age, or inclination.

There is natural splendour in abundance, including the beautiful beaches and iconic Table Mountain of Cape Town, the magnificent Drakensberg Mountains, the Blyde River Canyon, the stunning scenery of the coastal Garden Route, the pristine coastline of the Transkei, and the sweeping vistas of the Highveld. Of course, the animals of South Africa, especially the Big Five, are a big draw for tourists and game safaris are a very popular diversion. The Kruger National Park is the country's most famous wildlife reserve and a must for many visitors.

South Africa has a complicated and dramatic history and the legacy of the pioneer wars, slavery, colonialism, the Boer War and Apartheid is still strongly felt. There is no shortage of interesting historical sightseeing, with sites like Robben Island - where Mandela was imprisoned - and the battlefields of the Boer War attracting many visitors. The country has many quaint historical towns, like Franschhoek in the Cape Winelands, and Grahamstown in the 'frontier country' of the Eastern Cape. South Africa also has its share of museums and galleries, and the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg is particularly noteworthy.

The country is easy to get around with competitive low-cost carriers, long distance buses, good value car hire and the best roads in Africa. Road tripping is a wonderful way to experience the hugely diverse landscapes and cultures of this vast country.

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Climate in South Africa

South Africa is a large country and has diverse climactic regions, so travellers should check the climate for the region they'll be visiting. In general the weather is sunny and hot in the summer months (November to February), and fairly mild during winter (June to August). The weather in autumn (March to May) and spring (September to October) is less predictable and more changeable.

The Cape has a Mediterranean climate with mild, wet winters, and hot, dry, sunny summers. The average temperatures in Cape Town in the summer range between 61°F (16°C) and 79°F (26°C), and in winter average between 47°F (8°C) and 64°F (18°C). Some snow does fall on the mountain ranges during the winter.

Gauteng and the northern regions have a subtropical highland climate with plenty of sunshine during hot summers, when thunderstorms regularly occur in the late afternoon and evening. Winters are dry and sunny with cold nights. Temperatures occasionally drop below freezing at night in the north. The average temperatures in Johannesburg (Gauteng) in the summer range between 58°F (15°C) and 78°F (25°C), and in winter range between 39°F (4°C) and 80°F (16°C).

The best time to visit South Africa differs hugely depending on region and desired activities but summer is the peak tourist season for coastal regions. Spring and autumn tend to be mild and pleasant seasons for travel.

Health Notes when travelling to South Africa

Health regulations in South Africa require that travellers from areas infected by yellow fever must carry a vaccination certificate; otherwise no vaccinations are required. There is a malaria risk in the low-lying areas of the Northern Province and Mpumalanga (including the Kruger National Park), as well as northeastern KwaZulu-Natal, and precautions are advised when travelling to these areas, especially between October and May. Vaccinations are recommended for hepatitis A, hepatitis B and typhoid. There is a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Tap water is generally 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.

Medical facilities in South Africa are good in urban areas, but medical insurance is strongly advised as private hospitals expect cash up front and public hospitals are best avoided. Medication is readily available in urban areas, but those travelling outside of major cities for an extended period should bring a basic supply kit for emergency self-treatment.

Safety Notes when travelling to South Africa

Safety is an issue and visitors to South Africa should be aware of the country's high crime rate. Violent crime tends to be concentrated in pockets throughout the country and travellers should do some research to find out which areas to avoid. For instance, Berea and Hillbrow in Johannesburg are high-risk areas, and township areas in general are dangerous for foreigners.

There is a risk of petty, opportunistic crime in all urban areas and armed robberies are fairly common in Johannesburg. Travellers should always be aware of these risks and exercise the necessary precautions. Carjackings and smash-and-grab robberies are common in major cities, and doors should be locked when driving and bags and valuables should be kept out of sight. Travellers should not walk alone at night in any area, and should be vigilant when using ATMs. They should not display signs of wealth (e.g. mobile phones, money, expensive jewellery, cameras) on the streets. Credit card fraud is on the increase and travellers should be vigilant and never allow their card out of their sight.

It is worthwhile noting that the South African authorities do give high priority to the protection of tourists. Although crime rates are high in South Africa, popular tourist sites and the main hotel areas tend to be safe and most visits are trouble-free.

Customs in South Africa

South African culture and etiquette in urban areas is very Western. While standards of dress vary, beachwear should generally not be worn off the beach, and nude sunbathing is only permissible in a few designated areas. Homosexuality is legal and accepted in urban areas without much fuss, but it is frowned on by some conservative South Africans and can be a problem in township 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 now common and 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.

Duty Free in South Africa

Travellers to South Africa do not have to pay duty on 200 cigarettes, 20 cigars and 250g of tobacco; 2 litres wine and 1 litre spirits; perfume up to 50ml and 250ml eau de toilette; and other goods to the value of R5,000. All other goods brought in from abroad by South African residents must be declared on arrival. These will be subject to import duties. For goods to be re-imported, travellers must complete a DA65 or NEP-form that is issued on departure. Prohibited items include meat and dairy products, all medication except for personal consumption, flick knives, ammunition, explosives and pornography containing minors and bestiality.

Doing Business in South Africa

Business practices in South Africa are influenced by South Africa's range of ethnicities, languages and even geographical areas, but in general follow common patterns. When doing business in South Africa it is important to be culturally sensitive and as understanding of colleagues' historical context as possible. Most South Africans prefer to do business with contacts they've met before, but they are also warm and open to newcomers. Working to build and maintain business relationships is vitally important in the South African business environment. South Africans are renowned for their friendliness which generally supersedes business formality.

Most large corporations, as well as the banking and financial sector, still adopt relatively formal business practices, whereas other companies and work environments enjoy more relaxed and personable atmospheres. Clear management hierarchies and respect for senior executives and colleagues are of paramount importance. However, business exchanges and decision-making processes often take on an egalitarian aspect. As with most countries, punctuality is highly regarded. However, government officials are notorious for their tardiness when it comes to keeping time. Dress codes tend to be conservative, but not overly formal. Suits are the exception more than the rule, but dressing stylishly will always count in your favour. It is best to dress formally for initial meetings.

South Africans value hard work and respect those who succeed. However, they are mindful of other aspects of life such as healthy living, family and nurturing relationships - all of which add up to a well-balanced life. 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. The official language of business in South Africa is English. Business hours tend to start at 8:30am or 9am and the day comes to a close at 5pm, or later in the major urban centres. Working over weekends tends to be quite rare in South Africa.

Communication in South Africa

The international access code for South Africa is +27. Mobile phone networks are available across the country, and there are roaming agreements with most international mobile operators. Mobile service providers offer very cheap 'pay-as-you-go' SIM cards, which are a good option for visitors staying for some time. Wifi is easily available, especially in the larger cities.

Tipping in South Africa

Tips of at least 10 percent are 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' operate in the city centres and tourist spots and will offer to look after parked car; they are usually immigrants from neighbouring countries looking for work and will expect anything from R8 upwards on the driver's return, depending on how long the driver will have been away.

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Entry Requirements

Entry requirements for Americans:

United States nationals need a passport valid for at least 30 days beyond intended travel. A visa is required.

Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadian nationals need a passport valid for 30 days beyond the date of intended travel, but no visa is needed for stays of up to 90 days.

Entry requirements for UK nationals:

British nationals need a passport valid for 30 days beyond the date of intended travel, but no visa is needed for stays of up to 90 days if passport is endorsed British Citizen or British Overseas Territories Citizen. Those whose passports state British National (Overseas) may stay up to 30 days without a visa.

Entry requirements for Australians:

Australian nationals need a passport valid for 30 days beyond the date of intended travel, but no visa is needed for stays of up to 90 days.

Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish nationals require a passport valid for 30 days beyond intended travel, but no visa is needed for stays of up to 90 days.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

New Zealand nationals require a passport valid for 30 days beyond intended travel. A visa is not required for stays of up to 90 days.

Tourist Offices

South African Tourism, Johannesburg: +27 11 895 3000 or <http://www.southafrica.net>

South Africa Embassies

In the United States:

South African Embassy, Washington, United States: +1 202 232 4400.

In Canada:

South African High Commission, Ottawa, Canada: +1 613 744 0330.

In the United Kingdom:

South African High Commission, London, United Kingdom: +44 20 7451 7299.

In Australia:

South African High Commission, Canberra, Australia (also responsible for New Zealand): +61 2 6272 7300.

In Ireland:

South African Embassy, Dublin, Ireland: +353 1 661 5553.

Foreign Embassies in South Africa

American Embassy

United States Embassy, Pretoria: +27 12 431 4000.

Canadian Embassy

Canadian High Commission, Pretoria: +27 12 422 3000.

British Embassy

British High Commission, Pretoria: +27 12 421 7500.

Australian Embassy

Australian High Commission, Pretoria: +27 12 423 6000.

Irish Embassy

Irish Embassy, Pretoria: +27 12 452 1000.

New Zealand Embassy

New Zealand High Commission, Pretoria: +27 12 435 9000.

Currency

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Exchange rate for 1 ZAR - South African Rand

0.00 BMD Bermudan Dollar	0.05 EUR Euro	0.05 USD U.S. Dollar	0.04 GBP U.K. Pound Sterling	8.27 JPY Japanese Yen	0.07 CAD Canadian Dollar
0.05 CHF Swiss Franc	0.08 AUD Australian Dollar	2.13 UAH Ukrainian Hryvnia	23.98 KZT Kazakhstani Tenge	5,028.39 LBP Lebanese Pound	0.26 LYD Libyan Dinar
0.37 BOB Bolivian Boliviano	0.00 NPR Nepalese Rupee	0.00 OMR Omani Rial	0.00 QAR Qatari Rial	0.07 SGD Singapore Dollar	0.58 SEK Swedish Krona
0.00 TTD Trinidad Tobago Dollar	0.00 VEF Venezuelan Bolivar	3.14 DOP Dominican Peso	0.00 HRK Croatian Kuna	0.92 MXN Mexican Peso	32.98 XOF West African CFA Franc
0.00 PGK Papua New Guinean kina	0.00 BSD Bahamian Dollar	0.00 FJD Fiji Dollar	0.00 HNL Honduran Lempira	7.23 DZD Algerian Dinar	0.00 MMK Myanma Kyat
0.00 BWP Botswana Pula	0.20 PEN Peruvian Nuevo Sol	50.70 CLP Chilean Peso	20.90 AMD Armenia Dram	1.26 CZK Czech Koruna	0.95 MDL Moldova Lei
7.56 ISK Icelandic Krona	679.77 UZS Uzbekistan Sum	0.20 ILS Israeli New Sheqel	0.04 JOD Jordanian Dinar	0.00 KWD Kuwaiti Dinar	2.06 UYU Uruguayan Peso
0.00 MUR Mauritian Rupee	0.00 NIO Nicaraguan Córdoba	0.59 NOK Norwegian Krone	0.22 PLN Polish Zloty	0.20 SAR Saudi Riyal	0.00 LKR Sri Lanka Rupee
1.99 THB Thai Baht	0.20 AED U.A.E Dirham	0.28 BRL Brazilian Real	0.25 RON Romanian New Leu	0.42 HKD Hong Kong Dollar	32.98 XAF Central African CFA Franc
1,372.55 VND Vietnamese Dong	47.45 ARS Argentine Peso	0.00 XCD East Caribbean Dollar	0.00 GTQ Guatemalan Quetzal	0.54 MAD Moroccan Dirham	0.00 BHD Bahrain Dinar
0.05 PAB Panamanian Balboa	0.09 AZN Azerbaijan Manat	211.78 COP Colombian Peso	4.78 KGS Kyrgyzstan Som	19.56 HUF Hungarian Forint	0.59 TJS Tajikistan Ruble
868.38 IDR Indonesian Rupiah	2.59 EGP Egyptian Pound	73.41 KRW South Korean Won	402.84 PYG Paraguayan Guaraní	0.26 MYR Malaysian Ringgit	27.46 CRC Costa Rican Colón
0.09 NZD New Zealand Dollar	15.01 PKR Pakistani Rupee	4.94 RUB Russian Rouble	0.17 TND Tunisian Dinar	0.00 BBD Barbadian Dollar	0.10 BGN Bulgarian Lev
1.75 TRY Turkish Lira	3.09 PHP Philippine Peso	1.75 TWD New Taiwan Dollar	62.93 NGN Nigerian Naira	0.00 XPF CFP Franc	0.00 GHS Ghanaian Cedi
0.00 JMD Jamaican Dollar	0.00 ANG Neth. Antillean Guilder	0.00 BND Brunei Dollar	5.88 RSD Serbian Dinar	0.39 CNY Chinese Yuan	0.38 DKK Danish Krone
0.19 TMT New Turkmenistan Manat	4.51 INR Indian Rupee				

Overview of the Attractions in South Africa

South Africa is a sightseer's paradise, with plenty to see and do no matter the traveller's interests, time frame, age, or inclination.

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Public Holidays in South Africa

	2020	2021
New Year's Day	Mon. January 1	Mon. January 1
Human Rights Day	Thu. March 21	Thu. March 21
Good Friday	Wed. April 10	Tue. April 2
Easter Monday	Sat. April 13	Fri. April 5
Freedom Day	Sat. April 27	Sat. April 27
Worker's Day	Wed. May 1	Wed. May 1
Youth Day	Sun. June 16	Sun. June 16
Women's Day	Fri. August 9	Fri. August 9
Heritage Day	Tue. September 24	Tue. September 24
Day of Reconciliation	Mon. December 16	Mon. December 16
Christmas Day	Wed. December 25	Wed. December 25
Day of Goodwill	Thu. December 26	Thu. December 26