

South Africa Info

Interesting Facts, History, Geography and Travel info

Supplied by www.BTSA.co.za South Africa at a glance
 Area: 1.2 million sq km
 Population: 47.4 million
 Time: GMT + 2 hrs
 Official Name: Republic of South Africa
 Capitals: Cape Town (legislative), Pretoria (administrative), Bloemfontein (Judicial)
 Head of State: President Jacob Zuma
 Religion: Predominantly Christian. Freedom of religion guaranteed by the Constitution.
 Languages: 11 official languages. English preferred language of business.
 Exports: Gold, minerals, diamonds, metals, foods, autos, automotive components.
 Imports: Machinery, transport equipment, manufactured goods, Chemicals, oil.
 History
 1488 - Bartholomew Diaz lands in Mossel Bay - First European
 1652 - Dutch East India Company establishes a settlement in the Cape under Jan van Riebeeck.
 1688 - Farmers start moving East to settle farms - First clashes with the Khoikhoi.
 1779 - First frontier war between Xhosa and White Settlers.
 1795 - Britain annexes Cape.
 1803 - Cape returns to Batavian Republic
 1806 - Britain re-occupies the Cape
 1867 - First Diamonds discovered
 1990 - ANC are unbanned, Nelson Mandela released.
 1994 - ANC wins country's first non racial election.
 1994 - Nelson Mandela becomes country's first black president.
 1994 - South Africa rejoins commonwealth
 1999 - Thaba Mbeki succeeds Nelson Mandela
 2009 - Jacob Zuma succeeds Thaba Mbeki
 South Africa info supplied by <http://www.btsa.co.za/Getting to South Africa>

Oliver Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg is the major airport in South Africa and is the hub for 45 airlines from all five continents. Flights from Europe are generally overnight and just a sleep away - an aperitif, dinner, sound sleep, and a good breakfast - and voila, you're in South Africa! The direct flights between the USA and Johannesburg or Cape Town are about 15 hours, and flights between London and Johannesburg take about 12 hours.

When to visit South Africa

South Africa is an all year destination, so your visit will depend on your interests. The seasons are opposite to those in the northern hemisphere.

The best time for game viewing is late winter to early spring (July to October). The Namaqualand Flowers bloom between August and November. Whales can be seen off the coast from mid June to the end of October. Diving and surfing are year round activities but are generally best from April to September. The best time for river rafting is at the end of winter in the Cape and during summer (late November to February) in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Spring and autumn are the best months for hiking as summer can be very hot. South Africa's superb climate allows you to lounge all year round on one of her beaches.

Time differences

South Africa operates two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time throughout the year, making it an hour ahead of Central European Winter Time, seven hours ahead of Eastern Standard Winter Time and seven hours behind Australian Central Time.

Passports & visas

All visitors to South Africa must be in possession of a valid passport in order to enter the country, and in some cases, a visa. The passport must contain at least ONE unused page when presenting the passport for endorsements. Travellers from certain regions of the world (Scandinavia, Japan, the USA, and most Western European and Commonwealth countries) do not need to formally apply for a visa. Upon arrival in South Africa, countries falling into this category will automatically be given a free entry permit sticker that outlines how long they may remain in the country. This automatic entry permit is usually for a maximum of 90 days, though the immigration officer may tailor the time period according to the airline tickets held. Foreign nationals from some other countries are offered this service, but for a maximum of 30 days. If visitors want to stay for a longer period, they will have to apply formally for a visa, as opposed to relying on the automatic entry permit.

Vaccinations

Visitors who are entering South Africa from a yellow fever zone must have a valid international yellow fever inoculation certificate. Only infants under the age of one year are exempt. Immunisation against cholera and small pox are not required and no other vaccinations are required when visiting South Africa.

Banks and money

The currency unit is the Rand, denoted by the symbol R, with 100 cents (c) making up R1 (one Rand). Coins come in 5c, 10c, 20c, 50c, R1, R2 and R 5 denominations. Notes come in R10, R20, R50, R100 and R200 denominations. Foreign currency can be exchanged at local banks and Bureaux de Changes. Visa and Mastercard are widely accepted, American Express and Diner's Card less so. You can also use Visa Electron and Maestro cards to access money at cash machines (ATM's).

Calling home

South Africa has only one landline telephone provider called Telkom. Making international calls can be quite costly. You can save on calls home by calling during the off-peak period which is between 7p.m and 7a.m the next morning. Telkom also sells World Call cards which offer cheaper international rates.

Some backpacker lodges and internet shops have skype facilities which you can use for a free.

You can also call home or send text messages using your mobile phone.

Mobile phones

Mobile phone operators use the GSM system. Bring along your mobile phone and arrange international roaming before you leave. Alternatively, use 'pay-as-you-go' with one of the three mobile networks.

Internet

Cities have broadband internet access and some WI-FI spots. Many travellers carry their laptops. Dial-up access is

available throughout the country.

Safety & crime

Most parts of the country can be safely visited by tourists provided they take basic common-sense precautions (for example not walking alone in deserted areas at night and being circumspect about how much photographic equipment or flashy jewellery you carry. Most of the crime that takes place in South Africa is between people who know each other and random acts of violence are the minority of cases. Most major cities run organized crime prevention programmes.

If you are in doubt as to the safety of a particular area or attraction, contact the National Tourism information and Safety Line on 083 123 2345 083 123 2345. This number may also be used for practical assistance in replacing lost documents or reporting incidents.

Women travellers

South African men may be sexist, but the country is safe for women travellers, even those travelling alone.

Disabled travellers

Generally speaking, our facilities for disabled visitors can be improved. Few backpacker hostels have wheelchair ramps and bathroom facilities for the disabled. Almost every national park has at least one accessible chalet and many accommodation establishments other than backpacker hostels have one or two wheelchair-friendly rooms. Most of our sports stadiums have accessible suites, stands or areas for wheelchairs near accessible parking as well as special toilet facilities. Most public buildings also cater for wheelchair access.

Clothing

The seasons in the Southern Hemisphere are directly opposite to those of the Northern Hemisphere. For summer months, lightweight (cottons and linens), short-sleeved clothes are best, although a light jersey/jumper might be needed for the cooler evenings. Umbrellas and raincoats are essential for the summers and the Western Cape winters. Warmer clothes are needed for the winter months.

Sun protection

South Africans have a good laugh at the expense of lobster red tourists. The sun is dangerously hot and we don't want you to get sunburn, or even worse, skin cancer. Please pack sunblock, sunglasses and a hat and remember to use them religiously. Try to stay out of the sun between 10a.m and three p.m. If you have to be out, even in windy and cloudy weather, be generous with the sunblock and don't forget the back of your neck and the tops of your ears. Re-apply frequently.

Health

Many foreigners are unaware that South Africa has a well-developed infrastructure, high standards of water treatment and medical facilities equal to the best in the world. Here we address any health and safety questions you may have.

Hospitals & medical care

In a great many medical disciplines, South Africa is a global leader. In fact, South African trained doctors are sought after all over the world, so this should give an indication of the standard of medical care available. There is a large network of public and private hospitals countrywide, offering excellent service. However, clients must have adequate health insurance to cover the fees private hospitals charge.

AIDS

Without going into the stats, we can tell you that AIDS is a big problem in South Africa. AIDS does not discriminate between races, but the sad truth is that most victims are black. Many tourists come to our country curious about the sexuality of Africans. Holiday flings between travellers are also common. If you're going to have sex in Southern Africa with anyone, a local or a fellow traveller, always use condoms. Using condoms is not the African way, that's why AIDS and HIV statistics in Southern Africa are so sad. It's also why you alone are responsible for protecting yourself.

Malaria
Malaria is found only in the Lowveld of Mpumalanga and Limpopo and on the Maputaland coast of KwaZulu-Natal.

Malaria is not much of a risk in the winter months. Although the incidence of malaria is rare, it would be best to take adequate precautions if you choose to visit these areas.

Our government has embarked on an extensive anti-malaria programme (in co-operation with Swaziland and Mozambique) and the incidence of malaria is decreasing. One reassuring thing about malaria is that there is absolutely no way at all that you can contract it unless you are bitten by an infected mosquito. And with modern insect repellents and some common sense one can reduce the chances of being bitten to close to zero.

The cheapest, safest and most effective measures against malaria are physical barriers such as a mosquito net, and the use of a good insect repellent. If you decide to take malaria prophylaxis, it is essential that you take the drugs according to the directions on the package insert. You will need to start a week or two before entering a malaria-endemic area and should continue taking the drugs for four weeks after leaving the malaria risk area. It is advisable to consult a medical professional before embarking on a course of malaria prophylaxis. Note that expectant mothers should avoid malaria medications.

Water and food

As a rule, tap water in South Africa is safe to drink as it is treated and is free of harmful microorganisms. In hotels, restaurants and nightspots, the standards of hygiene and food preparation top-notch. It is safe to eat fresh fruit and salads and to put as much ice as you like in your drinks - a good thing, too, after a day on the beach or in the bush.

Road safety

Our transport infrastructure is excellent and our roads are in good condition. However, the distances between towns are significant, so if you're planning to self-drive, it is a good idea to plan your itinerary to ensure they don't drive long distances as fatigue is a major cause of road accidents. Avoid long car journeys that necessitate driving at night as it always carries more risk. Also, in some of the more remote rural areas, the roads are not fenced so there may be stray

animals on the road - which could be very dangerous at night. (Cows don't have headlights).

We have very strict drinking and driving laws - with a maximum allowable alcohol blood content of 0.05%. Translated that means about one glass of wine for the average woman and perhaps 1.5 or two for the average or large man. Our speed limits are 120kmph on the open road, 100kmph on smaller roads and between 60 and 80kmph in towns. Be aware that even major national roads cut through residential areas so there may be a speed limit of 80 or 60kmph on a road that looks like an autobahn. This is to protect pedestrians, especially children, so we really do encourage people to comply.

Driving

All visitors intending to drive are required to obtain an international drivers permit, visitors found driving without a permit will be fined and not permitted to continue on their journey. Visitors will also not be able to rent a car without a valid driver's permit. The wearing of seatbelts is compulsory and strictly enforced by law. [Click here for more info](#)

Electricity

South Africa's electricity supply is 220/230 volts AC 50 Hz. The exceptions are Pretoria (230 V) and Port Elizabeth (200/250 V)

Most plugs have three round pins but some plugs with two smaller pins are also found on appliances. Adaptors can be purchased but may be in short supply. US-made appliances may need a transformer.

Eating out

South Africa is steadily gaining a reputation for its excellent restaurants. Tourists are particularly impressed with the quality of beef, lamb and seafood. Adventurous eaters can sample Venison, crocodile and ostrich. Even our home-grown franchise burger joints beat McDonalds anyday. All restaurants cater for vegetarians. Ask your backpacker hostel for their pick of restaurants in the area.

Tipping

Most restaurants do not add a service charge to bills - thus it is customary to leave a 10-15% tip. Parking and petrol station attendants should be given whatever small change you have available. This is always appreciated, even though it may seem a small amount. Shopping

Most major shopping centres and malls operate 7 days a week, but you will find that in the smaller towns and rural areas that shops are closed on a Sunday. General opening hours are 9a.m to 5p.m on weekdays and 9a.m to 2.p.m on a Sunday. Don't be surprised to find supermarkets open for your convenience until 8 at night.

Markets, shops and galleries sell a wide variety of African arts and crafts. You can find exquisite sculptures, beading, jewellery, fabric, grasswork and many other beautiful things. Designs are both traditional and contemporary.

Tax

Value-added-tax (VAT) is charged on most items. Foreign tourists to South Africa can have their 14% VAT refunded provided that the value of the items purchased exceeds R250. VAT is refunded at the point of departure provided receipts are produced.