

Tourist information on South Africa

Introducing South Africa

Every country in the world displays some diversity, but South Africa, stretching from the hippos in the Limpopo River to the penguins waddling on the Cape, takes some beating. It befits its position at the southern end of the world's most epic continent, with more types of terrain than photographers can shake their zoom lens at. There's the deserted Kalahari, Namakwa's springtime symphony of wildflowers, iconic Table Mountain and Cape Point, Kruger National Park's wildlife-stalked savannah (scene of the famous lion-buffalo-crocodile battle watched more than 40 million times on YouTube) and, running through the east of the country and into Lesotho, the Drakensberg. KwaZulu-Natal's iSimangaliso Wetland Park alone has five distinct ecosystems, attracting both zebras and dolphins.

Climate & when to go

South Africa can be visited comfortably any time. However, depending on what you plan to do, it's worth paying attention to the seasons, which are the reverse of those in the northern hemisphere. Winter (June to September) is cooler, drier and ideal for hiking and outdoor pursuits. Because vegetation is less dense and thirsty animals congregate around rivers and other permanent water sources, winter is also the best time for wildlife-watching. In the eastern highveld, nights are often crisp and clear, with occasional frosts, so come prepared with a jacket.

More of a consideration than weather are school holidays. From mid-December to January, waves of vacation-hungry South Africans stream out of the cities, with visitors from Europe and North America adding to the crush. The absolute peak is from Christmas to mid-January, followed by Easter. At this time, accommodation in tourist areas and national parks is heavily booked, and prices can more than double. If you visit Cape Town, the Garden Route or other popular areas during this time, it's essential to book accommodation in advance. On the plus side, the high summer months offer some great festivals, including Cape Town's Kaapse Klopse.

Spring (mid-September to November) and autumn (April and May) are ideal almost everywhere. Spring is also the best time to see vast expanses of the Northern Cape carpeted with wildflowers.

Money & costs

Money

South Africa's currency is the rand (R), which is divided into 100 cents. There is no black market. The coins are one, two, five, 10, 20 and 50 cents, and R1, R2 and R5. The notes are R10, R20, R50, R100 and R200. There have been forgeries of the R200 note, and some businesses are reluctant to accept them.

Credit cards are widely accepted in South Africa, especially MasterCard and Visa. Nedbank is an official Visa agent, and Standard Bank is a MasterCard agent – both have branches across the country.

Dangers & annoyances

Crime is the national obsession and, apart from car accidents, it's the major risk that you'll face in South Africa. However, try to keep things in perspective, and remember that despite the statistics and newspaper headlines, the majority of travellers visit the country without incident.

The risks are highest in Jo'burg, followed by some township areas and other urban centres. Daylight muggings are common in certain sections of Jo'burg, and the city's metro train system has had a problem with violent crime. No matter where you are, you can minimise the risks by following basic safety precautions, remaining alert and exercising common sense.

Recommended vaccinations

The World Health Organization (WHO; www.who.int/en) recommends all travellers be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, as well as hepatitis B, regardless of their destination. The consequences of these diseases can be severe, and outbreaks do occur.

According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (www.cdc.gov), the following vaccinations are recommended for South Africa: hepatitis A, hepatitis B, rabies and typhoid, and boosters for tetanus, diphtheria and measles. Yellow fever is not a risk in the region, but the certificate is an entry requirement if you're travelling both from an infected region to some of South Africa's neighbouring countries such as Mozambique.

Visas

Visitors on holiday from most Commonwealth countries (including Australia and the UK), most Western European countries, Japan and the USA don't require visas. Instead, you'll be issued with a free entry permit on arrival. These are valid for up to 90 days, and your passport must be valid for at least 30 days after the end of your intended visit. Unless you request otherwise, the immigration officer may use the date of your flight out as the date of your permit expiry.

Wildlife

South Africa encompasses one of the most diverse landscapes on the entire continent, with habitats ranging from verdant forests, to stony deserts and soaring mountains, to lush grasslands and classic African savannahs. It is home to penguins and flamingos, great white sharks and ponderous African elephants, and many more animals that will surprise and amaze visitors. There are over 700 publicly owned preserves (including 19 national parks) and about 200 private reserves, with Kruger National Park and Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park being the largest.

Tourist attraction

Western Cape Attractions



majestic [Table Mountain](#)



Atlantic Seaboard



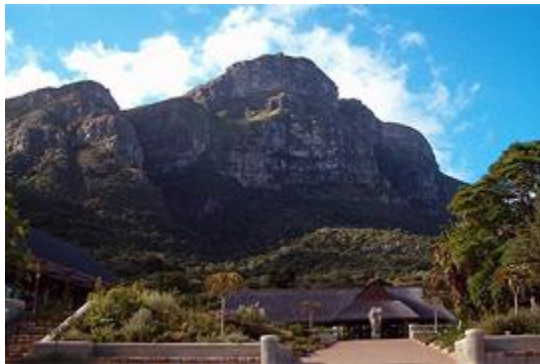
Café Caprice (Camps Bay)



False Bay, Cape Town



Southern Suburbs, Cape Town



Robben Island, Cape Town



V&A Waterfront, Cape Town



Cape Point, Atlantic Seaboard

