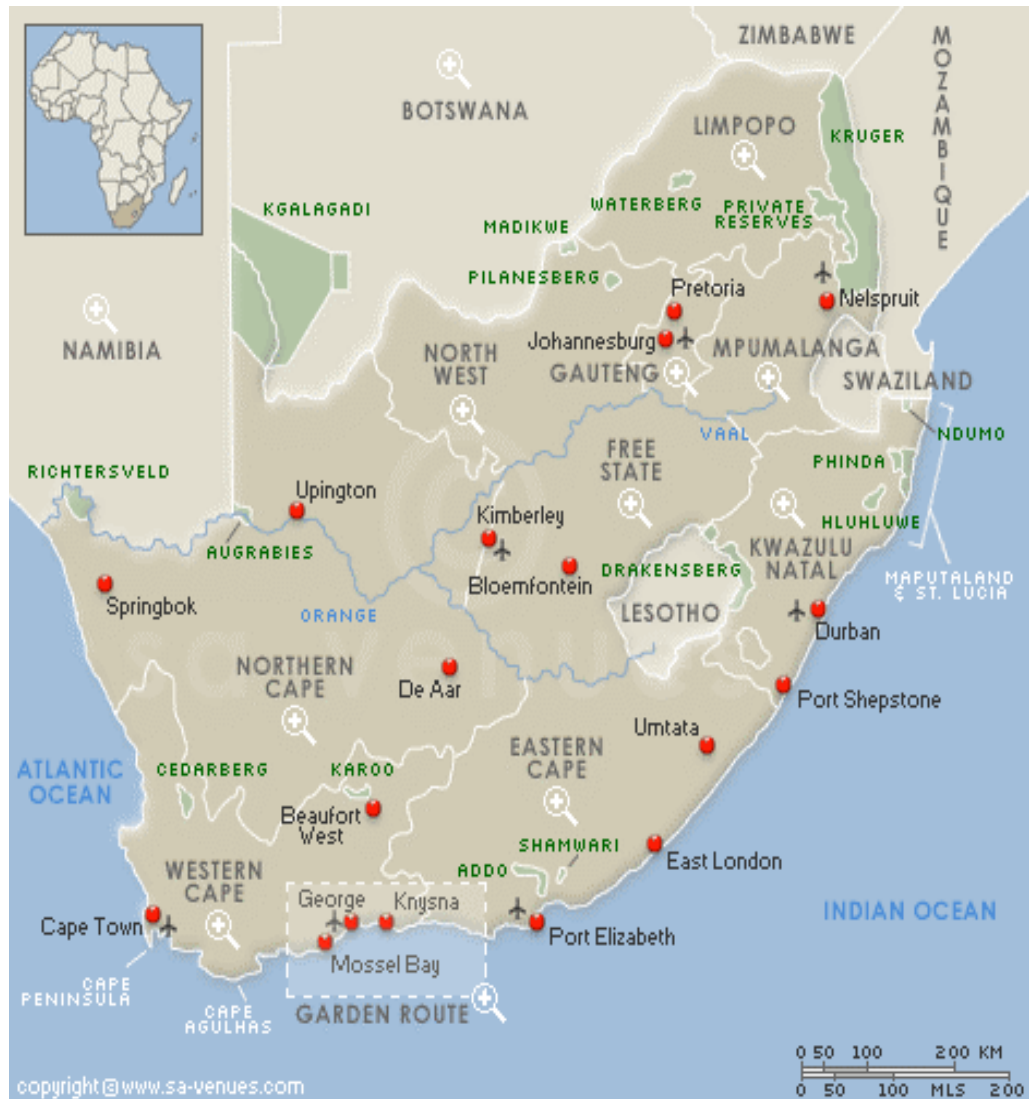


South Africa: Travel Information

Wildlife, wild times and a culture in repair



Introduction

South Africa is an exhilarating, spectacular and complex country. With its post-apartheid identity still in the process of definition, there is undoubtedly an abundance of energy and sense of progress about the place. Travellers too are returning to a remarkable land that has been off the trail for way too long. This stretch of Eastern Cape coast, a graveyard for numerous ships, is largely unspoilt. There are a couple of resort towns and the inevitable casino, but it's easy to get away from it all. The Shipwreck Hiking Trail extends for 64km (38mi), but there are several entry and exit points for hikers. In this beautiful city even transient visitors can't help but devote a few million brain cells to storing images of its grandeur: its striking Table Mountain backdrop, its glorious beaches and enchanting vineyards, its rugged landscapes, its strange and wonderful plants and animals. This is one of the few walking areas in South Africa where you can set your own pace, camp more or less where you choose and light fires (providing they are on sand and well away from vegetation). Those who make the effort are amply rewarded. Cape Town is famed for its hospitality. Its mix of trendy establishments matches up favourably any other cosmopolitan centre. There's a lively cultural scene, particularly when it comes to music, which seems to pervade every corner of the city. The general ambience is open-minded and relaxed.



Weather Overview

South Africa has been favoured by nature with one of the most temperate climates on the African continent, and plenty of sunny, dry days. The main factors influencing conditions are altitude and the surrounding oceans. Basically, the farther east you go, the more handy your rain-gear becomes, but there are also damp pockets in the south-west, particularly around Cape Town. The coast north from the Cape becomes progressively drier and hotter, culminating in the desert region just south of Namibia. Along the south coast the weather is temperate, but the east coast becomes increasingly tropical the further north you go. When it gets too sticky, head for the highlands, which are pleasant even in summer. The north-eastern hump gets very hot and there are spectacular storms there in summer. In winter the days are sunny and warm.

Visa Overview

Entry permits are issued free on arrival (at the airport and land crossings) to visitors on holiday from many Commonwealth and most western European countries, as well as Japan and the US. If you aren't entitled to an entry permit, you'll need to get a visa (also free) before you arrive. It's much less hassle when arriving by air if you arrive with a return air-ticket.

History:

Pre 20C

Although the nomadic San (also known as Bushmen) have possibly lived in Southern Africa since around 100,000 BC, they didn't reach the Cape of Good Hope until about 2000 years ago. Because of the close relationship between the San and the Khoikhoi peoples, who intermarried and coexisted, both are often referred to as Khoisan. By the 15th century most arable land had been settled by encroaching Bantu pastoral tribes.

Southern Africa became a popular stop for European crews after Vasco de Gama opened the Cape of Good Hope spice route in 1498, and, by the mid-17th century, scurvy and shipwreck had induced Dutch traders to opt for a permanent settlement in Table Bay on the site of present-day Cape Town. The mostly Dutch burghers pushed slowly north, decimating the Khoisan with violence and disease as they went. Towards the end of the 18th century, with Dutch power fading, Britain predictably jumped in for another piece of Africa. It was hoped that British settlers

would inhabit a buffer zone between skirmishing pastoral Boers and the Xhosa, but most of the British immigrant families retreated to town, entrenching the rural-urban divide that is evident in white South Africa even today. Although slavery was abolished in 1833, the division of labour on the basis of colour served all whites too well for any real attempt at change.

Upheaval in black Southern Africa wasn't only generated by the white invaders. The difaqane ('forced migration' in Sotho) or mfeqane ('the crushing' in Zulu) was a time of immense upheaval and suffering, a terror campaign masterminded by the Zulu chief, Shaka. This wave of disruption through Southern Africa left some tribes wiped out, others enslaved and the lucky ones running. Into this chaos disgruntled Boers stomped on their Great Trek away from British rule in search of freedom. Most of the pastures the Boers trekked through were deserted or inhabited by traumatised refugees. The Zulus were no pushovers, however. They put up strong and bloody resistance to the Boers before eventually ceding to superior firepower. Boer republics popped up through the interior, and were annexed one by one by Britain in a chaotic kerfuffle of treaties, diplomacy and violence through the middle part of the 19th century. Just when it looked like the Union Jack was going to fly from Cairo to the Cape, diamonds were discovered in Kimberley, and the Dutch resistance became suddenly stronger.

The first Anglo-Boer War ended in a crushing Boer victory and the establishment of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. The British backed off until a huge reef of gold was discovered around Johannesburg and then marched in again for the second Anglo-Boer War, dribbling with empiric greed. By 1902 the Boers had exhausted their conventional resources and resorted to commando-style raids, denying the British control of the countryside. The British quashed resistance with disproportionate reprisals: if a railway line was blown up, the nearest farmhouse was destroyed; if a shot was fired from a farm, the house was burnt down, the crops destroyed and the animals killed. The women and children from the farms were collected and taken to concentration camps - a British invention - where 26,000 died of disease and neglect. The Boers were compelled to sign an ignominious and bitter peace.

Modern

Soon after the Union of South Africa was established in 1910, a barrage of racist legislation was passed restricting black rights and laying the foundations for apartheid. After a last flutter with military rebellion during WWI, the Afrikaners got on with the business of controlling South Africa politically. In 1948 elections the Afrikaner-dominated and ultra-right National Party took the reins and didn't let the white charger slow down until 1994. Under apartheid, every individual was classified by race, and race determined where you could live, work, pray and learn. Irrespective of where they had been born, blacks were divided into one of 10 tribal groups, forcibly dispossessed and dumped in rural backwaters, the so-called Homelands. The plan was to restrict blacks to Homelands that were, according to the propaganda, to become self-sufficient, self-governing states. In reality, these lands had virtually no infrastructure and no industry, and were therefore incapable of producing sufficient food for the black population. There was intense, widespread suffering and many families returned to squalid squatter camps in the cities from which they had been evicted. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi was pivotal in the Inkatha movement, a failed attempt to unite Homeland leaders. Black resistance developed in the form of strikes, acts of public disobedience and protest marches, and was supported by international opinion from the early 1960s, after 69 protesters were killed in Sharpeville and African National Congress (ANC) leaders, including Nelson Mandela, were jailed.

After withdrawing from the British Commonwealth in 1961, South Africa became increasingly isolated. Paranoia developed through the 1960s and 70s, as the last European powers withdrew from Africa and black, often socialist, states formed around South Africa's northern borders. South Africa's military responses ranged from limited strikes (Mozambique, Lesotho) to full-scale assault (Angola, Namibia). When Cuba intervened in Angola in 1988, South Africa suffered a major defeat and war looked much less attractive. As the spirit of Gorbachev-style detente



permeated Southern Africa, Cuba pulled out of Angola, Namibia became independent and a stable peace was finally brokered in 1990.

The domestic situation was far from resolved. Violent responses to black protests increased commitment to a revolutionary struggle, and the United Nations finally imposed economic and political sanctions. But in the mid-1980s, black-on-black violence in the townships exploded. Although bitter lines were drawn between the left-wing, Xhosa-based ANC and the right-wing, Zulu-dominated Inkatha movement, such distinctions are simplistic in the context of the massive economic and social deprivation of black South Africa. There were clashes between political rivals, tribal enemies, opportunistic gangsters, and between those who lived in the huge migrant-workers' hostels and their township neighbours. President PW Botha detained, tortured and censored his way to 1989, when economic sanctions began to bite, the rand collapsed and reformist FW De Klerk came to power. Virtually all apartheid regulations were repealed, political prisoners were released and negotiations began on forming a multiracial government. Free elections in 1994 resulted in a decisive victory for the ANC and Nelson Mandela became president. De Klerk's National Party won just over 20% of the vote, and the Inkatha Freedom Party won 10.5%. South Africa rejoined the British Commonwealth a few months later.

Despite the scars of the past and the enormous problems ahead, South Africa today is immeasurably more optimistic and relaxed than it was a few years ago. The international community has embraced the new South Africa and the ANC's apparently sincere desire to create a truly non-racial nation. It will be some time before the black majority gain much economic benefit from their freedom, as economic inequality remains an overwhelming problem. However, the political structure seems strong enough to hold the diverse region together. There are huge expectations for the new South Africa.

Recent

In 1999, after five years of learning about democracy, the country voted in a more normal election. Issues such as economics and competence were raised and debated. There was some speculation that the ANC vote might drop with the retirement of Nelson Mandela. The ANC's vote didn't drop - it increased, putting the party within one seat of the two-thirds majority that would allow it to alter the constitution. Thabo Mbeki, who took over the ANC leadership from Nelson Mandela, became president in the 1999 elections.

In November 2003 the government finally approved a major program to treat and tackle HIV/AIDS. Prior to that time, the government had refused to provide anti-AIDS medicine through the public health system. In April 2004 the ANC won another landslide election victory, garnering 70% of the vote and ensuring Mbeki being in power until 2009.

In 2010 South Africa will be the first African nation to ever host FIFA's World Cup.

Places of Interest

Addo Elephant National Park

Tel : 0422230556

This national park is near the Zuurberg Range in the Sundays River Valley. There are hundreds of elephants in the park and you'd be unlucky not to see some. They are the remnants of the herds that once roamed the Eastern Cape. Be aware that the park closes if there has been heavy rain, as the dirt roads can become impassable; call ahead if in doubt.

Web: www.sanparks.org



Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve

The Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve is one of South Africa's scenic highlights, featuring the awesome viewpoints of Wonder View and God's Window. Once you could park quietly and enjoy the views at the lookouts; now there are entry gates and a battery of souvenir sellers. While most visitors drive, it's worth exploring



the impressive rock formations and rainforest on foot if you have time.

Kruger National Park

As well as being one of the most famous wildlife parks in the world, Kruger National Park is among the biggest and the oldest - it turned 100 in 1998. You can see the 'big five' here (lions, leopards, elephants, buffaloes and rhinos) as well as cheetahs, giraffes, hippos, all sorts of antelope species and smaller animals.

Web: www.parks-sa.co.za



Attractions

The Shipwreck Coast

This stretch of Eastern Cape coast, a graveyard for numerous ships, is largely unspoilt. There are a couple of resort towns and the inevitable casino, but it's easy to get away from it all. The Shipwreck Hiking Trail extends for 64km (38mi), but there are several entry and exit points for hikers.

This is one of the few walking areas in South Africa where you can set your own pace, camp more or less where you choose and light fires (providing they are on sand and well away from vegetation).

Those who make the effort are amply rewarded.

The rewards include wild, unspoilt surf beaches, rich coastal vegetation, beautiful estuaries and diverse birdlife. Try not to burn it all down. East London and Port Elizabeth are the main entry points to this area.

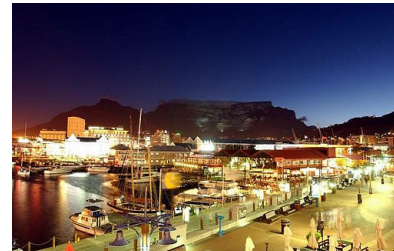


Cape Town

In this beautiful city even transient visitors can't help but devote a few million brain cells to storing images of its grandeur: its striking Table Mountain backdrop, its glorious beaches and enchanting vineyards, its rugged landscapes, its strange and wonderful plants and animals.

Cape Town is famed for its hospitality. Its mix of trendy establishments matches up favourably any other cosmopolitan centre. There's a lively cultural scene, particularly when it comes to music, which seems to pervade every corner of the city. The general ambience is open-minded and relaxed.

South Africa's parliamentary capital, Cape Town works as a city in a way that so few on the African continent do. Historic buildings have been saved, businesses are booming, crime is coming under control and you'll seldom be stuck for a parking space. Factor back in those stunning mountains and magnificent surf beaches and you'll soon discover - like many before you - that it's easy to lose track of time while exploring this unique Southern African city.



Health Conditions

Malaria

Malaria is mainly confined to the eastern half of South Africa, especially on the lowveld (coastal plain).

If you are travelling in endemic areas it is extremely important to avoid mosquito bites and to take tablets to prevent this disease. Symptoms range from fever, chills and sweating, headache, diarrhoea and abdominal pains to a vague feeling of ill-health. Seek medical help immediately if malaria is suspected. Without treatment malaria can rapidly become more serious and can be

fatal. If medical care is not available, malaria tablets can be used for treatment. You should seek medical advice, before you travel, on the right medication and dosage for you. If you do contract malaria, be sure to be re-tested for malaria once you return home as you can harbour malaria parasites in your body even if you are symptom free. Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites at all times. The main messages are: wear light-coloured clothing; wear long trousers and long-sleeved shirts; use mosquito repellents containing the compound DEET on exposed areas (prolonged overuse of DEET may be harmful, especially to children, but its use is considered preferable to being bitten by disease-transmitting mosquitoes); avoid perfumes and aftershave; use a mosquito net impregnated with mosquito repellent (permethrin) - it may be worth taking your own, and impregnating clothes with permethrin effectively deters mosquitoes and other insects.

Schistosomiasis (bilharzia)

Bilharzia is carried in freshwater by tiny worms that enter through the skin and attach themselves to the intestines or bladder. The first symptom may be tingling and sometimes a light rash around the area where the worm entered. Weeks later, a high fever may develop. A general unwell feeling may be the first symptom, or there may be no symptoms. Once the disease is established, abdominal pain and blood in the urine are other signs. The infection often causes no symptoms until the disease is well established (several months to years after exposure), and damage to internal organs is irreversible. Avoid swimming or bathing in freshwater where bilharzia is present. Even deep water can be infected. If you do get wet, dry off quickly and dry your clothes as well. A blood test is the most reliable test, but it will not show positive until a number of weeks after exposure.

Bilharzia is also found mainly in the east but outbreaks do occur in other places, so you should always check with knowledgeable local people before drinking water or swimming in it.

HIV/AIDS

HIV (Human Immuno-deficiency Virus) develops into AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), which is a fatal disease. Any exposure to blood, blood products or body fluids may put the individual at risk. The disease is often transmitted through sexual contact or dirty needles - body piercing, acupuncture, tattooing and vaccinations can be potentially as dangerous as intravenous drug use. HIV and AIDS can also be spread via infected blood transfusions, but blood supplies in most reputable hospitals are now screened, so the risk from transfusions is low. If you do need an injection, ask to see the syringe unwrapped in front of you, or take a needle and syringe pack with you. Fear of HIV infection should not preclude treatment for any serious medical conditions. Most countries have organizations and services for HIV-positive folks and people with AIDS. For a list of organizations divided by country, plus descriptions of their services, see www.aidsmap.com.

Getting there

Overview

Although about 30 airlines now fly to South Africa, it still isn't exactly a hub of international travel and the fares reflect that. Johannesburg International Airport remains the main international airport, but there are an increasing number of flights to Cape Town and a few to Durban. There's an airport departure tax of 6.00 for domestic flights, 10.00 for flights to regional (African) countries and 30.00 for other international flights. The tax is usually included in the ticket price.

Getting around

Overview

South Africa is geared towards travel by private car, with some very good highways but limited and expensive public transport. If you want to cover a lot of the country in a short time, hiring or buying a car might be necessary. If you don't have much money but have time to spare, you might organise lifts with fellow travellers and, if you don't mind a modicum of discomfort, there's an extensive network of minibus taxis, buses and trains. Two major national bus operators cover

the main routes and will usually be pretty comfortable. The hop-on hop-off Baz Bus is cheap and convenient for backpackers.

Time Zone

GMT/UTC +2

Weight measures

Metric

Area Sqkm

1,233,404 sq km

Area Code

Country Code: 27

Population

43,800,000

Spoken Language

Zulu (official)

Xhosa (official)

Afrikaans (official)

English (official)

Tswana (official)

Sotho, Southern (official)

Swati (official)

South Ndebele (official)

Religion

Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and traditional religions

Currency

Rand (R)

Electricity

220/230V 50Hz

Electrical Plug

South African/Indian-style plug with two circular metal pins above a large circular grounding pin