



The Definitive Guide to Travelling in

South Africa

**Travel
Local**

Everything you need to know
when you're visiting South Africa

Travel Local

TravelLocal is bringing the 'buy local' movement to the travel industry. The company specialises in bespoke travel itineraries, created with local experts around the world. This involves connecting travellers with handpicked local experts, ensuring quality and local knowledge. It's a great way to support the local economies of the places you visit and have a better trip!



Our local partner based in South Africa

"We know South Africa like nobody else and can arrange any number of trips, from safaris in famous national parks like Kruger, but also holidays to the winelands, along the Garden Route and up the west coast."



Great trip to Cape Town, wine lands and garden route

- John from UK

Travelled to South Africa in February 2018



Fantastic trip of a lifetime, love the TravelLocal concept

- Deidre from Germany

Travelled to South Africa in October 2017



Amazing trip in South Africa

- Eileen from Ireland

Travelled to South Africa in October 2017

Our local partner in South Africa was founded in 2009 to offer people a more in-depth, less rushed, eco-friendly safari holiday. For years the founders were privately guiding clients around, exploring all the known (and lesser known!) corners of this beautiful country. Now they have a fantastic team of 11 local specialists working with them, who man the office and are always happy to help you plan your ideal South Africa holiday. Their repertoire includes the very best of safari, as well as perfectly arranged self-drive holidays, not only in the national parks like Kruger, but through the winelands, along the Garden Route, and also up the west coast to the Kalahari and Kgalagadi.

Since the very beginning, their clients' personal wishes have been at the heart of what they do and we see their personal touch as one of their main strengths. They listen carefully to your needs and work hand-in-hand with you to create your dream holiday to South Africa, perfectly tailored to you and your budget. On arrival for a self-drive tour, they give you a mobile with a South African sim (you can call their team at any time of day or night), a GPS and a hard copy of your holiday itinerary, so that you can travel with complete peace of mind.

SOUTH AFRICA



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MAKE IT HAPPEN

THE OVERVIEW

They call South Africa 'the World in One Country' with good reason. Deserts butt up against dramatic mountains, winelands ripple across the foothills and two oceans lap along its shores. And that is merely scratching the surface. A variety of ecosystems, a fascinating cultural mix and a world class city are icing on the cake, and the powerful wildlife spectacles are the cherry on the top. Whether you want to indulge in a luxury South African honeymoon or an action packed family adventure, a beach holiday or a wilderness experience, South Africa can oblige in style.



THE STATS AND FACTS ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA

There is minimal time difference between South Africa and most of Europe, meaning that many travellers can step off the plane and get straight on with their holiday without the fog of jetlag to conquer first.

In 1967, the world's first successful heart transplant was completed in Cape Town by Dr. Christiaan Barnard.

After decades of apartheid, on 27 April 1994 Nelson Mandela was elected the first black president of South Africa. Freedom Day is celebrated every year marking the anniversary of his election.



Seasons are opposite to those in the UK, so December to March is the summer season, while the winter spans from June to August.

In 2006 South Africa became the first African nation to recognise same sex marriage, making it the fifth country in the world to take this progressive step. Today, South Africa is still a trailblazer in gay rights.

South Africa has 11 official languages, showing the amazing diversity of cultures in the country.

The population of South Africa is approximately 56.5 million. This breaks down into around 80% African, 9% each for white and mixed race, and 2% Indian / Asian.

There are three capitals in South Africa: Cape Town is the Legislative capital, Pretoria the Administrative capital, and Bloemfontein is the Judicial capital.

The national animal of South Africa is the springbok, a delicate antelope with a ridge of hair along its back that fans up as it leaps. It's an emblem of the country and the national rugby team is known as the 'springboks'.

One of the most surprising South Africa facts is that the annual sardine run between May and August - where enormous shoals of sardines move en masse from Cape Point northwards - is visible from space.

South Africa shares borders with Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique to the north, and entirely surrounds two independent countries, Lesotho and Swaziland. The rest of the country is bordered by the sea, with over 3,000 kilometres of coastline.

THE HIGHLIGHTS



Jump
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Cape Town

The South African Culture

The Elephant Coast

South Africa's marine wildlife

South Africa's National Parks

Safaris in South Africa

The Winelands

The Garden Route

**The wildflowers of the
West Coast, Cederberg
and Namaqualand**

The Karoo and Klein Karoo

**The Drakensberg
Mountains**

CAPE TOWN

This is a city with a lot going for it. Primarily it's Cape Town's winning location in the shadow of one of the world's most iconic mountains and alongside some stunning coastline which makes it so appealing. But add a lively and sociable dining and nightlife scene with some of the best restaurants on the continent into the mix, and it's clear that Cape Town is something special. The cultural distractions are a highlight too, with museums and the historic Robben Island to evoke the nation's eventful past.

The Bo Kaap neighbourhood is bursting with character, full of colourful homes and historic streets which were originally inhabited by the descendants of Southeast Asian slaves. This is the heart of Cape Malay culture and it's definitely the best place to try the eponymous spicy cuisine. The V&A waterfront is an enticing part of the city where you can see the workings of a modern port in action, dine in some of the most fantastic restaurants and shop in some great boutiques. The unmissable attraction of Table Mountain will tempt you to its peak at some point during your stay, and on the days when 'the tablecloth' cloud cover is absent, the view from the top is well worth the effort. You can choose to hike to the summit or catch the cable car up. The beaches of False Bay are among the best for swimmers, as the water is warmer and calmer, but surfers should head for the rougher waves of the Atlantic beaches. There's enough to do in Cape Town to keep you busy for at least a week, but you can pack the major attractions into a three or four day trip.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN CULTURE



South African culture can be summed up in one word: diverse. With so many different tribes and their associated heritages, the cultural scene is complex. Combine the indigenous cultures with western influences brought by the European colonists, and a dash of Indian and Malaysian culture as a result of slavery, and the picture is a cosmopolitan one. When Desmond Tutu coined the term 'Rainbow Nation' he made a valuable point. All kinds of people from disparate corners of the globe have made South Africa the true melting pot it is today. It makes for a fascinating trip, as you discover different angles on this exciting destination.



Black African artistic expression predominantly incorporates music, dance, art and storytelling. Much of the purely tribal heritage has seen strong influences from colonialists and Christian ministers over time, and has adjusted accordingly, yet retains a strong African identity. The oral art of Storytelling has been a cultural cornerstone for many tribal peoples and is now, in some cases, beginning to be committed to paper.

Alongside the African heritage comes the European influence, brought by the Dutch, German, Portuguese and British whose longtime presence is felt particularly strongly in Cape Town and surrounds, where Cape Dutch architecture and Afrikaans culture are very prominent. When the Europeans arrived, they brought slaves, mainly Indonesians and Indians, and this led to the assimilation of aspects of Asian culture into the mix.

Modern South African society is complex and ever evolving, and not without its problems, but overall great steps forward have been taken since the abolition of apartheid. In general, the people you will come across are friendly and welcoming

hosts, as curious about your culture as they are keen to share theirs with you. There is definitely a warm and hopeful optimism among many South Africans which makes it a charming and cheery place to travel.

The most important South African festivals include Braai Day, when everyone cooks up a charcoal roasted feast, and 16th December, which is known as the Day of Reconciliation. This national holiday was conceived to acknowledge the significance of 16 December to both the Afrikaner and liberation struggle traditions. It has been celebrated as a public holiday since 1995.



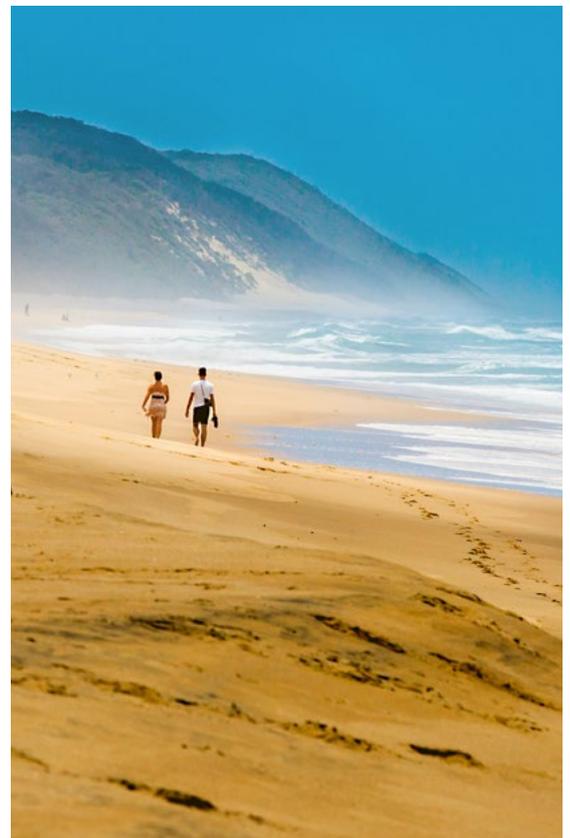
THE ELEPHANT COAST



One of the most enticing places to visit in South Africa is the remote and beautiful Elephant Coast. Stretching from the north of Durban up towards the border with Mozambique, this sub-tropical region is incredibly scenic and home to all sorts of wildlife. The iSimangaliso Wetland Park can boast more than 500 species of birds, making it one of South Africa's prime birding destinations, with a huge variety of wetland species such as flamingos, pelicans, storks, lesser jacanas and pygmy geese. There are also large numbers of game animals in the iSimangaliso Wetland Park including the Big Five.

The St Lucia estuary is another wildlife hotspot, and boat tours of the area allow you to see hippos and crocodiles up close. The bird life is also an attraction - look out in particular for kingfishers and fish eagles. The Agulhas current keeps the water of Sodwana Bay warm enough for extensive coral reefs to thrive here, the most southerly in Africa. There are almost 100 different types of coral as well as more than 1,000 species of fish, including various sharks, rays and eels.

The Tembe Elephant Park near the Mozambique border is another reserve in the area which is well worth a visit. Home to more than 250 of the world's largest elephants, including many of the handful of remaining 'tuskers' - the genetically favoured elephants that have an immense size and a propensity to have huge tusks. Unfortunately this particular strain of African elephants is very desirable to poachers and these gentle giants are often killed for their ivory. The Tembe Elephant Park provides a refuge for them, and it's a great place to see the world's biggest elephants.



The Highlights /

SOUTH AFRICA'S MARINE WILDLIFE

There's plenty of wildlife on land in South Africa, but it is also possible to see lots of marine creatures whilst touring the land. Hermanus is the hotspot for South Africa's whale watching, and correspondingly popular as the immense creatures can be seen directly from the shore. Clifftop viewing spots give a great view over the water, and from July to November - though peak times are September to November - you are virtually guaranteed to see some cetacean action. Walker bay is the busiest with whale activity, mainly southern right whales but there are a total of nine whale species that migrate through South African waters. There are various whale watching opportunities around Hermanus in addition to the clifftop viewing zones - boat trips and aerial whale watching tours are available too.



Penguins are another exciting entry on South Africa's list of marine wildlife, and there are two accessible colonies not too far from Cape Town. The first, and most popular with visitors, is Boulders Beach, where around 2,000 African penguins reside. The beach, as the name suggests, is surrounded by large boulders where the penguins live work and play. The area is part of the Table Mountain National Park, and it's around an hour's drive from Cape Town. Most of the viewing opportunities are from boardwalks, but if you head for Foxy Beach you can actually share the beach with and even swim with the penguins. Another area lively with penguins is at Betty's Bay in the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, which is home to a colony of around 3,000. This spot is less busy with visitors than Boulders Beach, and it's cheaper, though it is 30 minutes further from Cape Town.

The Highlights /

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL PARKS



There are more than twenty National Parks in South Africa, each with a unique landscape and appeal. From forested coasts and wetland ecosystems to mountain ranges and deserts, it's all here. For the quintessential South Africa safari experience, the Kruger National Park is top of the list, particularly because it is open to those who wish to self-drive. Justly famous and correspondingly popular, this is a huge National Park in the far northeast with a vast number of animals, including the 'Big Five' which are: elephant, buffalo, leopard, lion and rhino. This park has good infrastructure and is surrounded by some of the best game reserves in South Africa, such as Sabi Sands Game Reserve and Thornybush Private Nature Reserve.

Addo Elephant National Park lies on the Eastern Cape, is malaria free, also boasts the African Big Five and is located within striking distance of Cape Town. It makes a great safari destination for those who wish to combine safari with the Garden Route. The Garden Route itself boasts a national park incorporating the areas around Tsitsikamma and Wilderness, which was set up to protect the unique coastal ecosystems which rapidly rise into the forested ridges behind.



SAFARIS IN SOUTH AFRICA

For many, the chance to see wildlife in its natural habitat is the number one reason to visit South Africa. It's no wonder, because the opportunities for spotting Africa's headline species are plentiful and legendary. Many National Parks and game reserves in South Africa provide a selection of accommodation to choose from, from the relatively simple rest camps for self drivers, to the ultimate in African luxury, where every bell and whistle you could dream of comes as standard.

There are many private reserves dotted throughout South Africa, most with their own upscale accommodation, and the major benefit of staying in one of these is that numbers are strictly limited, so you won't be sharing the space with many others. Game drives are carried out by expert guides to locate and explain interesting species, and everything is organised for you, including forays into the bush, food, drink, relaxation and creature comforts.

In comparison, the rest camps run by the National Parks network are usually quite populated, with many units of accommodation that are often booked up in advance, and a less exclusive vibe. This kind of accommodation has definite advantages, especially for families travelling with young children who are not usually able to book the top end safari lodges in South Africa as they often have a 12+ policy. The rest camps are cheaper, plus they are well sited and well set up for self caterers, with groceries available and often a restaurant too. Rangers are on hand for safety and information, but trips to find wildlife will be self-driven, meaning you need to know what to look for.

To find out more about which safari destinations would most suit your needs and which of the many South African safari lodges would be right for your party, contact the friendly and knowledgeable team of our local partner company who know them all and can make bespoke recommendations.



The Highlights /

THE WINELANDS



Fanning out to the east of Cape Town are the South African Cape Winelands, a beautiful area of vine-clad hills with a mountain backdrop. This is one of the most architecturally appealing regions in the whole of South Africa, scattered with historic Cape Dutch villages and wineries. The building style is very attractive, and many of the houses are low, white, gabled buildings with large windows as well as ornate gables on each end and a further central gable above the door. Stellenbosch, Paarl and Franschhoek are the hubs of activity in the Cape Winelands, and from these towns various wine routes radiate out into the surrounding vines, where the wineries sit amid the incredible scenery, waiting for visitors to come and experience the wonderful food and hospitality they offer.

The whole area has a rustic charm enhanced by the traditional building style, and the wines are delicious. These may be New World wines but in New World terms they are among the oldest, as the first of them were planted in the mid-17th century. Stellenbosch and Franschhoek are attractive places to spend time, wandering from gallery to cafe to boutique and absorbing the leafy ambiance. When Stellenbosch was founded as a wine town, the planners decided to plant large numbers of oak trees so they could be used to manufacture barrels. However the perfect growing conditions meant that the wood was too porous and the barrels leaked, so the trees still stand, shading the streets of Stellenbosch as they have for centuries.



The Highlights /

THE GARDEN ROUTE

Some of the most entrancing scenery in the land is found along the Garden Route, South Africa's best known natural playground. Stretching across 200km of coastal landscapes east of Cape Town, the Garden Route is so named for its greenery and vegetation, so if you were hoping for lots of formal gardens to visit, you'll be disappointed! What the Garden Route does have is dramatic, lush scenery, and lots of it.

The warm waters of the Indian Ocean crash onto wild beaches while all sorts of creatures creep and rustle in the undergrowth, rivers tumble towards the sea and peaceful lagoons dot the landscape. Soaring mountains and rocky ravines compete for your attention with ancient forests and cave systems. If that's not enough to keep you busy, try some adrenaline sports or indulge in some of the excellent food available in the region. This is one of South Africa's classic, most popular tourist destinations, and as such the infrastructure is good and there are excellent lodgings, activities and resorts to choose from. Among the highlights of the Garden Route are Wilderness National Park, a slice of beautiful coastal wetlands thrumming with birdlife; Knysna and Plettenberg Bay are lively towns which make good bases; Nature's Valley has a stunning beach and lagoon; and Tsitsikamma National Park is a haven for wildlife and natural scenery where you can enjoy a canopy zip line.

THE WILDFLOWERS OF THE WEST COAST, CEDERBERG AND NAMAQUALAND

The spring flowers of South Africa are one of the main draws of the Northern Cape and West Coast. After the winter rains, the usually dry and dusty land explodes into carpets of purple, orange, yellow, blue, white and red flowers all mixed together with brilliant clashing abandon. Depending on the timing of the winter rains, the flowers generally first begin to blossom in Namaqualand and the Northern Cape in late July / early August before moving south, eventually arriving on the West Coast in late August and blooming on into September.

To make the most of the flowers, you should try to go and see them on a sunny day (they tend to close up when it's gloomy or wet) and travel or wander according to the direction of the sun as the flowers turn to face it. If you are planning to drive in a circular route, then in the morning, you should head in a westerly direction, south over the middle of the day and east in the later afternoon. There are ample guided tours available - though you should book well in advance as availability dwindles nearer the time - and it's also possible to see the flowers on a day trip from Cape Town. You won't be able to get to the Northern Cape, but the West Coast flowers are equally spectacular and reachable within a two hour drive. If you can't get a guided tour, then there are plenty of flower books available that can fill you in on the different flora as you come across it.



THE KAROO AND KLEIN KAROO



This lesser-known area of South Africa is a beautiful expanse of semi-desert landscape the size of Germany... Despite its size, the population has never gone over one million, and the scattering of pretty towns and farms are surrounded by wild, empty lands and crowned with a spectacular starry sky at night.

Desert landscapes seem to attract creative minds, and the Karoo is a cultural haven of galleries filled with local artists' work, independent bookshops, quirky guesthouses, small production plays and wonderful foodie discoveries. Every town you stop in is likely to have its own identity and buzz, but Prince Albert is the place best known to those who visit the Karoo. Pick up a little guide pamphlet from the visitor's centre and take its advice on what is going on in the area at the time, whether that's a photography exhibition, a one-man-play or a walking tour around the local gardens, which are often exhibitions in themselves.

There's also AfrikaBurn - Nevada's Burning Man Festival's little brother - where art, music and the weird and wonderful are celebrated in equal measure. After a week of celebration, installation art is burned to the ground and the attendees clear up any debris, leaving no sign that the festival ever occurred and returning to everyday lives feeling renewed.

Getting away from the crowds and into the wild is another of the Karoo's appeals, calling to South African residents just as much as foreign visitors. Cape Town's chic and city-slick professionals escape to the wild more often than you'd expect, wandering the plains to spot wildlife, practice photography or perhaps even go fishing in the surrounding flat-topped mountains. Sitting by a firepit in the evening is one of the best ways to unwind - search the heavens for shooting stars, dine on braaied lamb chops from a local farm, and listen out for the lonely call of a jackal as you fall asleep.

THE DRAKENSBERG MOUNTAINS



Known as uKhahlamba - "the barrier of spears" - in Zulu, the Drakensberg Mountain range is the highest in South Africa, reaching a dramatic 3,482 metres above sea level and spanning over 1,000 kilometres. The towering basalt buttresses give you ample clues as to how it earned its name and beg for exploration.

Wherever you go, you're hard put to not see a spectacular view, but arguably the most magical is the view of Blyde River Canyon in the north of the range, and there are plenty of trails and treks that incorporate this natural spectacle. But these magnificent peaks appeal to more than just hikers and climbers. Their incredible biodiversity and endemic flora draws botanists like a magnet, whilst fishing enthusiasts head to the rivers that course through the valleys. History lovers are awestruck by the abundance of San rock art - there are over 35,000 individual works located at over 600 sites throughout the Drakensberg, and as you scramble along the rocky paths and gaze out at the epic, wild views it's not hard to imagine that you may come across a member of this indigenous Stone Age population just around the next corner.

There are plenty of easy guided walks or more challenging trekking available across the range, and our local experts can help to arrange this for you. Let them know what kind of walking your after - through the best of the flora, past the finest San painting examples or simply with the most spectacular views - and they can plan your perfect trip to include it.



THE PRACTICALITIES

An aerial photograph of a coastal city, likely Durban, South Africa. The image shows a dense urban area with numerous high-rise buildings and residential structures. In the foreground, there is a wide, sandy beach with several blue swimming pools and a pier extending into the ocean. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, and white waves are breaking along the shore. The sky is clear and blue.

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WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO TO SOUTH AFRICA

Although at times it seems that the media always tries to portray South Africa as dangerous, in the 9 years since the team at our local partner company began operating they have not had a single incident happen to their guests, apart from the occasional pickpocketing or iPad being stolen from the back seat of a car. A certain level of awareness is a good idea in big cities, as it is in big cities the world over. Be sensible with valuables - don't leave them on view in a parked car for example - and perhaps think twice before packing that diamond bracelet, but generally as a tourist you are extremely unlikely to encounter anything more serious than petty theft.

Internet access is very good almost everywhere in South Africa, and wifi is widespread in lodgings, but be aware that connection speeds can be very slow compared to usual European standards.

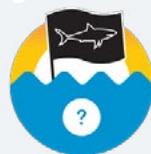
The incredible surf and beautiful beaches of South Africa are one of the main appeals of travelling along the coastline. Great care is taken to ensure that all swimmers are as safe as can be when in the water, particularly around Cape Town where the breeding seal colony in the middle of the bay means that there is a healthy population of great white sharks. Spotters are posted on the hillsides around the beaches whose sole job is to scan the seas for signs of sharks, and a thorough and effective flag system on each beach allows swimmers and surfers to make the decision on whether they would like to enter the water or not.



White flag with a solid black shark
Shark in vicinity of water users (siren will be sounded on sight) or after serious incident when beach is closed.



Red flag with solid white shark
One hour after a sighting or if a shark is spotted but not near swimmers or if there is an increased risk of shark activity.



Black flag with shark outline
Poor spotting conditions in area where majority of swimmers are. No shark seen.



Green flag with shark outline
Good spotting conditions in area where majority of swimmers are. No shark seen.

No flag = no spotter on duty

FOOD IN SOUTH AFRICA



In recent years the South African food scene has exploded in a tantalising array of unmissable flavours and experiences. The combination of top quality local produce with the diversity of cultural influences results in a huge variety of delicious dishes and cooking styles waiting to be sampled, and whether your foodie highlight is a snack from a simple street stall or a tasting menu in a refined restaurant, South Africa's exciting food scene will not disappoint.



One of the unmissable aspects of South African cuisine is the braai. No trip would be complete without experiencing this bigger, meatier, more exuberant and altogether more South African version of the humble barbecue. Most self-catered accommodation will offer braaing facilities so you can pick up delicious boerewors (a traditional curled sausage), locally reared lamb chops or steak at your nearest supermarket and rustle up your own braai. If you don't have these facilities on-hand, however, you can find fabulous arrays of grilled meat, seafood, corn, stews and salads at restaurants and food markets across the country.

Another memorable genre of food in South Africa is the sweet, subtly spiced Cape Malay cuisine, perfect when sampled in the Bo-Kaap area of Cape Town, its historical home. A legacy of the Malaysian slave trade, Cape Malay cuisine brings the sparkling flavours of Asia to the Capetonian table. The secret is in the complex spicing, which creates a unique blend of flavours you shouldn't miss.

With the rainbow of cultures that South Africa is famous for comes a rainbow of culinary surprises. Indian curry is a staple street food in Durban whose popularity is now so widespread you can find bunny chow (hollowed out bread filled with super spiced curry) at street food markets over the world.

Crayfish, or rock lobster, are abundant in west coast waters and are landed fresh and generally cooked over a braai with delicious results. As long as you follow local guidelines, you can even attempt to catch a couple for yourself. Head to Lambert's Bay in March for the annual Kreeffees crayfish festival, in celebration of this delectable local speciality.

Put together a delicious picnic when you visit one of South Africa's showcase produce markets. There are now hundreds of regular markets throughout the country offering all things edible, from the simple fortnightly farmers' markets to the hipster day trip that is Woodstock Market at the Old Biscuit Mill in Cape Town, where you can socialise, shop, sample craft beers and put together an epic picnic all under one roof.

Gourmet evenings out in Cape Town are a must-do holiday treat. Densely packed with eateries, Kloof Street is heaven for the hungry. A good mix of locals and tourists throng the pavement cafes and shops giving the area busy, buzzy, villagey feel. Whether you wish to mingle with the young and beautiful at one of the hip bars, or relax over a meal with views of table mountain, the main challenge will be deciding where to go: there are dozens of tempting venues to choose from.



SOUTH AFRICA'S WINE

Some of the most memorable culinary experiences in South Africa go beyond food and take you on a journey to the various international cuisines who have influenced the food of this nation.

South African wine is rightly world famous. The wine growing regions are the oldest of the new world wines, with the earliest records of planting vines dating back to the mid 17th century. The climate is warm and this enables rich, full flavoured wines with a relatively high alcohol content. Reds are particularly full bodied, though those produced nearer the coast in the Western Cape show a cleaner, fresher flavour profile as the heat is tempered by sea breezes creating a lower sugar juice. Reds to sample include Pinotage and Syrah, while popular South African white wines include Sauvignon Blanc and Chenin Blanc.



Much of the wine can be sampled in tastings in and around Stellenbosch and Franschhoek, but if you don't have time to visit the winelands you can get a good idea for the quality of the wine by simply popping into a local bottle shop. Look for vineyards that you can spot on a map on the labels and feel free to ask for advice from the shopkeeper - you can easily walk away with a truly delicious wine for about a third of the price that it would fetch on foreign shores.

SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGES

There are 11 official South African languages, reflecting the multicultural and multiethnic composition of the population. These 11 languages are Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga. Many South Africans speak at least two languages, and English is widely used and understood, being the main language of education and the media.



WHAT'S SOUTH AFRICA'S CURRENCY?

The South African currency is the Rand. At the time of writing 1 Euro converts to 16 Rand, 1 pound sterling is worth 18 Rand, and 1 US dollar buys 13.5 Rand. ATMs are available throughout the country, and credit cards are widely accepted. Even so, it's wise to carry some cash, especially if you are self-driving, as petrol stations generally only accept cash payments. If this is the case, keep some cash in one wallet but store the rest in one that is less in the public view.



SOUTH AFRICA

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Most European and North American passport holders can enter South Africa without organising a visa in advance. For a full list of nations whose citizens are exempt from arranging visas in advance, check [here](#). For those qualifying for a South African visa on arrival, a free 90 day visa will be issued providing you have at least six months validity on your passport and two consecutive blank pages.

If you are travelling with children aged under 18, you may need to plan ahead as it is imperative to bring their birth certificate(s) clearly stating both parents' names. Should the child be travelling with just one parent, you must bring an affidavit from the absent parent with their permission for the child to travel, plus a certified copy of the absent parent's passport. If you are travelling with a child who is not your own, you will need the birth certificate and signed affidavits from both parents with certified copies of the parental passports. All certificates should be in English and will need to be apostilled. This can all take a while to organise so it's important to get the appropriate paperwork in place in advance.



THE SOUTH AFRICAN CLIMATE

South Africa is an extremely large country and as such the climate is not a simple one to summarise. The best time to go depends on quite a few factors, not least what you plan to do on your trip and where you would like to travel. South Africa's climate is such that every time of year has its advantages, and whenever you plan your trip there will be lots to do and see.

One overarching fact to bear in mind is that Christmas is the busiest time everywhere. The South African summer holidays straddle Christmas, and so beaches everywhere are busy and the wildlife viewing experiences are much more crowded. Prices also rise, so you end up paying more for a less tranquil and relaxing trip. There are areas which see fewer crowds over the festive period, so if your chosen dates include Christmas, our local experts can advise.

European summer is another popular time to visit South Africa, and although this coincides with the South African winter when the climate on the Cape is often wet, areas further north such as the Elephant Coast are still warm in the daytime. The Western Cape and Garden Route is a year round destination, and in winter there are plenty of all weather attractions to distract you from the damp weather. Unless you hope to include daily hikes on your trip to the Cape and Garden Route, winter is doable, though to enjoy this landscape in the warm sunshine, December to April is a better bet.

If wildlife viewing in Kruger and the surrounding parks is a priority, the European summer (May to September) is the best season, because the lack of rainfall means vegetation is less dense and animals are more visible and active as they seek out water sources. Daytime is often dry and mild, while evenings and mornings are extremely chilly. To witness the incredible Namaqualand wild flower blooms, visit between July and October, which is also a good time in terms of climate and game viewing on the Northern Cape. South African summer in this region is extremely hot and the 40 plus degrees celsius can become oppressive. If you are at all unsure, then contact our local experts with your ideal travel dates or preferred activities and they can advise.

DRIVING IN SOUTH AFRICA

A white hatchback car is driving away on a dirt road that winds through a savanna landscape. The car is kicking up a small amount of dust. The background shows a mix of green trees and dry, yellowish grass under a clear sky.

Many trips to South Africa include some road travel. Visitors from Britain, Ireland, Japan, Malta, Cyprus, India and Australia will be delighted to learn that in South Africa you drive on the left-hand-side of the road. You need to carry your driving license with you at all times, and it must either be printed in English or be an international license.

The roads are mostly in good condition but it's wise to remember that the more rural areas often only have dirt roads, and some vehicles drive very slowly and may be difficult to overtake, meaning that driving times are a lot longer than one would think. This is another way that the expertise of our local South African operators can benefit you and have a positive impact on your trip - they know the road network and can advise on the best routes and times of day to travel.

If you are self-driving for much of your trip there are certain unwritten rules that it's wise to abide by in order to ensure that you are as safe as you can be.

- 1** It is strongly advised to only drive during the daylight hours.
- 2** Make sure that you always have plenty of fuel and fill up before you tackle any long stretches of road that look particularly isolated.
- 3** If you see a hitchhiker or someone in distress on the side of the road, do not pull over as this could be a petty thief's bait. Instead stop and speak to someone in the next town, or call the police and direct them to the spot so that they can help if needs be. It's extremely unlikely that you will see this but it is always good to be aware.

Very few fuel stations in South Africa are self-service. Instead, when you drive into a fuel station you will be beckoned towards a pump by an enthusiastic attendant who will ask you if your car is petrol or diesel then proceed to fill your tank. At the same time, someone is likely to clean your windscreens and occasionally your other windows - it is customary to tip them between R2 or R4 for this service. Most often, you pay for your fuel through the window meaning the majority of the time you hardly need to leave the driving seat.

When you park in a South African city, you may well spot a local in a high visibility vest wandering between the cars or sat in the corner supervising. They will keep an eye on your car while you are away and it's nice to give them a small tip of a couple of rand before you leave the car park.

TOP SAFARI TIPS FROM OUR SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL EXPERTS

For many people, a safari holiday is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and therefore a game drive is often a first-time experience. If you are staying in a private reserve and taking game drives with experienced guides then they will tell you the rules of what is allowed and what you should avoid doing when on a game drive. However it can be good to be armed with this knowledge beforehand, and it is crucial that you know what you are doing if you are undertaking a self-drive safari through the Kruger. Nick, one of the founders of our local partner company, has some top tips to bear in mind when you are going on safari.



The dos and don'ts of safari

- DO** stay still and quiet when you are approaching animals. They are sensitive to abrupt movement and noise and you don't want to lose them into the bush. Keep your phone on silent and speak in whispers when you are near wildlife.
- DO NOT** stick your head out of your car's sunroof or any limbs / cameras out of the safari truck. This will break the silhouette of the vehicle which animals otherwise tend to ignore. By doing so you could scare the animal which may flee or attack.
- DO** be extra vigilant with children. For safety reasons, keep your car windows closed and instruct your children to remain silent when in the presence of animals. Young children can trigger predators' hunting instincts and elephants may also become aggressive when hearing crying for example.
- DO NOT** feed any wild animals at any point. You may encounter some that seem tame but this usually is due to people encouraging them to become accustomed to humans. In many cases these animals will have to be shot. Should you encounter seemingly tame animals, keep your distance as they are still wild animals and they could be dangerous.
- DO** always stay in your vehicle unless you're in a clearly designated area. These areas - e.g. picnic sites and viewpoints - are generally avoided by wildlife due to the large numbers of people, but it is still good to be aware of your surroundings.

Nick's self-drive safari top tips

Keep a safe distance from animals and be particularly careful with elephants.

Elephants are much larger than your average car, very strong and should be treated with respect. It is difficult to say exactly but you should give any wild animal space - ideally about 30 metres - then if it barely reacts to your presence and continues with what it was doing, you probably can drive a bit closer. Be aware, however, that elephants and rhinoceroses can suddenly turn on you faster than you would think for their size.

Be aware of elephants in musth.

When a male elephant is in musth, he is completely overrun with hormones that drive him to seek out and mate with females, often battling any males he comes across on his journey. An elephant in musth is identifiable by the wet patches down his back legs and the patches that look like they're weeping behind his eyes. In this state they can be aggressive to cars so it is best to get out of their path wherever possible - if he's standing by the road give him extra space and don't drive close past him.

Switch off your engine and stop on the same side of the road as the animal when observing it, even if it is the wrong side of the road.

That way you avoid situations where passing cars must travel between you and the animal. Always stop your vehicle in such a way that there is enough space for another vehicle to pass unhindered. Switching off your engine stops distracting noise and exhaust fumes.

Be considerate to other game viewers.

If other cars are queuing up behind you and can't see the wildlife you are observing, move on to allow others the chance to see it.

Plan your route carefully.

Ensure that you exit the game park before the gate closes. You could be fined or even banned from the park if you are trying to leave too late.

If you breakdown at any point, do not leave your vehicle to get help.

You can change a tire or push your vehicle as long as you have someone on lookout. Make sure you stay within three metres of your car, and where possible just wait inside for help. Do not go walking around.

Be wary of small animals crossing the road.

Although you will be looking out for the big cats and mammals, the smaller wildlife is equally wonderful and you must be careful not to hurt them if they are crossing a road. For example, you may come across tortoise, chameleons, snakes or dung beetles, and all of them should have right of way in the park.

In the unlikely event that you encounter a dangerous animal while on foot...

don't run away and stand perfectly still. In most cases the animal will be just as startled by you as you are by it and will retreat into the bush. Once it is out of sight, walk backwards (don't turn around) to get to your car. If it doesn't run try to make yourself look as big as possible, shout and clap at the animal (don't scream). Wherever possible, it's best to just avoid putting yourself in a position where this could happen - stay in your car or book a guided walking safari.





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HAPPEN

Tempted by the huge variety of South African attractions? Our local experts are perfectly placed to provide you with whatever **South Africa** information you are looking for and will come up with bespoke itinerary ideas tailored to your specific wish list. All you need to do is **send an enquiry**.

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