



# South Africa

## Introduction

Official Name: Republic of South Africa

Nationality: South African

Area: 1,219,912 square kilometers (471,011 square miles)

Languages: IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Afrikaans, Sepedi, English, Setswana, Sesotho, Xitsonga, other indigenous languages

Currency: rand (ZAR)

Location: Southern Africa, bordered by Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe with coastline on the Indian Ocean and South Atlantic Ocean

## Statistical Information

Population	44 million
0-14 years	29.1 percent
15-64 years	65.5 percent
65+ years	5.4 percent
Birth rate	18 births/1,000
Death rate	22 deaths/1,000
Fertility rate	2.2 children/woman
Pop. growth rate	-0.46 percent
Life expectancy	42.5 years
Literacy	86.4 percent
HIV/AIDS rate	21.5 percent
Below poverty live	50 percent
Ethnic groups	79 percent black African 9.6 percent white 8.9 percent coloured 2.5 percent Asian/Indian
Religion	11.1 percent Zion Christian 8.2 percent Pentecostal 7.1 percent Catholic 6.8 percent Methodist 6.7 percent Reformed 3.8 percent Anglican 1.5 percent Muslim 36 percent other Christian 3.7 percent other 15.1 percent none

## Economy

South Africa has a middle-range economy with an abundance of natural resources. It has well-developed financial, legal, communications, energy, and transportation sectors. South Africa's stock exchange is the seventeenth largest in the world, and its infrastructure is very modern and efficient. Problems remaining from the apartheid era include poverty, high levels of unemployment, lack of economic resources among the disadvantaged groups, and a shortage of public transportation.

## Government

Capital: Cape Town (legislative capital), Pretoria (administrative capital), Bloemfontein (judicial capital)

South Africa is a republic. The president is both chief of state and head of government, and is elected by the National Assembly for a five-year term. The legislature consists of the bicameral Parliament. The National Assembly has 400 members, who are elected by popular vote on the basis of proportional representation to serve five-year terms. The National Council of Provinces has 90 members; each of the nine provincial legislatures elects 10 members to serve five-year terms.

## Climate

Most of the country has warm, sunny days and cool nights. A small portion in the northwest has a desert climate. The interior plateau has a temperate climate, and the northeastern part of the country is subtropical. Most rainfall in South Africa occurs during the summer months (November through March), although in the southwest, around the Cape of Good Hope, rainfall often occurs during the winter months (June through August). Frost and snowfall may occur in high-altitude areas, especially during the winter.

## **Environmental Concerns**

South Africa's lack of important arterial rivers or lakes makes water conservation and control measures important. The growth in water usage is currently outpacing the country's supply of fresh water.

Agricultural runoff and urban wastes pollute rivers, and air pollution has begun to produce acid rain in some areas. Soil erosion and desertification also pose long-term problems.

## **History**

The San, called Bushmen by early European settlers, are among the oldest indigenous peoples in South Africa. For thousands of years, they lived nomadic lives across South Africa as hunter-gatherers. Their basic social unit was the small hunting party, and they lived in caves or rock dwellings. Around the time of Christ, the pastoral Khoikhoi tribes settled in the southern coastal regions of South Africa. By the 8th century A.D., Bantu speakers had settled in the northern regions of South Africa. The Bantus developed their own systems of societal organization.

In 1488, Bartolomeu Dias, a Portuguese sailor, became the first European to sail around the Cape of Good Hope. Although European ships frequently passed by South Africa on their way to East Africa or India, and occasionally stopped to rest or replenish supplies, no permanent European settlement was made until 1652, when Jan van Riebeeck and 90 other Dutch merchantmen set up a provisioning station for the Dutch East India Company at Table Bay on the Cape of Good Hope.

Soon after establishing the settlement, van Riebeeck began to trade with the local Khoikhoi tribes. He gave European settlers land for farms, and began importing Malays and Africans from East and West Africa as slaves. By 1662, there were around 250 Europeans living near the Cape. They gradually moved inland and founded the city of Stellenbosch in 1679.

In 1689, 200 Huguenot refugees from Europe arrived in South Africa. They established a wine-making business, and intermarried with the already-established Dutch settlers in Stellenbosch. Settlers continued to arrive, and by 1707 there were around 1,780 European landowners in South Africa.

By the early 18th century, most San tribespeople had migrated to inaccessible regions of South Africa to escape European domination. The Khoikhoi either moved inland, or remained near the Cape, where they essentially became slaves of the Europeans. In 1713, a smallpox epidemic killed many Europeans and

most of the Khoikhoi living near the Cape. During the 18th century, Europeans and Khoikhoi began to intermarry, creating what would become known as the "coloured" population. At the same time, white farmers of Dutch or French descent, known as Boers or Afrikaners, began to push farther from the Cape in search of cropland and pastures.

By 1750, some Boers had reached the region between Gamtoos and Great Fish rivers, where they encountered the Xhosa people. The Boers and Xhosa initially engaged in friendly trade, but in 1779 the first in a long series of Xhosa Wars began, primarily over land and cattle ownership. The Xhosa Wars would drag on for nearly a century.

During the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, the British replaced the Dutch at the Cape. The Congress of Vienna gave the Cape territory to Great Britain in 1814. In 1820, 5,000 British settlers were given farms near the Great Fish River; the intention was to create a barrier to the southward expansion of the Xhosa. However, most of the new British settlers gave up farming and moved to nearby cities.

Great Britain reorganized the government of South Africa along British lines, which greatly angered the Boers. British law called for better treatment of black and colored servants or slaves. In 1828, the British granted nonwhites legal rights equal to those of whites, and prohibited the Boers from acquiring new land. In 1833, slavery was abolished in the British Empire, but white landowners continued to mistreat freed slaves.

To escape British rule, about 12,000 Boers left the Cape between 1835 and 1843. These Boers, known as the Voortrekkers, migrated beyond the Orange River in search of new land. Some remained in the interior highlands of South Africa, while others traveled eastward into Natal, or the eastern coastal regions.

In February of 1838, around 70 Boers were killed in a clash with the Zulu. In December of 1838, a Boer army led by Andries Pretorius defeated the Zulu at the battle of Blood River, and the Boers proceeded to settle in Natal. Britain annexed Natal in 1843, and most Boers retreated to the interior. In the 1850s, the Boers established the republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

In 1867, diamonds were found along the Orange and Vaal rivers. In 1870, diamonds were discovered in what is now Kimberley, and in 1886 gold was found on the Witwatersrand. From 1870 to 1900, white

prospectors arrived in South Africa in great numbers. Economic development soared; new railroads were laid and foreign trade increased dramatically.

In 1871, the British annexed the diamond-mining region known as Griqualand West, to the displeasure of the Orange Free State. In 1877, the British annexed the Transvaal, but restored independence in 1881 after a revolt.

In 1890, Cecil J. Rhodes became prime minister of British-administered Cape Colony. He was a strong advocate of a South African federation, and he encouraged the non-Boer whites (Uitlanders) in the Transvaal to overthrow the Boer leader. In December of 1895, Leander Starr Jamison, allied with Rhodes, invaded the Transvaal, hoping to incite an Uitlander revolt. He was not successful, and was quickly defeated by the Boers.

Tensions continued to rise, and in 1896 the Transvaal and the Orange Free State formed an alliance. They declared war on Britain in 1899. The Boer War, from 1899 to 1902, ended in British victory. To combat Boer guerrilla warfare, the British adopted a scorched-earth policy of destroying everything in the guerrilla country section by section. Boer women and children were sent to concentration camps, where unhealthy conditions led to some 26,000 deaths, mostly children. The war formally ended with the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging on May 31, 1902, but left deep-seated bitterness that would influence South African politics for years to come.

In 1910, the British established the Union of South Africa, with the Cape of Good Hope, the Orange Free State, the Transvaal, and the Natal as provinces. After elections, Louis Botha became the first South African prime minister. In 1914, Botha led South Africa into World War I on the Allied side.

From 1921 to 1922, skilled white mine workers from the Witwatersrand staged a massive strike, fearful of losing their jobs to lower-paid nonwhite workers. The strike was ended by force, resulting in around 230 deaths.

In 1924, J.B.M. Hertzog became prime minister of South Africa. He initiated a Boer cultural and economic revival. He gained additional British recognition of South African independence, and took South Africa off the gold standard, raising the value of gold and stimulating the gold-mining industry. He restricted the electoral power of nonwhites and developed the system of setting aside "reserved" areas for blacks to live.

South Africa entered World War II, again on the side of the Allies. South African troops fought against Italian aggression in Ethiopia, as well as in Italy and Madagascar.

The National Party won the 1948 elections; a succession of five National Party prime ministers would remain in power through 1989. These governments strengthened white control of the country, and promoted apartheid. A series of laws was passed restricting nonwhite movement, including requiring blacks to carry passbooks and the planned establishment of a number of independent homelands for African ethnic groups.

Black Africans had long protested whites' treatment of them through the African National Congress (ANC), founded in 1912, and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa, founded in 1919. During the 1950s and early '60s, black Africans protested the restrictive policies through passive resistance and the peaceful burning of passbooks. In 1960, a peaceful protest against pass laws in Sharpeville ended in tragedy when police opened fire, killing 70 protesters and injuring 190 others. Through the 1960s, most leaders of the opposition to apartheid, including Nelson Mandela, were jailed or living in exile.

In 1961, South Africa left the Commonwealth of Nations and became a republic. South Africa remained strongly opposed to the establishment of black rule in white-ruled Angola, Rhodesia, and Mozambique, giving military assistance to the whites there. By 1974, with independence for both Angola and Mozambique under majority rule looming, South Africa faced further isolation as one of the few remaining white-ruled African nations. During the 1970s, increasing numbers of whites, especially students, began to protest against apartheid.

In the early 1970s, black workers staged strikes and revolted against their inferior status. South Africa invaded Angola in 1975 in an attempt to crush resistance leaders living in exile there, but the attempt failed. In 1977, rebellion boiled over in the town of Soweto, near Johannesburg, as a reaction to the requirement of teaching in Afrikaans in black schools. The rioting spread to other major cities and resulted in the deaths of around 600 black South Africans.

When P.W. Botha became prime minister in 1978, he promised to both uphold apartheid and improve race relations. The government granted partial independence to four tribal homelands: Transkei in

1976, Bophuthatswana in 1977, Venda in 1979, and Ciskei in 1981. During the early 1980s, Botha's government launched military strikes on exiled ANC leaders in Lesotho, Mozambique, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia.

In 1984, a new constitution was passed; the new constitution called for a tricameral legislature. The House of Representatives was comprised of coloureds, the House of Delegates was comprised of Indians, and the House of Assembly was comprised of whites. There were more white seats than coloured and Indian seats combined. Blacks protested being completely left out of the new system, and the ANC began to advocate more extreme measures of resistance.

In 1985, the South African government declared a state of emergency as attacks against police stations and other government buildings increased. Anglican bishop Desmond Tutu, a black South African leader, addressed the United Nations in 1986 and asked for more sanctions against South Africa. In 1987, another wave of strikes and riots marked the tenth anniversary of the Soweto rebellion.

In 1989, President Botho became ill and was succeeded by F.W. de Klerk. De Klerk's administration began to loosen apartheid restrictions; in 1990, de Klerk freed Nelson Mandela after 27 years of imprisonment. In late 1991, de Klerk and Mandela set up a multiracial forum known as the Convention for a Democratic South Africa to begin negotiations for a new constitution and a transition to majority rule. Opponents of the process continued violent protests.

Despite the continued opposition, a new constitution was completed in 1993, marking the end of white-minority rule in Africa. A 32-member transitional government was appointed, with blacks in the majority. In April 1994, the first multiracial elections were held; the ANC won by a large percentage and Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa.

From 1996 to 2003, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, headed by Archbishop Tutu, sought to establish the truth about injustices and atrocities committed during the apartheid era. The commission's final report stated that the apartheid government had supported violence in its fight against racial equality, but was also critical of many opposition groups, including the ANC.

The end of apartheid led to South Africa's reemergence on the international stage. It is active in the African Union, and has helped negotiate peace agreements in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. AIDS has become a significant health problem in South Africa; in 2003 the government agreed to provide an anti-AIDS prevention and treatment program through the national health system.

### **Ethnic Groups**

In the last census, 79 percent of South Africans identified themselves as black Africans. Within this larger group, there are many smaller tribal groups, some of which are unique to South Africa and some of which are spread over several African nations. Two of the largest South African ethnic groups today are Zulus and Xhosas.

Zulus are the largest South African ethnic group. Many Zulus live in what is now the province of KwaZulu-Natal; the Zulu population is distributed fairly evenly between rural and urban settings. The Zulu language is isiZulu, a language belonging to the Bantu family. Some modern Zulu are Christian, and some still follow the traditional Zulu religion. Music is highly valued in Zulu culture, and Zulu styles of music have influenced many internationally known musicians.

The Xhosas are another Bantu-speaking tribe. Their language is known as isiXhosa. Xhosa society was traditionally fairly open, as they were willing to learn from other societies with which they came into contact. Xhosa society has a strong oral tradition with many stories of ancestral heroes. Traditional Xhosa religion was centered around a supreme being, uThixo or uQamata; ancestors were considered important intermediaries, and dreams were significant. Today, many Xhosa are Christian, although some combine Christianity with traditional Xhosa beliefs.

The white population of South Africa, about 9.6 percent, is not homogenous. It is divided between Afrikaners, or Boers (mainly descendants of Dutch farmers and French Huguenots), who speak Afrikaans, and English-speaking groups, many of whom are descendants of British settlers. The white population is decreasing due to low birth rates and emigration.

The term "coloured" was coined in colonial times to refer to people of mixed African and European heritage, and is still used today to refer to South Africans of mixed heritage. Coloured people may

have a mix of West or East African, native Khoikhoi, British, Dutch/Afrikaner, Indian, and Asian heritage.

Approximately 2.5 percent of South Africa's population is Asian or Indian. This group is largely comprised of people descended from Indian and Malay indentured workers brought to Natal in the 19th century to work on sugar plantations.

### **Religion**

Around 79.7 percent of the South African population identify themselves as Christian. Denominations with the largest numbers of congregants in South Africa include the Zion Christian Church, Pentecostals, Catholic, Methodist, Reformed, and Anglican. Some groups in South Africa combine Christianity and traditional religion.

Islam in South Africa probably predates the colonial period; it was most likely introduced by Arab and East African traders. Many South African Muslims belong to the coloured ethnic group. The majority of South African Muslims are Sunnis, although there is a small number of Shi'as.

Hinduism dates back to the colonial period. It was brought to South Africa by Indian and Malay indentured laborers. Later waves of immigrants from India and South Asia have contributed to the Hindu population.

### **Culture**

**Food**—The South African diet consists of a high volume of starches and meats. A specialized cuisine exists in the Cape area, where Dutch, English, and Southeast Asian cooking all lend traits to the local cuisine. Food plays an important role in the family and community life of nearly all South African ethnic groups.

**Social status**—During the colonial period, a color caste system developed. Under this system, which came to be known as apartheid, whites occupied the highest tiers of society, while darker-skinned people had lower social and economic status. This system persisted until 1994, when all races were legally equalized, and blacks, coloureds, and Indians were given the right to vote along with other rights. Some redistribution of wealth has occurred, with rises in the income and quality of life for blacks, but wealth is still very unevenly distributed along racial lines.

**Marriage**—Polygamy is still legal among some communities, but is becoming rare. Divorce rates in South Africa are above 50 percent, and living together without marriage is the

most common arrangement in some communities. Marriage celebrations are among the most important social occasions in South African life. Weddings are often elaborate, multisite affairs, usually involving a community feast.

**Education**—Christian and Muslim clergy introduced religious schools in the 18th and 19th centuries, but apartheid policies attempted to segregate and limit the training and opportunities of black pupils. Today, the education system is integrated, but it is difficult to overcome years of damage done by the previous educational structure. Schools in predominantly black areas tend to be underfunded and low on resources, while schools in rich, traditionally white areas have more educational privilege. South Africa has more than 20 universities.

**Etiquette**—South Africans are customarily polite in speech. Each culture group has its own specific forms of expression of respect. Black Africans show particular respect to age, genealogical seniority, male adulthood, and political position. Rural South Africans still practice traditional and formal aspects of greeting and social respect. Customarily, South Africans are hospitable, sympathetic, helpful, and anxious to avoid verbal conflict or rudeness.

### **Dress**

Many South Africans, especially those who live in urban areas, dress in Western styles. South African cities have many high-fashion shops and boutiques. Tribal groups may wear traditional styles of clothing all the time or just during celebrations. Traditional clothing may incorporate saris for women, beaded and woven skirts, blankets and cloaks for cooler weather, and colorful metal jewelry. Each tribe has its own specific traditional styles of dress.

### **Travel/Transportation**

Traffic in South Africa moves on the left. Roads in South Africa are generally in very good repair, though rural roads may not be well-lit at night.

Drivers in South Africa should not carry valuables in plain sight in a car, and should keep windows rolled up and locked when stopped at traffic lights in urban areas, because thieves sometimes conduct "smash and grab" robberies, where the thief smashes a car window to steal something of value.

Visitors who wish to drive in South Africa should consider applying for an international driving permit

(IDP). An IDP is a document which allows a motorist to operate a vehicle in another nation when accompanied by a valid driver's license from his or her own country.

You can apply for an IDP in the United States or Canada before you travel. The American Automobile Association (AAA) and the American Automobile Touring Alliance are the only organizations in the U.S. authorized by the State Department to issue IDPs. The Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) is authorized to issue IDPs to Canadian citizens. The cost of an IDP is under \$20; the application will need to be accompanied by two passport-sized photos.

### **Illness/Injury**

Private medical facilities are good in urban areas and near game parks; the availability of medical treatment may be limited in rural areas. Pharmacies carry equivalents of most American pharmaceuticals.

### **Crime**

Although most visitors do not experience problems, the rate of crime in South Africa is fairly high. The government has initiated anti-crime measures, but the rate of violent crime remains high.

Visitors who wear expensive clothes or flashy jewelry or who carry large amounts of cash are most likely to be targeted by thieves. Visitors should maintain the same level of caution as in any major Western city.

### **Safety and Security**

South Africa has not experienced any recent terrorist activity, nor have there been any threats against foreigners.

### **Entry/Exit Requirements**

A valid passport is required to enter South Africa; the passport must have at least two blank, unstamped visa pages in it. If the passport does not have two blank visa pages, the traveler may be refused entrance even when in possession of a valid South African visa.

Visitors to South Africa for the purpose of tourism or business for 90 days or less do not need a South African visa. Anyone traveling to the country for other purposes, including volunteers, students, and foreigners who intend to work in South Africa, will most likely need a visa.

For the most current information on visas, contact the Embassy of the Republic of South Africa at 3051

Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20008, or [info@saembassy.org](mailto:info@saembassy.org).

### **Immunizations**

There are no required vaccines for entry into South Africa. If entering South Africa from a country where yellow fever is present, travelers must present proof of yellow fever vaccination or be vaccinated at the airport.

South Africa is a high-risk area for both hepatitis A and B. Travelers may wish to consider these vaccinations. Other CDC-recommended vaccinations include typhoid and polio.

Malaria is not a risk in most areas of South Africa. Risk areas include Kruger National Park and low-altitude areas of Mpumalanga Province, Northern Province, and northeastern KwaZulu-Natal. Consult a travel health professional to determine if you will be at risk for contracting malaria. Chloroquine is not an effective antimalarial for South Africa; another antimalarial drug, such as doxycycline or mefloquine, should be used.

### **Special Circumstances**

When touring game parks, it is dangerous to leave a vehicle or to be on foot, even with a guide. There have been incidences of wild animal attacks on visitors to game parks.

Along South Africa's coastline, shark attacks have been reported; in 2005 and 2006, there were several fatal attacks on swimmers in the False Bay area of the Western Cape. If a shark is sighted near shore, local authorities usually sound a warning signal to alert those on the beach or in the water.

### **Electricity**

South Africa uses 220V or 230V/50Hz power. In Grahamstad and Port Elizabeth the voltage is usually 250. Travelers will need a power converter to use most American appliances in South Africa. Many modern cell phone chargers and laptop computers are designed to run on multiple types of power. Many South African outlets accept type M plugs, which have large round pins, although types C and G can be found in some areas. Travelers will need a set of plug adapters to convert American types A and B plugs to fit in South African outlets.