

South Africa

Cape Dutch homestead on a vineyard, South Africa © iStockphoto / Thinkstock

Practical Info

Required Clothing

For summer in Africa you'll need to keep cool, so pack lightweight clothes. In winter you'll be surprised at how cold it can be in some areas, so bring a jumper or sweatshirt. You will never need a heavy coat or jacket, but a light raincoat can be useful, especially in Cape Town. For a safari bring long sleeves and long trousers, if only to protect against mosquitoes and thorn bushes. The game drives will either start out chilly with an 0600 start and end under the blazing sun, or vice versa, with a hot late afternoon start and a return after sunset, so take a wrap or pullover of some sort.

Electricity

220/230 volts AC, 50Hz. Plugs have three fat round pins.

Social Conventions

South Africa's biggest cities are very westernised and hold few cultural surprises for Europeans. Handshaking is the usual form of greeting, sometimes in a more elaborate African handshake that foreigners will pick up readily. Casual wear is widely acceptable, especially in less formal [Cape Town](#). Smoking is prohibited in public buildings and on public transport.

The presence of so many diverse ethnic backgrounds certainly adds some spice outside of the main business centres. Rural areas most likely to be visited by travellers include Zulu land in KwaZulu Natal where communities are based in small traditional villages with round huts (*rondevals*) and a few hustling, bustling relatively poor towns.

In Durban you'll be entertained by beach-front Zulu dancers wearing full animal skin tribal regalia. A more modern form of culture is the now commercialised Gum Boot dance, performed in wellingtons and mining outfits and developed in men's only mining hostels when entertainment was scarce.

Language



The official languages are Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga.

Shopping

Opening Hours

Many shops stay open until at least 1800, and large shopping malls and tourist spots generally stay open even later. Sunday shopping is very common too.

Credit Cards

MasterCard and Visa are preferred. American Express and Diners Club are also widely accepted. ATMs are available in all towns, cities and shopping malls and most petrol stations, and accept international cards. Almost all hotels, shops, restaurants, national parks and game reserves accept credit cards. They are now acceptable at most petrol stations too, but since that is a relatively new measure, it's worth checking before you fill up.

Travellers Cheques

Valid at banks, hotels, restaurants and some tourist-orientated shops. To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travellers are advised to take traveller's cheques in Pounds Sterling or US Dollars.

Exchange Rates

AUD 1 = ZAR 6.58

EUR 1 = ZAR 13.27

GBP 1 = ZAR 15.77

USD 1 = ZAR 9.96

Rates correct as of 10 Dec 2013

Eating

Regional Specialities

- *Boerworst* (a fairly spicy high-quality sausage, essential for a braai).
- *Bobotie* (a curried mince stew often studded with raisins).
- *Potjiekos* (a spicy casserole cooked in an iron pot).
- *Bredie* (meat, tomato and vegetable casserole).
- *Biltong* (dried meat, typically beef or venison).

Tipping

A tip of 10 to 15% is expected.

Drinking Age

18.

Food Drink

Mains water is safe to drink. Milk is pasteurised and dairy products are safe for consumption, as are local meat, poultry, seafood, fruit and vegetables. Diarrhoea remains the most common cause of ill health in travellers, with South Africa graded as an intermediate risk country. The standard of food safety and preparation is generally good and poses little threat to your health, but sensitive travellers should follow the advice to 'cook it, peel it or leave it.'



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