

Getting Started



South Africa's infrastructure is well-developed, with an excellent network of tarmac roads, ready access to ATMs and the Internet, and an extensive selection of good-value, high-quality accommodation. Except during school holidays (when accommodation in popular areas is invariably booked out), it's possible to visit almost on the spur of the moment. Swaziland and (especially) Lesotho have less-developed infrastructure than South Africa. In Lesotho, for example, only a few major roads are paved, and in both countries, ATM and Internet access are only available at a handful of places in or near the capitals. Yet, both countries are so small and easily navigated that it is usually no problem to sort things out as you go. Wherever you go, however, you'll get more out of your visit with some advance planning. Tourism in all three countries is big business and a much welcomed source of revenue – resulting in a raft of informative tourist offices and a generally high level of tourism awareness throughout the region.

If travelling by public transport, allow plenty of time to wait for connections, especially away from major routes. It's quite popular and easy to journey around South Africa by private car – and this is often the only way to get around when away from the major routes. With luck and advance planning, you can sometimes find good rental deals. Car travel is also easy and reasonably priced in Lesotho and Swaziland, although – and in contrast with South Africa – public transport will take you almost everywhere you could want to go in these countries cheaply and with a minimum of hassle.

WHEN TO GO

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

Summer (late November to March) brings rain, mists and – in the lowveld, including much of eastern Swaziland – some uncomfortably hot days. Along the Indian Ocean coast, conditions are sultry and tropical, with high humidity. Spectacular summer thunderstorms are common in Swaziland and Lesotho, and in Lesotho flooding sometimes washes out sections of road.

More of a consideration than weather are school holidays. From mid-December to January, waves of vacation-hungry South Africans stream out of the cities, with visitors from Europe and North America adding to the crush. The absolute peak is from Christmas to mid-January, followed by Easter. Accommodation in tourist areas and national parks is heavily booked, and prices can more than double. If you visit Cape Town, the Garden Route or other popular areas during this time, it's essential to book accommodation in advance. On the plus side, the high summer months offer some great festivals, including the Cape Town New Year Karnaval, and Swaziland's Incwala ceremony. See p610 for more information on these, and other festivals.

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

COSTS & MONEY

Travelling in South Africa is not as cheap as in many less-developed African countries. However – and despite the increasing strength of the rand – it usually works out to be less expensive than travelling in Europe or North America, and the quality of facilities and infrastructure is generally high. Among the best deals are national parks and reserves, which offer excellent and accessible wildlife-watching at significantly less cost than you would pay in parts of East Africa.

At the budget level, it's quite possible to get by on about R200 per day with a bit of effort, by camping or staying in hostels or self-catering accommodation, and using public transport.

For midrange travel – where South Africa's best value is to be found – plan on about R400 per person per day, more if you hire a vehicle and less if you stay in self-catering places (many of which are quite comfortable).

Life in the luxury lane starts at about R1500 per person per day, and can climb to more than five times this if you decide to ensconce yourself in some of the continent's top wildlife lodges.

Costs in Lesotho and Swaziland are the same as, or somewhat less than, in South Africa, with savings coming from cheaper local transport, inexpensive food and (in Lesotho) plentiful opportunities to stay with locals or camp. The unit of currency in Lesotho is the loti (plural maloti; M), which is divided into 100 liesente, while in Swaziland the lilangeni (plural emalangenji; E) is used. Both currencies are fixed at an equal value to the South African rand.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

From Jo'burg to Jozi, edited by Heidi Holland and Adam Roberts, is an eminently readable collection of short takes on this famous city by local and foreign journalists. The follow-up volume, *Soweto Inside Out*, edited by Adam Roberts and Joe Thloloe, offers more of the same, this time with the focus on South Africa's most famous township.

CUTTING COSTS

In popular tourist areas, it's easy to pay much more than the averages listed under Costs & Money if you don't keep a watch on expenses. Cape Town in particular has a long history of enticing travellers, showing them a good time and emptying their wallets. However, there are also plenty of excellent-value options, both in accommodation and dining, that won't break your budget. Some ways to save include the following:

- avoid travelling during school-holiday periods
- always ask about midweek or weekend discounts, as well as reduced rates for children
- take advantage of self-catering facilities and camping grounds
- save your receipts to reclaim your value-added tax (VAT; see p615)
- focus on just one or two areas of the country, and don't try to cover too much distance
- use public transport, or try to travel in a group to share car-rental costs
- book car rentals well in advance for better deals
- book domestic air tickets online; savings can be as high as 50% of published fares

Although accommodation in South Africa isn't quite as full or expensive during other school holidays as during the main December–January break, prices still rise and reservations are recommended. See p612 for holiday periods.

HOW MUCH?

Bottle of wine R60–70

Car hire per day R300

Kilo of mangoes R6

Kruger National Park entry per person R120

Surfboard R1500

See also Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.

See Climate Charts (p607) for more information.

TOP TENS

Architectural Highlights

South Africa's history is written in its architecture. Hunt out these landmarks, and watch the story unfold before you.

- Regina Mundi Church in Soweto (p424)
- Cape Dutch houses along Church St in Tulbagh (p197)
- Robben Island prison, where Mandela was incarcerated (p107)
- Alayam Hindu Temple in Durban (p310)
- Owal Mosque and Cape Town's Bo-Kaap area (p104)
- Small, brightly coloured Xhosa houses in the villages inland from the Wild Coast (p282)
- Johannesburg's Constitutional Court (p404)
- Pretoria's Church Sq (p433) and Voortrekker Monument (p432)
- Linton Panel in Cape Town's South African Museum (p113)
- Freedom Park (p432)

Classic Books

The anti-apartheid struggle produced an unsurpassed collection of literature – essential reading to get into the heart of the country.

- *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela
- *The Marabi Dance* by Modikwe Dikobe
- *My Traitor's Heart* by Rian Malan
- *A Burning Hunger: One Family's Struggle Against Apartheid* by Lynda Schuster
- *Singing Away the Hunger: Stories of a Life in Lesotho* by Mpho 'M'atsepo Nthunya
- *The Mind of South Africa* by Allister Sparks
- *Let My People Go* by Albert Luthuli
- *The Heart of Redness* by Zakes Mda
- *Cry, The Beloved Country* by Alan Paton
- *The Lying Days* by Nadine Gordimer

Great Films

Watch some of these films for a mesmerising and often challenging introduction to South Africa.

- *Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony* (Lee Hirsch, 2003)
- *U-Carmen eKhayalitsha* (Mark Dornford-May, 2004)
- *Drum* (Zola Maseko, 2005)
- *Zulu Love Letter* (Ramadan Suleman, 2004)
- *Sarafina!* (Darrell Roodt, 1992)
- *Boy Called Twist* (Timothy Greene, 2004)
- *Mapantsula* (Oliver Schmitz, 1988)
- *In My Country* (John Boorman, 2005)
- *A World Apart* (Chris Menges, 1988)
- *Friends* (Elaine Proctor, 1993)

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- binoculars for wildlife-watching and a zoom lens for taking great wildlife shots
- an appetite for biltong, boerewors and mealie pap (see p92)
- making room in your schedule to visit at least one township
- your yellow-fever vaccination card, if you've been travelling elsewhere in Southern Africa
- reading the Malaria section of the Health chapter (p647) in this book if you'll be travelling in malarial areas
- a torch (flashlight) and warm, waterproof clothing for those cold, black, starry nights in the Lesotho highlands
- a sleeping bag if you're planning on camping
- reading a few of the books listed (opposite, or bringing one along for long bus rides).

Power Lines: Two Years on South Africa's Borders by Jason Carter chronicles a Peace Corps' volunteer's perspectives on the still-deep divisions between white and black South Africa.

While not travel literature, Nelson Mandela's superb and inspirational autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, is one of the best ways to prepare for a South Africa trip. To pick up where Mandela leaves off, try the less profound but insightful *Rainbow Diary: A Journey in the New South Africa* by John Malathronas. *After the Dance: Travels in a Democratic South Africa* by David Robbins is another intriguing chronicle of travels through post-apartheid South Africa.

For a dated but still relevant perspective, look for *South from the Limpopo: Travels through South Africa*, in which inveterate Irish writer Dervla Murphy details her bicycle journey through the rainbow nation before, during and after the 1994 elections.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Government of Swaziland (www.gov.sz) The Swazi government's homepage.

Lesotho Government Online (www.lesotho.gov.ls) The Lesotho government's homepage.

Linx Africa (www.linx.co.za) Links to all things South African, including dozens of hiking and biking trails.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) South Africa travel tips and the Thorn Tree bulletin board.

Mail & Guardian Online (www.mg.co.za) South Africa news.

See Lesotho (www.seelesotho.com) Background and cultural information.

South Africa Info (www.safica.info) South Africa's info-packed official gateway.

South African National Parks (www.parks-sa.co.za) The best place to start your safari.

Times of Swaziland (www.times.co.sz) Local Swazi news.

See p618 for regional tourism websites.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

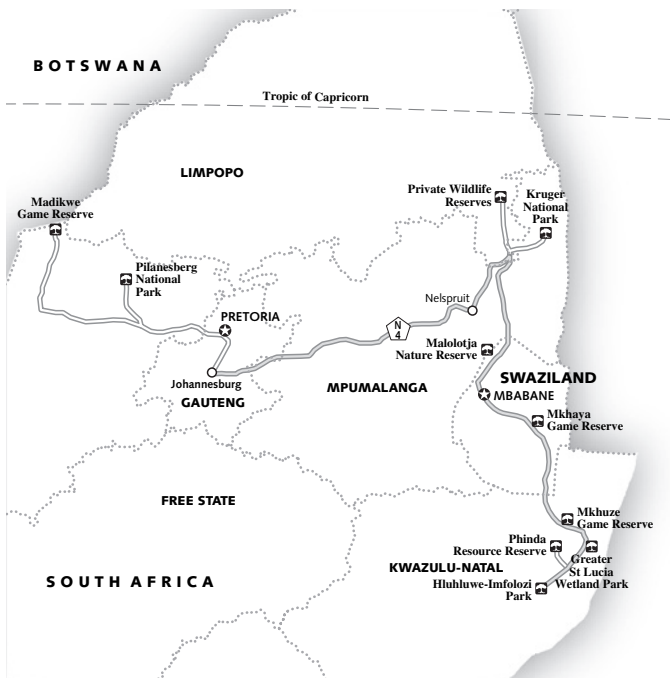
SAFARI SPECIAL One to Two Weeks / Johannesburg to KwaZulu-Natal

South Africa is a superb safari destination, and with as little as a week or two, it's possible to get in a good sampling. Using **Johannesburg** (p396) as a gateway, head east via **Nelspruit** (p457) to South Africa's safari showpiece, **Kruger National Park** (p466). The wildlife here and in the neighbouring **private wildlife reserves** (p485) will hold you captivated for at least several days. If time is tight, you can get a good taste of things at **Madikwe Game Reserve** (p518) or **Pilanesberg National Park** (p516), both easily reached from Johannesburg.

From Kruger, continue south into Swaziland, where you can spend a few days hiking through the grasslands and forests of **Malolotja Nature Reserve** (p590) before heading on via **Mbabane** (p578) to the wildlife-rich **Mkhaya Game Reserve** (p594), which is noted in particular for its black rhinos. From here, continue south into KwaZulu-Natal, where a collection of top-notch wildlife-watching areas awaits you. These include **Mkhuze Game Reserve** (p345) and the evocative **Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park** (p335), with its network of walking trails. Nearby are the upmarket **Phinda Resource Reserve** (p346), and the estuaries and waterways of the **Greater St Lucia Wetlands Park** (p339).

With 10 days, you can see a good sampling of the wildlife along this 1600km-plus route.

Short on time? Concentrate on just one or two parks. With three weeks or more you'll be able to get in Kruger and Swaziland plus several of KwaZulu-Natal's parks as well. Roads are good throughout, but expect some gravel and dirt roads in the parks.



CAPE & COAST

Two Weeks / Cape Town to Plettenberg Bay

Beautiful natural scenery, excellent infrastructure and an array of amenities make this the South Africa of the tourist brochures. The loop can be done by public transport, but is better by car to take advantage of the many possibilities for detours.

After a few days in **Cape Town** (p100), including a stay at a township B&B, tear yourself away from this wonderful city and head to the fertile valleys of the Winelands, with a night or two in **Stellenbosch** (p170) or **Franschhoek** (p178). From here, continue east to the artists' enclave of **Montagu** (p203), and then via the scenic Route 62 through the Little Karoo to **Oudtshoorn** (p207), South Africa's ostrich capital. Possible detours along the way include to **Hermanus** (p188) for whale-watching, if the season is right; **Cape Agulhas** (p192) for the thrill of standing at Africa's southernmost point; or **De Hoop Nature Reserve** (p193).

Oudtshoorn makes a good springboard for heading into the Karoo via the impressive **Swartberg Pass** (p228) and on to charming **Prince Albert** (p228), from where it's a straight shot on the N1 back to Cape Town. Alternatively, make your way south, joining the N2 along the Garden Route, near **Knysna** (p219), with its sylvan setting, and **Plettenberg Bay** (p225), a relaxed beachside resort town. Return to Cape Town via Oudtshoorn and the Route 62, or directly, along the N2.

This delightful itinerary will take you 1000km on good roads through some of the most beautiful country in Southern Africa. You could whizz along in about 10 days, or relax along the way and stretch things out to three weeks or more.



GRAND CIRCUIT

Two Months / Cape Town to Cape Town

Starting in **Cape Town** (p100), head eastwards, following Route 62, the Garden Route or bits of both to Eastern Cape. If entering Eastern Cape from Prince Albert via the Karoo, don't miss **Graaff-Reinet** (p266) with its charming architecture, striking setting and the nearby **Karoo Nature Reserve** (p270). Entering Eastern Cape via the coast, recommended stops include **Tsitsikamma National Park** (p242) and **Addo Elephant National Park** (p255). Moving eastwards, **Amathole** (p273) is well worth exploration, as is the **Wild Coast** (p282), before **Durban** (p302). From here, it's in, up and over the **Sani Pass** (p565) for a Lesotho detour.

Head back to KwaZulu-Natal for as much time as possible enjoying the parks, including **Mkhuze Game Reserve** (p345), **Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park** (p335) and the **Greater St Lucia Wetland Park** (p339). **Sodwana Bay** (p342) is an amenable spot for relaxing before moving on to **Swaziland** (p574), **Kruger National Park** (p466) and then to **Johannesburg** (p396) and **Pretoria** (p427). Possible stops en route include **Sabie** (p449) and **Pilgrim's Rest** (p451).

Time and inclination permitting, detour northwards into Limpopo, for a visit to **Mapungubwe National Park** (p500) or to the **Soutpansberg** (p497) region. Otherwise, continue from Jo'burg southwest to **Kimberley** (p526), gateway to South Africa's vast northwest, detouring to **Clarens** (p387) and the eastern **Free State** (p383) en route. Explore the **Kalahari** (p533), including **Augrabies Falls National Park** (p541), before swinging down towards **Namaqualand** (p543). Finish up by relaxing in the **Winelands** (p169) and then on to Cape Town.

Even if you can't squeeze everything in on this 5000km-plus journey, you'll undoubtedly come away with an excellent overview of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. Six weeks (more via public transport) is the bare minimum, but allow at least two months to follow detours and to get into the region's pulse.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

THE WILD NORTHWEST

Four to Six Weeks / Cape Town to Cape Town

South Africa's northwestern reaches, with their all-pervasive sense of space, make an excellent alternative to the coast. Starting in **Cape Town** (p100), head northwards via **Citrusdal** (p236), **Clanwilliam** (p237), **Vanrhynsdorp** (p526) and the Hantam Karoo town of **Calvinia** (p548), enjoying the fine views en route. Continue to **Namaqualand** (p543) to catch the spring flowers before exploring the rugged and remote **Richtersveld National Park** (p547), with its mountainous desert landscapes, ravines and gorges. Plan on four days here to take advantage of the hiking. From Richtersveld, make your way via **Upington** (p534) to **Augrabies Falls National Park** (p541), which merits three days for hiking, rafting and canoeing. Upington itself is worth a stop, as is **Witsand Nature Reserve** (p537), where the wind sings over the dunes. Continue northwards for at least four days in **Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park** (p537). Make your way back to 'civilisation' via **Kuruman** (p534) – an unassuming but feisty frontier town – and the diamond capital of **Kimberley** (p526) with its Anglo-Boer battlefields and atmospheric pubs. From here, the route turns south along the N12 and the N1 through the Karoo, with possible stops including **Karoo National Park** (p230) and **Matjiesfontein** (p229), before entering the Winelands around **Franschhoek** (p178) and finishing in Cape Town. An alternative route from Kimberley: continue eastwards to **Bloemfontein** (p375), with its rich history and surprisingly good nightlife, and on to **Johannesburg** (p396).



After travelling about 2500km through South Africa's vast, open northwest, settling back into an urban lifestyle won't be easy. Consider a 4WD for Kgalagadi, Richtersveld and Augrabies Falls parks, and allow six weeks to include more hiking or rafting.

TRADITIONAL TRAILS

One Month / Swaziland to Johannesburg

For an introduction to traditional culture, there's no better place to start than **Swaziland** (p574). If possible, time your visit to be there for the annual **Umdlanga (Reed) Dance** (p583) or the equally colourful **Incwala** (p583), or enter the country via **Matsamo Cultural Village** (p460). Swaziland's crafts are top-notch and craft shopping is another way to step into the culture. Selection is especially good in the **Malkerns Valley** (p587) and in the **Ezulwini Valley** (p585).

From Swaziland, head south into the Zulu heartland of KwaZulu-Natal. In **Zululand** (p328), you'll find many traditional villages, and with luck will be able to catch a **Zulu festival** (p332). Continue via **Durban** (p302) to **Lesotho** (p550), where a **pony trek** (p568) or a hike through Basotho villages is an excellent way to get acquainted with local life and culture. Crafts here are also well worth seeking out. **Teyateyaneng** (p560) is the unofficial craft centre, known especially for its tapestries. Before leaving Lesotho, don't miss sampling some traditional brew – watch for the white and yellow flags hanging in villages. From Lesotho, make your way south into the areas inland from the **Wild Coast** (p282), where the rolling hills are dotted with Xhosa villages. Make your way back to Durban – perhaps enjoying some **Indian culture** (p310) en route – before finishing in **Johannesburg** (p396). A possible detour from Johannesburg: head north into Limpopo to acquaint yourself with the **Ndebele** (p492) and **Venda** (p501) people.

This 3000km-plus loop takes in some of Southern Africa's most colourful corners, and is an ideal antidote to the blandness of Western culture. It's easy to cover the distance in three weeks, but worth allowing more time. In general, the rougher the road, the more vibrant the local traditions.



TAILORED TRIPS

BODY & SOUL REJUVENATION

South Africa is one of the continent's most urbanised countries, but the rejuvenating power of the African bush is never far away. The vast **Karoo** (p227) is one of the best places to experience this, with its stark landscapes and striking light patterns. The beautiful town of **Graaff-Reinet** (p266) makes an excellent starting point. **Namaqualand's** (p543) rugged expanses are also stunning, especially in springtime when the plains are carpeted with wildflowers.

Along the coast, head to the wilds of **Maputaland** (p338), where you'll be greeted at sunrise with bird calls echoing over the waterways. At nearby **Mkhuze Game Reserve** (p345), sit by a pan at dawn, listening to the sounds of the bush and watching the wildlife parade before you.

The magical mountain village of **Hogsback** (p274) is tamer, but no less enticing. Its relaxing setting and organic-foods-based cuisine are ideal for recharging. Want to go upscale? Book a few days at the **Santé Wellness Centre** (p183) outside **Paarl** (p182).

For something loftier, take in the scene from a perch at the edge of the Drakensberg Escarpment in the **Central Berg** (p351), listening to the wind in the ravines. Rounding out the picture is the magnificent **Kalahari** (p533), with its shifting red and white sands, unforgettable sunsets and endless expanses punctuated by prehistoric vegetation. Then journey to the **Overberg** (p186) and, to finish things up, stand at **Cape Agulhas** (p192) under spray from the crashing seas, and revel in being at Africa's southern tip.



HIKER'S CHOICE

South Africa's hiking trails – ranging from several hours to several days – are a superb way to experience the country's stunning topography. Hardcore hikers should head to the Eastern Cape, where **Tsitsikamma National Park** (p242) and the excellent **Amathole Trail** (p273) offer outstanding views and challenging terrain.

In Western Cape, the beautiful **Boesmansklouf Hiking Trail** (p201) is well worth exploration, as is **Cederberg Wilderness Area** (p235), with its sandstone formations and San rock paintings.

In the Drakensberg, try **Royal Natal National Park** (p349), with its dramatic cliffs and valleys, **Golden Gate Highlands National Park** (p385), with beautifully coloured sandstone outcrops and plenty of animals, and **Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve** (p453), with wide vistas and sheer drop-offs. The **Giant's Cup Trail** (p356) from Sani Pass to Bushman's Nek is another highlight. In the eastern lowlands, the wilderness trails in **Kruger National Park** (p471) offer a fine opportunity to really get into the bush.



For something a bit tamer, try the Cape Peninsula, where the **Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve** (p164) offers unsurpassed walking against a backdrop of wind-whipped sea and spray. Table Mountain itself is highly rewarding, and ideally explored on the three-day **Table Mountain Trail** (p107) over its top.

And of course there is **Lesotho** (p550) – a country seemingly created with hiking in mind – where you can set off into the hills and walk at will. Swaziland's **Malolotja Nature Reserve** (p590) is another ideal walking destination, with a wonderful wilderness atmosphere and intriguing flora and birdlife.

THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

Following in the footsteps of Nelson Mandela and other freedom fighters provides an excellent overview of recent South African history. There are far too many names and sites to list here, but an essential introduction is **Robben Island** (p107), where Mandela was incarcerated for so long, together with Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) founder Robert Sobukwe. Nearby in Paarl is **Victor Verster Prison** (now known as Drakenstein Prison, p183), from where Mandela walked to freedom.

The Eastern Cape was the birthplace of some of the anti-apartheid struggle's most famous figures, including Sobukwe, whose house in Graaff-Reinet's Umasizakhe township can be visited; Oliver Tambo (born in Pondoland); Govan Mbeki; Walter Sisulu; Chris Hani; and of course Mandela. Eastern Cape also has the moving **Mandela Museum** (p293); **Qunu** (Mandela's boyhood home and current residence, p292); tiny **Mveso village** (his birthplace, p292); plus the **University of Fort Hare** (p274) near Alice, where Mandela, Sobukwe, Tambo, Hani, Steve Biko and many others studied. Just outside King William's Town is Ginsberg cemetery, with **Steve Biko's gravesite** (p274).

From Eastern Cape, head to **Soweto** (p420), passing near Sharpeville, site of the Sharpeville Massacre, en route. It was in Soweto that the African National Congress (ANC) resistance to apartheid reached its fullest voice. The ANC's Freedom Charter was declared in Soweto's Kliptown (Freedom) Square, and the Soweto Uprising was ignited here (at Orlando West Secondary School on Vilikazi St). It was also to Soweto that Mandela and Sisulu returned after being released from prison, and where many other ANC activists lived. The excellent **Hector Pieterse Museum** (p423) gives a good overview of the history of the independence struggle, plus insights into life in Soweto. Nearby is **Regina Mundi Church** (p424), a central rallying point in the apartheid struggle and, later, the site of several Truth and Reconciliation Committee hearings.



In **Johannesburg** (p396), you can see the law office Mandela shared with Oliver Tambo (on Fox St, just off Ghandi Square), **City Hall** (p401), and various jails, including the notorious **Old Fort** (p404). **Museum Africa** (p401) is a worthwhile stop for its exhibit on the infamous 1956–61 Treason Trials, in which Mandela testified. It was in Pretoria's **Palace of Justice** (p433) that the Rivonia Trial was held in which Mandela, Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and five others were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Snapshot

Almost a decade and a half has passed since the official dismantling of apartheid, and South Africa is well on its way. The country's third democratic elections in 2004 passed with barely a ripple, delivering the expected massive majority to the African National Congress (ANC). The government's project for changing colonial-era place names is proceeding apace, notwithstanding vociferous objections to some of the more controversial proposals. And history is literally being rewritten as school curricula and textbooks are continually revised to include the full history of life in the region. The initial shock of apartheid-era horrors, as revealed during the 1996–98 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Hearings, has receded into the background; anti-retroviral drugs are becoming increasingly available for the country's millions of AIDS sufferers; and crime rates, while still shockingly high, are showing signs of finally beginning to fall.

Yet in many ways the real work of nation building is only now beginning. While the political violence that was threatening to engulf the country in the early 1990s has for the most part disappeared, racial and cultural divisions remain entrenched. Monuments, museums and other cultural heritage sites giving tribute to black South Africans and other previously excluded groups have been springing up across the country and filling a long vacant gap. Yet many have served to respark old tensions, and debate continues on all sides about which version of history is the 'real' one.

Perhaps the biggest attention grabber in South Africa's ongoing struggle to define itself as a nation has been Freedom Park – a multimillion dollar venture on the outskirts of Pretoria that is intended to give a sweeping overview of South African history. When finished, it will span the millennia from humankind's earliest beginnings up to the present, including a memorial to apartheid-era freedom fighters. The park, which has been lauded by President Mbeki as the country's most important national monument, is set directly opposite the Voortrekker Monument – for years an icon for most Afrikaners and a despised symbol of colonial-era injustices for many other South Africans.

What's the next step? While almost all South Africans agree that things are better than before, no one has quite been able to agree on which way forward will best balance out the diversity that is the country's greatest asset, as well as its biggest challenge. There has been talk of building a road joining Freedom Park and the Voortrekker Monument. If this road ultimately comes to be seen by those on all sides as a symbol of a united path into the future, then it will have truly captured the emerging spirit of the new South Africa and the country will be well on its way to rebuilding itself as a 'rainbow nation'.

For more on what's happening in Lesotho see p553, and in Swaziland see p577.

FAST FACTS: SOUTH AFRICA

Population: 46.9 million

Area: 1.2 million sq km

Unemployment: 26.7%

HIV/AIDS prevalence rate: 29.5%

Official languages: 11
(English, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Xhosa, Zulu, Sepedi, Sotho, Setswana, Swati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga)

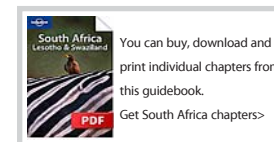
Literacy rate: 86.4%
(87% for males and 85.7% for females)

National flower: King Protea (*Protea cynaroides*)

Elephants in Kruger National Park: 12,467
(2005 census)

Age of South Africa's wine industry: almost 325 years – the oldest anywhere outside Europe

World's largest diamond: 3106.75 carats uncut, and mined in South Africa in 1905



The Authors



MARY FITZPATRICK

Coordinating Author

Mary first glimpsed the Johannesburg skyline over a decade ago, standing on a rise east of the city. Since then, she's returned to South Africa dozens of times, including numerous forays into Lesotho and Swaziland. Among her most cherished moments: witnessing South Africa's first multiracial elections; getting driven out of Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve in a police paddy wagon on Christmas Eve; hiking in Lesotho; and being on the receiving end of the wonderful hospitality of residents of the region. She works as a full-time travel writer from her home base in Cairo – on the northern end of the African continent, but at least in the same time zone as South Africa.

My Favourite Trip

Time permitting, I'd try to fit as many of the following into my next Southern Africa journey: hiking at Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve (p164); trekking around the Lesotho highlands (p564) near Oxbow; spending an afternoon perched above one of the valleys of the Golden Gate Highlands National Park (p385), taking in the silence and the scenery; a visit to Kgalagadi Transfrontier park (p537); and several weeks in KwaZulu-Natal's parks, especially Mkhuzi Game Reserve (p345) and Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park (p335). Johannesburg (p396) is my favourite city, and Swaziland (p574) the most enjoyable detour.



KATE ARMSTRONG

KwaZulu-Natal, Lesotho, Swaziland

Kate was bitten by the African bug when she lived and worked in Mozambique, and on her subsequent travels around East Africa. She jumped at the chance to explore new territory for this Lonely Planet edition. While she successfully avoided malarial mosquitoes, she was less able to escape an obsession with Zulu culture, giraffes and the overwhelming hospitality of the local people (not to mention several flat tyres along the way). When Kate's not eating, hiking and dancing her way around parts of Africa, Europe and South America, her itchy feet are grounded in Sydney where she writes travel articles and children's educational books.

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