

Lesotho

Lesotho (le-soo-too) is called Southern Africa's 'kingdom in the sky' for good reason. This stunningly beautiful, mountainous country is nestled island-like in the middle of South Africa and it is a fascinating travel detour from its larger neighbour. The country offers superb mountain scenery in forbidding terrain, a proud traditional people, endless hiking trails, and the chance to explore remote areas on Basotho ponies.

The 'lowland' areas (all of which are still above 1000m) offer some craft shopping and dinosaur footsteps, while the highlands in the northeast and centre feature towering peaks (over 3000m) and verdant valleys.

Lesotho came into being during the early 19th century, when both the *difaqane* (forced migration) and Boer incursions into the hinterlands were at their height. Under the leadership of the legendary king Moshoeshoe the Great, the Basotho people sought sanctuary and strategic advantage amid the forbidding terrain of the Drakensberg and Maluti Ranges. The small nation they forged continues to be an intriguing anomaly in a sea of modernity.

Getting around is reasonably easy – ordinary hire cars will get you to most places; public transport is extensive, albeit slow. Hiking or pony trekking from village to village are the best ways of exploring.

FAST FACTS

- **Area:** 30,355 sq km
- **Capital:** Maseru
- **Country code:** ☎ 266
- **Famous for:** Ponies, royalty, dams, Basotho hats and blankets
- **Languages:** South Sotho, English
- **Money:** Loti (plural maloti)
- **Phrases:** *khotso* (hello, or literally 'peace'); *kea legoha* (thank you)
- **Population:** 2.1 million



HOW MUCH?

- **Traditional dance/cultural group** US\$4.50-22
- **Internet** US\$0.10-0.20 per minute
- **Coffee** US\$0.35-1.20
- **Banana** US\$0.15
- **Genuine (wool) Basotho blanket** US\$60

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** \$0.90
- **1L bottled water** US\$0.80-1
- **Bottle of beer** US\$1
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US\$4.50-9
- **Bag of fat cakes (fried savoury donuts)** US\$0.30

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Malealea** (p149) Pony trekking through the rugged interior with breathtaking scenery.
- **Sani Top** (p147) Absorbing the awesome vistas from Sani Pass and hiking the challenging wilderness hikes of the northern highlands.
- **Ts'ehlanyane National Park** (p146) Revelling in the splendid isolation of this stunning park.
- **Off the beaten track** (p148) Hiking from Semonkong in the beautiful Thaba Putsoa mountains to the Ketane Falls.

ITINERARIES

- **One week** From **Maseru** (p140), head south to **Morija** (p149) where you'll find Morija Museum & Archives, a great museum with Basotho culture displays. Continue to **Malealea** (p149) or **Semonkong** (p148) – the 'gems' of Lesotho – to go pony trekking. You may be able to squeeze in a trip to **Quthing** (Moyeni; p150) to check out the 180-million-year-old dinosaur footprints.
- **Two weeks** Visit **Teyateyaneng** (p145), north of Maseru, the craft centre of Lesotho, or slightly further north, **Bokong Nature Reserve** (p146). Get a taste of the mountainous 'lowlands' by heading to **Morija** (p149), **Malealea** (p149) or **Semonkong** (p148), and **Quthing** (p150). Continue northeast on

to the remote **Sehlabathebe National Park** (p147) or **Mt Moorosi** (p151).

- **One month** Head northeast to **Teyateyaneng** (p145) and **Butha-Butha** (p146), with a side trip to the beautiful **Bokong Nature Reserve** (p146) or **Ts'ehlanyane National Park** (p146). Then take in some of the country's most impressive scenery on a circuit to **Mokhotlong** (p147) and up to the magnificent **Sani Top** (p147). Return to Maseru via **Thaba-Tseka** (p146) and the **Katse Dam** (p145), or via the **Mohale Dam** (p144) and **Roma** (p144), before heading east to **Morija** (p149) and following the two-week itinerary. Note: unfortunately it's difficult to circumnavigate the country – the road between Sehlabathebe in the east and Sehonghong in the northeast requires a 4WD.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Clear, cold winters, with frosts and snow (and unpredictable changes) in the highlands, await you in Lesotho, so pack warm clothing. During summertime (late November to March), dramatic thunderstorms are common, as are all-enveloping clouds of thick mist, and roads can be affected by flooding rivers. Temperatures at this time can rise to over 30°C in the valleys, though it's usually much cooler in the mountains, even dropping below freezing. Most of Lesotho's rain falls between October and April. Throughout the year, the weather is notoriously changeable.

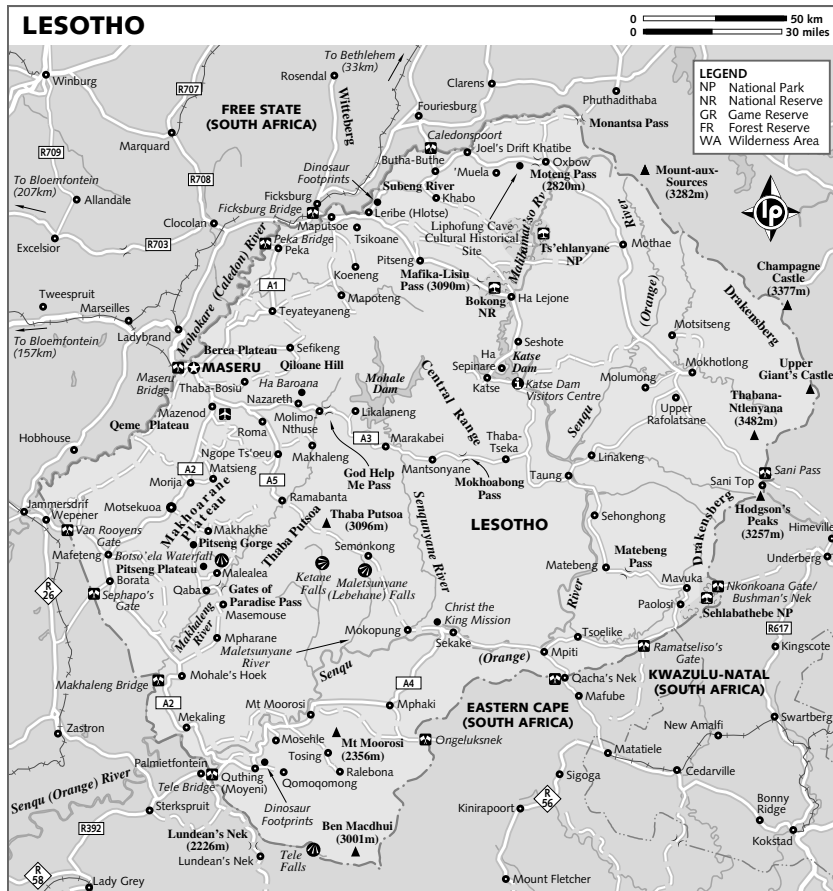
Visits are possible at any time, with spring and autumn optimal.

HISTORY

Lesotho was settled by Sotho peoples as late as the 16th century. The Khoisan, and possibly some Nguni people, lived among them, intermarrying and mingling their languages.

The early society was made up of small chiefdoms. Cattle and cultivation were the economy's mainstays. Their products were traded for iron from the northeast of South Africa.

By the early 19th century white traders were on the scene, exchanging beads for cattle. They were soon followed by the Voortrekkers (Boer pioneers) and pressure on Sotho grazing lands grew. Even without white encroachment, Sotho society had to accept that it had expanded as far as it could and would have to adapt to living in a finite territory. On top of this came the disaster of the *difaqane* (forced migration; see p41).



The rapid consolidation and expansion of the Zulu state under the leadership of Shaka (see p41), and later Dingaan, resulted in a chain reaction of turmoil throughout the whole of Southern Africa. That the loosely organised Southern Sotho society survived this period was largely due to the abilities of Moshoeshe (pronounced *mo-shesh*) the Great.

Moshoeshe the Great

Moshoeshe began as a leader of a small village and in around 1820 he led his villagers to Butha-Buthe (Place of Lying Down). From this mountain stronghold his people survived the first battles of the *difaqane* and in 1824 Moshoeshe began his policy of assisting

refugees who helped in his defence. Later in the same year he moved his people to Thaba-Bosiu (Mountain at Night), a mountain top that was even easier to defend.

From Thaba-Bosiu, Moshoeshe played a patient game of placating the stronger local rulers and granting protection – as well as land and cattle – to refugees. These people were to form Basotholand, which, by the time of Moshoeshe's death in 1870, had a population of more than 150,000.

The welcome Moshoeshe gave to missionaries, and his ability to take their advice without being dominated by them, was another factor in Basotholand's emergence and survival. The first missionaries arrived in 1833 from the Paris Evangelical Missionary

Society. In return for a degree of Christianisation of Sotho customs, the missionaries were disposed to defend the rights of 'their' Basotho against the new threat – British and Boer expansion.

The Boers had crossed the Orange River in the 1830s, and by 1843 Moshoeshe was sufficiently concerned by their numbers to ally himself with the British Cape government. The British Resident, installed in Basotholand as a condition of the treaties, decided Moshoeshe was too powerful and engineered an unsuccessful attack on his kingdom.

In 1854 the British withdrew from the area, having fixed the boundaries of Basotholand. The Boers pressed their claims on the land, and increasing tension led to the Free State-Basotho Wars of 1858 and 1865. After success in the first war, Moshoeshe was forced in the second to sign away much of his western lowlands.

Moshoeshe again called on British assistance in 1868, this time on the imperial government in London. A high commission adjudicated the dispute and the result was the loss of more Basotho land. It was obvious that no treaty between Boers and Basotho would hold for long. Continual war between the Free State and Basotholand was not good for British interests, so the British annexed Basotholand and handed it to the Cape Colony to run in 1871.

After Moshoeshe the Great

The year after Moshoeshe the Great's death, squabbles over succession divided the country. The Cape government exploited this and reduced the powers of chiefs, limiting them to their individual areas.

The Gun War of 1880 began as a protest against the Cape government's refusal to allow the Basotho to own firearms, but it quickly became a battle between the rebel chiefs on one side and the government and collaborating chiefs on the other. The war ended in a stalemate with the Cape government being discredited.

A shaky peace followed until another war appeared imminent, and in 1884 the British government again took direct control of Basotholand. The imperial government decided to back strong local leaders rather than rule through its own officers, which helped to stabilise the country. One unexpected benefit of direct British rule was that when the Union

of South Africa was created, Basotholand was classified as a British Protectorate and was not included in the Union.

Home Rule & Independence

In 1910 the advisory Basotholand National Council was formed from members nominated by the chiefs. After decades of allegations of corruption and favouritism, reforms in the 1940s introduced some democratic processes into council appointments.

In the mid-1950s the council requested internal self-government from the British. In 1960 a new constitution was in place and elections were held for a Legislative Council.

Meanwhile, political parties had formed, including the Basotholand Congress Party (BCP), similar to South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), and the Basotholand National Party (BNP), a conservative party headed by Chief Leabua Jonathan.

The BCP won the 1960 elections, then demanded, and won, a new constitution that paved the way to full independence from Britain in 1966. However, after the 1965 elections the BCP lost power to the BNP, and Chief Jonathan became the first prime minister of the new Kingdom of Lesotho. During the election campaign the BNP promised cooperation with the South African apartheid regime and in turn received massive support from it.

As most of the civil service was still loyal to the BCP, Jonathan did not have an easy time. Stripping King Moshoeshe II of the few powers that the new constitution had left him did not endear Jonathan's government to the people, and the BCP won the 1970 election.

Jonathan responded to the election results by suspending the constitution, arresting and expelling the king, and banning opposition parties. The king was eventually allowed to return from exile in Holland, and Jonathan attempted to form a government of national reconciliation. This ploy was partly successful, but some BCP members, including the leader Ntsu Mokhehle, resisted and attempted to stage a coup in 1974. The coup failed miserably and resulted in the death of many BCP supporters and the jailing or exile of the BCP leadership.

Jonathan changed tack in his attitude to South Africa, calling for the return of land in the Orange Free State that had been stolen from the original Basotholand, and, more seriously from the South African point of

view, criticising apartheid, allegedly offering refuge to ANC guerrillas, and flirting with Cuba. Relations soured; South Africa closed Lesotho's borders, strangling the country.

The Lesotho military took action. Jonathan was deposed in 1986 and the king was restored as head of state. This was a popular move, but eventually agitation for democratic reform rose again. In 1990 King Moshoeshoe II was deposed by the army in favour of his son, Prince Mohato Bereng Seesia (Letsie III). Elections in 1993 resulted in the return of the BCP.

The BCP was split between those who wanted Prime Minister Ntsu Mokhehle to remain as leader and those who didn't. Mokhehle formed the breakaway Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) party and continued to govern.

In 1995 Letsie III abdicated in favour of his father and, five years after being deposed, Moshoeshoe II was reinstated. He restored calm to Lesotho after a year of unrest. Tragically, less than a year later he was killed when his 4WD plunged over a cliff in the Maluti Mountains. Letsie III was again made the king.

Elections, Invasion & Peace

Elections were held in 1998 amid accusations of widespread cheating by the LCD, which won with a landslide. Tensions between the public service and the government became acute, and the military was also divided. Meanwhile, Mokhehle handed over to his successor Pakalitha Mosisili.

Following months of protests, the government realised it was losing control and in September 1998 called on the Southern Afri-

can Development Community (SADC) treaty partners, Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe, to help restore order. Troops, mainly South African, invaded the kingdom.

Rebel elements of the Lesotho army put up a strong resistance and there was a short burst of heavy fighting in Maseru, where many shops and other businesses were looted and torched.

The government agreed to call new elections, but the political situation remained tense and political wrangling delayed the elections until May 2002. The LCD won again and Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili began a second five-year term, which has until now been peaceful.

Lesotho Today

The elections of 2007 may bring challenges of another kind. Questions being considered are whether to back Mosisili for a third term, whether corruption is being tackled vigorously enough, and whether the grass roots is being neglected in favour of a more gentrified party.

Meanwhile, Lesotho ranks among the region's poorer countries, and has few natural resources other than water and gem diamonds. During the last century, Lesotho's main export was labour – approximately 60% of males worked mainly in mining in South Africa. In the late 1990s, the restructuring of the South African gold-mining industry, mechanisation and the closure of some mines resulted in huge job losses. Meanwhile, the Lesotho economy – under transformation due to a rapid growth of the textile industry – also collapsed due to stiff competition from China and changes to international agreements.

FAMINE IN LESOTHO

Lesotho, particularly rural Lesotho, is extremely vulnerable to food shortages; the mountain kingdom's annual cereal production is declining because of unpredictable weather, long-term soil erosion and the impact of HIV/AIDS. On top of this, the country faces trade constraints and declining employment opportunities, leaving many vulnerable to food insecurity. Subsistence farming used to be the main food source for most people, but today many rent out their land for others to cultivate, thereby losing their ability to grow their own food. Per capita agricultural production in real terms has been falling for decades, and today, tens of thousands of the most vulnerable people are relying on external food aid. The World Food Programme estimates that 26% of the population is malnourished. Many people in the country's lowlands do not have access to water for domestic use, and travel long distances each day to fetch it, an irony given that the Lesotho Highlands Water Project supplies South Africa with millions of cubic metres of water each year (see the boxed text, p145).

THE CULTURE

The National Psyche

Pride is at the core of the Basotho people, not surprisingly given the incredible history of their nation. The Basotho are remarkably free of the effects of apartheid and warmly welcome travellers to their kingdom. Like their African neighbours, they have a wonderfully carefree attitude to time. The traditional class system has altered – herding, once a revered position, is done by the poorest boys (many families are said to sell their sons to wealthy families to be herders), although the population continues to rely on and respect its community chiefs. The Basotho blanket, worn proudly by many in the rural areas, reflects one's status in the community, according to the quality, material and design of the blanket itself.

Daily Life

Traditional culture, which is still strong, consists largely of the customs, rites and superstitions with which the Basotho explain and enrich their lives. Music also plays an important part in their lives (see right).

Traditional medicine mixes rites and customs with a *sangoma* (witchdoctor), who develop their own charms and rituals. The Basotho are traditionally buried in a sitting position, facing the rising sun – ready to leap up when called.

Poverty and death is ever-present in Lesotho. Life for most people is harsh, with the majority determinedly trying to eke out a living on the land or subsistence agriculture, especially livestock; unemployment currently stands at about 45%. The spectre of AIDS is high – the infection rate (adult prevalence) is estimated at a massive 30%.

Most Lesotho in rural communities live in rondavels, round huts with mud walls (often decorated) and thatched roofs.

Population

The citizens of Lesotho are known as the Basotho people. Most are Southern Sotho and most speak South Sotho. The melding of the Basotho nation was largely the result of Moshoeshoe the Great's 19th-century military and diplomatic triumphs; many diverse subgroups and peoples have somehow merged into a homogeneous society. Maseru, with a population of 175,000, is the largest town.

RELIGION

Around 80% of the population is believed to be Christian (mainly Roman Catholic, Anglican and Episcopal). The remaining 20% live by traditional Basotho beliefs. There are many churches throughout the country, many of which were (or continue to be) built by missionaries (see p136).

ARTS & CRAFTS

Architecture

Traditional Basotho huts, also known as rondavels, are one-room huts that serve as the living area, kitchen and bedroom. Most rondavels are made of stone (plastered over with mud) and have thatched roofs. Many are exquisitely decorated with murals, often imbued with symbols and meaning, such as visual prayers for rain. For further information, you might like to check out *African Painted Houses* by Gary N Van Wyk (1998).

Music

Music and dance are important components of ceremony and everyday life. There are various musical instruments, from the *lekolulo* (a flutelike instrument played by herd boys), to the *thomo* (a stringed instrument played by women) and the *setolo-tolo* (a stringed instrument played with the mouth, by men). For more information see p52.

Tapestry Weavings

Tapestry and rug weaving is practised in many regions of Lesotho and good-quality items can be found around the country, especially around Teyatyaneng and on the fringes of Maseru. Often, the woven pieces convey typical life in the villages, with bright figures undertaking daily activities or celebrations. Most handwoven goods are from pure wool and mohair. Other handicrafts specific to the area include Basotho hat baskets and grass and clay products.

ENVIRONMENT

The Land

From Lesotho's northern tip to its western side where it juts out almost to the town of Wepener in South Africa, the border is formed by the Mohokare (Caledon) River. The eastern border is defined by the rugged escarpment of the Drakensberg Range, and high country forms much of the southern border.

All of Lesotho exceeds 1000m in altitude, with peaks in the central ranges and near the

Drakensberg reaching to more than 3000m. Lesotho has the highest lowest point of any country. The tallest mountain in Southern Africa (the highest point south of Mt Kilimanjaro) is the 3482m Thabana-Ntlenyana, near Sani Pass in eastern Lesotho.

Wildlife

ANIMALS

Due mainly to its altitude, Lesotho is home to fewer animals than many Southern African countries. You may come across rheboks and reedbucks, and in the Drakensberg, elands are still present. Baboons and jackals are reasonably common and there are also mongooses and meerkats.

The bird life is rich, with just under 300 species recorded. The Drakensberg is an excellent place for bird-watching, and bearded vultures and black eagles are both found here. Lesotho is one of the few places you may spot the extremely rare bald ibis.

PLANTS

The high plains and mountains are home to Cape alpine flowers. The national flower, spiral aloe, is a strange plant unique to Lesotho. Its leaves form rows of striking, spiral patterns and you'll see it in left- and right-handed varieties on the slopes of the Maluti Mountains.

National Parks

Sehlabathebe is Lesotho's most famous national park. Its high-altitude grasslands, lakes, bogs and otherworldly rock formations offer a wonderful wilderness experience and are ideal for hiking. Sehlabathebe is under the jurisdiction of the **National Environment Secretariat** (Map p142; ☎ 2231 1767; Raboshabane Rd, Maseru).

The country's other main conservation areas – Ts'ehlanyane National Park, Bokong, Nature Reserve and the Liphofung Cave Cultural Historical Site (see p146) – are all under the jurisdiction of the **Lesotho Highlands Development Authority Nature Reserves** (LHDA; ☎ 2246 0723, 2291 3206; www.lesothoparks.com), which handles all accommodation bookings. All have simple accommodation (with the exception of Bokong which has camping only), established trails and helpful staff, are relatively easy to access and are well worth visiting.

Environmental Issues

This high, corrugated and often freezing kingdom is a tough environment at the best

of times. Serious erosion exists in Lesotho due to the pressures of modern farming techniques and overgrazing. Heavy summer rains wash away unacceptably large amounts of topsoil, as well as create dongas (eroded gullies). Action is being taken to tackle erosion, including the reclamation of dongas through the building of rock dams–cum-terraces to capture silt and detritus, but in the future, large tracts of land will become uncultivable.

There are also serious environmental concerns about the controversial Lesotho Highlands Water Project, which provides water and electricity to South Africa (see the boxed text, p145). Traditional Basotho communities have been disrupted by the project and the Mohale Dam is said to have flooded some of the most fertile land in the country. There is also concern about the potential effect on the ecology of the Senqu (Orange) River and the impact on Namibia, a downstream user with its own water shortage problems; these are all troubling unknowns.

In order to protect and develop the eastern-alpine ecosystem of the Maluti-Drakensberg Mountains, the multimillion-dollar Maluti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Project between South Africa and Lesotho was established in 2001.

FOOD & DRINK

You won't be writing home about the food in Lesotho. It's not notably bad, but it's nothing special either. The staples here are much the same as in South Africa. Maseru now boasts a decent selection of restaurants serving a range of local and foreign foods, but outside the capital, you'll usually have to take what you're given.

MASERU

pop 175,000 / elevation 1600m

Maseru is the kind of place that grows on you. It sprawls across Lesotho's lower-lying western edge, rimmed by the Berea and Qeme Plateaus. The city has been a quiet backwater for much of its history. However, it has rapidly expanded over the past few decades, and boasts a modest array of modern amenities. A major city rebuilding programme has hidden many of the once-visible scars of the 1998 political unrest (see p138).

ORIENTATION

Most food and shops are found on Maseru's main street, Kingsway (paved in 1947 for a visit by the British royals). Kingsway runs from the border crossing at Maseru Bridge right through town to the Circle, a traffic roundabout and landmark. At the Circle the street splits to become two important highways: Main North Rd (for Teyateyaneng and points north) and Main South Rd (for Mophale's Hoek and points south). A bypass road rims the city to the south.

Maps

The **Department of Land, Surveys & Physical Planning** (☎ 2232 2376; Lerotholi Rd; ☎ 9am–3pm Mon–Fri) sells good topographic maps. The tourist information office has free maps of Maseru city.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Basotho Hat (☎ 2232 2523; Kingsway; ☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Sat) This craft shop has books on Lesotho.

Maseru Book Centre (Kingsway; ☎ 8am–4:30pm Mon–Fri, 9am–noon Sat) Near Nedbank.

Emergency

Ambulance (☎ 2231 2501)

Fire Department (☎ 115)

Police (☎ 2231 9900)

Internet Access

Data Kare (LNDC Centre, Kingsway; per hr US\$1.50; ☎ 8am–9pm) The best and cheapest place for internet access.

Leo (Orpen Rd; per min US\$0.10; ☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Fri) Behind the Basotho Hat building.

Medical Services

For anything serious, you'll need to go to South Africa. In an emergency, also try contacting your embassy (p153), as most keep lists of recommended practitioners.

Maseru Private Hospital (☎ 2231 3260) In Ha Thetsane, about 7km south of Maseru.

Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (☎ 2231 2501; Kingsway) Opposite Husters Pharmacy.

Money

The top-end hotels will do forex transactions (at poor rates). Otherwise try the following.

International Business Centre (ground fl, Lesotho Bank Tower, Kingsway; ☎ 8.30am–3.30pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–noon Sat)

Nedbank (Kingsway) Does forex transactions Monday to Friday.

Standard Bank (Kingsway) Has an ATM.

Post

Post office (cnr Kingsway & Palace Rd) Has unreliable poste restante.

Telephone

Public phone shop (LNDC Centre, Kingsway) Public telephones can be found here.

Tourist Information & Travel Agencies

City Centre Maseru Travel (☎ 2231 4536; Kingsway) In the Book Centre building next to Nedbank; does regional and international flight bookings. It can also arrange tickets for Intercape and other long-distance buses.

Tourist information office (☎ 2231 2427; touristinfo@ltdc.org.ls; Kingsway; ☎ 8am–4.30pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–5pm Sat) Managed by the Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation, this is a helpful office that has lots of brochures, lists of tour guides, information on public transport and free Maseru city maps.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Maseru is reasonably safe, but walking around at night, especially off the main street, is definitely not recommended. Bag-snatching and pickpocketing are the main risks during the day.

TOURS

The **tourist information office** (☎ 2231 2427; Kingsway) keeps an updated list of tour operators, and many of the main lodges listed in this chapter arrange tours and activities in Lesotho.

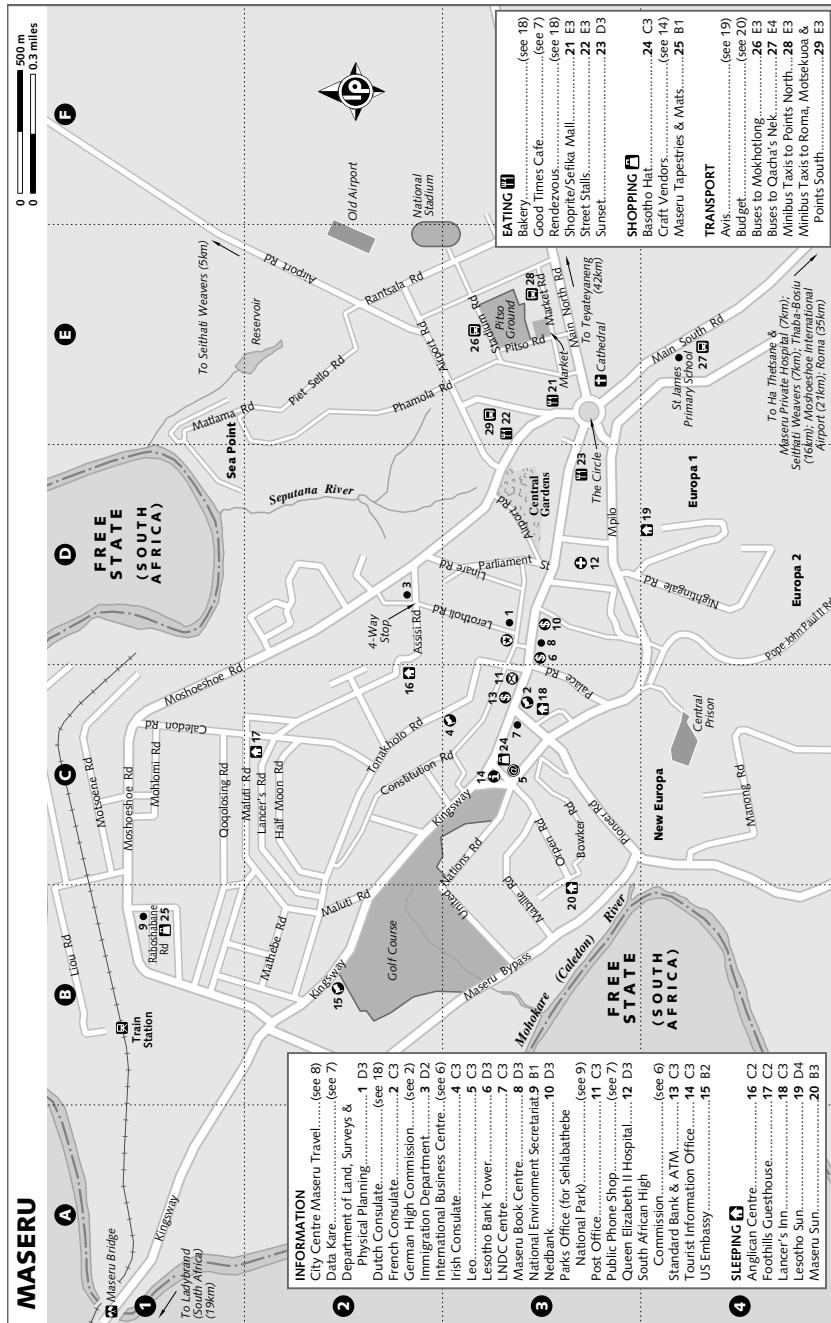
A few South African operators run tours up Sani Pass and over the border into Lesotho; see p522.

SLEEPING Budget

Anglican Centre (☎ 2232 2046; dm/tw with shared bathroom US\$7/14) Austere with clean rooms, and meals available with advance notice. It's next door to St James Church, about 500m north of Kingsway on the bend where Assisi Rd becomes Lancer's Rd.

Midrange & Top End

Foothills Guesthouse (☎ 5870 6566; melvin@xsinet.co.za; 121 Maluti Rd; s/d with breakfast US\$41/62) This converted sandstone house has large and airy rooms with décor c 1960s, and a pleasant enclosed veranda for breakfasts.



Lancer's Inn (☎ 2231 2114; lancers-inn@ilesotoh.com; cnr Kingsway & Pioneer Rd; s/d/tr with breakfast US\$66/79/96; 🍷) Business travellers flock to this central option for its pleasant colonial-era ambience and excellent restaurant. A bit overinflated for what you get.

Maseru Sun (☎ 2231 2434; maseru@sunint.co.za; 12 Orpen Rd; r US\$130; 🍷) These comfortable, modern rooms with a grassy outlook are a safe bet, although the slot machines might eat your extra pennies. Maseru Sun is just southwest of the junction of Kingsway and Pioneer Rd, and is signposted.

Lesotho Sun (☎ 2231 3111; lesoresv@sunint.co.za; r US\$134; 🍷) A predictable gamble (ask about specials) is Lesotho's other Sun. Perched on a quiet hillside with a great setting overlooking town, it boasts a casino and two restaurants.

EATING

Sunset (☎ 6276 0030; Kingsway; mains US\$2-4; 🍷 lunch & dinner) This pleasant, corporate-looking place offers Maseru's most authentic à la carte dining experience. It's above Fruit & Veg City.

Good Times Cafe (☎ 2231 7705; Level 1, LNCDC Centre; mains US\$2.50-7; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) The funky red and blue suede sofas, stylish lights, and oh-so-shiny chrome trimmings make this 'it' for the local cool crowd.

Rendezvous (☎ 2231 2114; Lancer's Inn, cnr Kingsway & Pioneer Rd; mains US\$5-10; 🍷 lunch & dinner) A fave among the expats and locals who goss in the garden café or have a tippie in the traditional chandeliered restaurant.

On the eastern end of Kingsway towards the minibus stations are a number of **street stalls** (meals about US\$1.50; 🍷 lunch) selling grilled snacks and curries. Shoprite is the best option for self-caterers.

Next to Lancer's Inn is a good **bakery** (🕒 7am-8.30pm), with pies, cakes and other delicacies.

SHOPPING

Basotho Hat (☎ 2232 2523; Kingsway; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) This government-run craft shop is the best place to start, although prices are generally higher than elsewhere in the country. If you plan on walking or pony trekking, the horsehair fly whisks sold here make good investments.

The craft vendors in front of the tourist information office have a supply of woven Basotho hats and other souvenirs. For tapes-

tries, try **Maseru Tapestries & Mats** (☎ 2231 1773; Raboshabane Rd), and **Seithati Weavers** (☎ 2231 3975), about 7km from town along the airport road.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus & Minibus Taxi

The hectic bus and minibus taxi departure points are in or around the Pitso Ground (and nearby streets) to the northeast of the circle. To avoid feeling overwhelmed by the throngs of people and buses, check first with the tourist office for specific departure points.

Shoprite's 'Money Market' kiosk in the LNCDC Centre sells Greyhound and Intercap bus tickets.

From Maseru buses depart to many destinations. Sample fares include Mafeteng (US\$2), Roma (US\$1.10) and Mohale's Hoek (US\$2).

Car

For car-rental agencies, **Avis** (☎ 2232 0087) is at Lesotho Sun and the airport, and **Budget** (☎ 2231 6344) at Maseru Sun.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Moshoeshoe International Airport is 21km from town, off Main South Rd. Minibus taxis (from the transport stand at Shoprite/Sefika Mall) cost US\$0.70. Private taxi companies charge around M7.

Taxi & Minibus Taxi

The standard minibus taxi fare around town is US\$0.40. Taxi companies include **Moonlite** (☎ 2231 2605), **Planet** (☎ 2231 7777) and **Luxury** (☎ 2232 6211). These can also be chartered for long-distance transport elsewhere in the country.

AROUND MASERU

Most towns in Lesotho have risen around trading posts or protectorate-era administration centres, but none of these towns approach Maseru in size or facilities.

Thaba-Bosiu

Moshoeshoe the Great's mountain stronghold, first occupied in July 1824, is about 16km east of Maseru. Thaba-Bosiu (Mountain at Night) played a pivotal role in the consolidation of the Basotho nation. The name may be a legacy of the site being first occupied

at night, but another legend suggests that Thaba-Bosiu, a hill in daylight, grows into a mountain at night.

At the mountain's base is a **visitors information centre** (admission US\$0.70; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) with maps and an information pamphlet. Arrange for an official guide to accompany you on the short walk to the top of the mountain.

Good views from here include those of the **Qiloane Hill** (inspiration for the Basotho hat), along with the remains of fortifications, Moshoeshoe's grave, and parts of the original settlement.

SLEEPING & EATING

Mmelesi Lodge (☎ 5250 0006; s/d US\$30/34.50) Offers well-organised flowery rondavels, about 2km before the visitors information centre. It also has a dining room.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibuses to Thaba-Bosiu (US\$1.10, 30 minutes) depart from Maseru at the transport stand at Shoprite/Sefika Mall. If you're driving, take the Mafeteng Rd for about 13km and turn left at the Roma turn-off; after about 6km take the signposted road left. Thaba-Bosiu is 10km further along.

Roma

Roma, 35km from Maseru, is Lesotho's centre of learning, with the country's only university. Several attractive sandstone buildings are dotted around the town, and the entry to town by the southern gorge is spectacular.

Just north of Roma are the **Ha Baroana** rock paintings. They are one of Lesotho's more publicised rock-art sites (there are many being discovered and not publicised), and are worth a visit if you have extra time, although neglect and vandalism have taken their toll.

To reach the paintings from Roma head back to the Maseru road and turn right in the direction of Thaba-Tseka for about 12km to Nazareth. Just before Nazareth follow the signposted gravel track to the paintings for 3km to Ha Khotso. Turn right at a football field and continue 2.5km to a hilltop. A footpath zigzags down the hillside to the rock shelter with the paintings. Minibus taxis go as far as Nazareth.

SLEEPING & EATING

Trading Post Guest House (☎ 2234 0202/67; www.tradingpost.co.za; camping per person US\$7, dm US\$11, rondavels

WORTH A VISIT – MOHALE DAM

The Mohale Dam is worth seeing only if you haven't visited Katse Dam or if you're passing by. Built across the Senqunyane River, the impressive 145m-high rock-fill dam was completed in 2004 as the second phase of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. There are commanding views of the lake and massive mountains beyond. This is easiest done with your own wheels if you're passing Likalaneng on the way to Roma or Thaba-Tseka. You can drive as far as the Mohale Tunnel through which water can flow 32km to the Katse Dam and vice versa. Alternatively, the Thaba-Tseka-Maseru bus stops at Likalaneng, from where it's a short walk to the visitors centre (tours available).

per person US\$24, s/d with shared bathroom US\$21/42; ☎) This lovely, relaxing place in a lush garden 2km west of Roma off the Maseru road offers various accommodation options. The trading post has been here since 1903: the Thorn family runs the mill and guesthouse. Pre-ordered breakfasts (US\$5) and dinners (US\$9) are available and there's a kitchen. *Minwane* (dinosaur footprints) are a 20-minute walk away. The same owners run the nearby Trading Post Adventures Guesthouse, which also offers tours, hiking trails and horse rides.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibus taxis run throughout the day between Maseru and Roma (US\$1.10, 30 minutes).

NORTHERN LESOTHO

Northern Lesotho – the area from Maseru up to Butha-Buthe and the main gateway to the spectacular northeastern highlands – is relatively densely populated, and dotted with a series of bustling lowland towns. While there are few formal tourist sights, the region's local flavours – markets, welcoming locals and the unique geographical backdrop – provide a genuine experience.

Regular minibus taxis run between Maseru and the towns. Mapotsoe is a major transport junction, and for northbound transport from Maseru, you'll usually need to change vehicles there. Minibus taxis to Maseru (US\$2.50, one hour), Butha-Buthe (US\$1.80, 45 minutes)

and Leribe (US\$1, 30 minutes) run throughout the day from the Total petrol station in Mapotsoe.

TEYATEYANENG

Referred to as 'TY', Teyateyaneng (Place of Quick Sands) has been developed as the craft centre of Lesotho. It has several places worth visiting, including **Helang Basali Crafts** (☎ 2250 0382; ☎ 8am-5pm) at St Agnes Mission, 2km before TY on the Maseru road; Setsoto Design; and Hatooa Mose Mosali. Etleloang Basali Weavers is about 4km to the north of TY.

The **Blue Mountain Inn** (☎ 2250 0362; s/d US\$32/39) has blue rooms, cottages and a restaurant.

Minibus taxis run between Teyateyaneng and Maseru (US\$1.70, 45 minutes, 35km). Chartering a taxi from Maseru costs about US\$18 one way.

LERIBE

Leribe (also known as Hlotse) is a busy regional market hub. It served as an administrative centre under the British, as witnessed by a few old buildings slowly decaying in the leafy streets. The main sight is the crumbling **Major Bell's Tower** near the market, a government storehouse (1879).

The **Leribe Craft Centre** (☎ 2240 0323; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat) sells a range of high-quality woollen goods. There is a set of **dinosaur footprints** a few kilometres south of Leribe at Tsikoane village. To get there, head north and take the small dirt road to the right at the Tsikoane Primary School, towards some rocky outcrops. Follow it up to the church and ask someone to direct you

to the *minwane*, a 1km slog up the mountainside in caves.

About 7km north of Leribe are the **Subeng River dinosaur footprints**. At the signpost indicating the river, walk down about 250m to a concrete causeway. The worn footprints of at least three species of dinosaur are about 15m downstream on the right bank.

Leribe Hotel (☎ 2240 0559; Main St; s/d US\$25/39) has an olde-worlde *Fawley Towers*-style dining room (meals from US\$3.50), with a pleasant tea garden.

HIGHLANDS WATER PROJECT Katse

Tiny Katse is the purpose-built former base for the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and the site of Africa's highest dam wall (185m). The green hilly area makes for a relaxing pause – even if you don't give a damn about engineering feats.

Two kilometres east of the Katse village junction on the main road is the **visitors centre** (admission US\$20). There's a video about and tours of the dam (daily at 9am and 2pm) and a dam viewpoint. Exposed and windy camping is also on offer here. In the village itself, **Katse Lodge** (☎ 2291 0202; dm US\$20, s/d with breakfast US\$33/59) offers hospital-style rooms, but ask about the more appealing and better-value 'dorm' accommodation with clean twin rooms and massive shared bathrooms.

The spectacular road from Leribe to Katse passes the lowland village of Pitseng before climbing over the Maluti Mountains. Be careful in the rain – the roads are slick. A comfortable accommodation option in Pitseng is **Aloes Guest House** (☎ 2700 5626; s/d US\$21/25).

LESOTHO'S WHITE GOLD

It might not seem like a valuable commodity, but for Lesotho water is a big money spinner. For more than 15 years the US\$8-billion Highlands Water Project has created dams and conduits for the water in Lesotho's highlands.

The scheme pipes water to rand-rich but water-poor Johannesburg. The first stages – the Katse Dam (see above) and Mohale Dam (near Likalaneng; see the boxed text, opposite) and associated waterworks – are complete, and by 2020 five dams and more than 200km of piping will supply water to South Africa.

In many ways the project has been a positive for the country – new roads and many jobs have been created – but it has not been without controversy.

Bribery scandals overshadowed the 1999 inauguration and hundreds of people who moved from their homes to make way for the project never received their promised compensation. Environmental concerns over the loss of habitat and fears that the dam will silt up over the long term have also been raised.

There are minibus taxis from Leribe to Katse (US\$5, three to five hours) and plenty of traffic if you want to hitch.

BUTHA-BUTHE

Moshoeshoe the Great named this frontier town Butha-Buthe (Place of Lying Down); it was here that his people first retreated during the *difaqane*. The Maluti Mountains form a beautiful backdrop.

Ask for directions to **Ha Thabo Ramakatane Youth Hostel** (dm US\$4.50). It's about 4km from the village and accessible only via 4WD or walking. We're talking basic – part of the house has no electricity, there's gas cooking, and water comes from the well – but it's as authentic as it comes.

Crocodile Inn (☎ 2246 0223; Reserve Rd; s/d/tr from US\$28/32/46) is definitely a bit of a croc – it looks nice enough, although water is infrequent and 'day rests' are advertised. The restaurant here is Butha-Buthe's main dining establishment.

A minibus taxi from Maputsoe to Butha-Buthe costs M13 (20 minutes).

OXBOW

Oxbow, over the dramatic 2820m Moteng Pass, consists of several lodges and huts nestled amid some wonderful mountain scenery.

(Beware the treacherous hairpin bends in winter.) Skiing is available through **Afri-Ski** (www.afriski.co.za), 11km past Oxbow.

New Oxbow Lodge (☎ in South Africa 051-933 2247; www.oxbow.co.za; s/d with breakfast M310/545) is an incongruous Austrian-style chalet on the banks of the Malibamat'so River, with accommodation, cosy bar, restaurant and ski-hire.

A bus between Maseru and Mokhotlong goes via Oxbow (US\$7, 4½ hours), and there are daily minibus taxis between Butha-Buthe and Oxbow (US\$3.50, 1½ hours).

EASTERN LESOTHO

The awesome eastern highlands area is defined by the rugged escarpment of the Drakensberg. It's probably best known for the Sani Pass, but it also boasts the highest mountain in Southern Africa, the 3482m Thabana-Ntlenyana. This stunning mountain region features highland villages, rondavels, shepherds and sandstone rock shelters. It's *the* place for serious hikers.

THABA-TSEKA

This remote scrappy town is on the eastern edge of the Central Range, over the sometimes-tricky Mokhoabong Pass. It was estab-

lished in 1980 as a centre for the mountain district.

You can bunk down at the **Farmer Training Centre** (☎ 2290 0294; r/dm US\$14/7), on the street behind the tower, or at **Mountain Star Hotel** (☎ 2290 0415; s/d US\$20/23.50), where the most creative aspects are the 'Adam' and 'Eve' toilet signs. The Lilala Butchery & General Cafe serves sandwiches and drinks.

Three buses run daily between Maseru and Thaba-Tseka (US\$5, seven hours). Minibuses also go as far as Sehonghong (US\$3, two hours); from here to Qacha's Nek you'd need to try your luck for a lift – roads are poor. For Mokhotlong, change at Likalaneng (US\$3, two hours).

MOKHOTLONG

Mokhotlong (Place of the Bald Ibis) is 270km from Maseru and the first major town north of Sani Pass. It has an appealing Wild West feel to it, with locals – sporting Basotho blankets – on their horses, and basic shops.

A worthwhile effort is **Molomong Guesthouse & Backpackers** (☎ in South Africa 033-394 3072; molomong@worldonline.co.za; camping per person M45, dm/d US\$10/25), a rustic lodge and former colonial trading post, about 15km southwest of Mokhotlong. It's a basic (electricity-free) self-catering stay so bring your own food. Pony trekking is available.

The **Senqu Hotel** (☎ 2292 0330; s/d with shared bathroom US\$25/33, s/d US\$28/39) is at the western end of town along the main road. Nearby **Grow** (☎ 2292 0205; dm US\$7), a Lesotho-registered development office, has basic dorms and a simple kitchen.

Regular public transport runs to/from Butha-Buthe (US\$7.60, six hours), Maseru (US\$10, eight hours), Linakaneng (ask for Molomong Lodge) and Sani Top.

SANI TOP

Sani Top sits atop the steep Sani Pass, the only dependable (albeit winding!) road into Lesotho through the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg mountain range in KwaZulu-Natal. It offers stupendous views on clear days and unlimited hiking possibilities.

From the Sani Top Chalet at the top of the pass there are several day walks, including a long and strenuous trek to **Thabana-Ntlenyana** (3482m), the highest peak in Southern Africa. A guide is a good idea.

Hodgson's Peaks (3257m) is a much easier hike 6km south, from where you can see into

Sehlabathebe National Park and KwaZulu-Natal.

There is a rugged three-day hike from Sani Top Chalet south along the remote escarpment edge to **Sehlabathebe National Park**. The altitude of much of this remote area is more than 3000m; try this only if you're well prepared, experienced and in a group of at least three people with a guide.

Other hikes in this area are outlined in the excellent booklet *A Backpacker's Guide to Lesotho* by Russell Suchet (US\$6.50), available through most lodges, **Morija Museum & Archives** (☎ 2236 0308; www.morijafest.com) and **Sani Lodge** (☎ in South Africa 033-702 0330; www.sanilodge.co.za) at Sani Pass.

Sleeping & Eating

Sani Top Chalet (☎ in South Africa 033-702 1158; www.sanitopchalet.co.za; camping per person US\$7, dm US\$12, r with shared bathroom US\$42) On the edge of the escarpment at a lofty 2874m, this popular but monopolistic ski chalet boasts the highest pub in Africa, plus simple, cosy rooms and excellent meals. Less lofty praise applies to the backpackers' dorm – its now-draughty, stained room detracts from an otherwise high. (Fingers crossed for the new rondavels under construction.) Pony trekking and sometimes skiing are on offer.

On the KwaZulu-Natal side of the pass, Sani Lodge is a convenient and pleasant sleeping option; see p522.

Getting There & Away

A minibus taxi runs daily from Mokhotlong via Sani Top down to Underberg (South Africa) and back (US\$9 one way, five hours).

If you're driving up the pass from KwaZulu Natal, a 4WD is obligatory; 2WD with clearance can make it down, though with difficulty. The South African border crossing is open 8am to 4pm daily; the Lesotho side stays open until 5pm to let the last vehicles through. Hitching is best at weekends.

Hostels on the KwaZulu-Natal side arrange transport up the pass, and various agencies in Himeville and Underberg (the nearest South African towns) arrange tours – see p522.

SEHLABATHEBE NATIONAL PARK

Lesotho's first national park, proclaimed in 1970, is remote, rugged and beautiful. Getting there is a worthwhile adventure, especially for wilderness, seclusion and fishing. The rolling

HIGHLAND PARKS & RESERVES

While the building of a series of dams on the Senqu (Orange) River has created controversy, not least over environmental concerns, it has also led to the creation of the following nature reserves. For bookings and inquiries contact **LHDA Nature Reserves** (☎ 2246 0723; fax 2246 1226; nature@lhda.org.ls; PO Box 333, Butha-Buthe 400, Lesotho). The website www.lesothoparks.com has greater (although outdated) detail.

Bokong Nature Reserve

The bearded vulture, the ice rat and the Vaal rhebok are just some of the denizens of this **reserve** (adult/child US\$0.80/0.50; camping US\$3, basic huts US\$5.50), at the top of the 3090m Mafika-Lisiu Pass, near the Bokong River. The park is also home to Afro-alpine wetland sponges. There are a number of day walks, a visitors centre and an overnight camping ground. Guides (per person M20) and pony trekking (from M50) can be arranged.

Ts'ehlanyane National Park

Deep in the rugged Maluti Mountains this 5600-hectare **national park** (admission US\$1.50; camping from US\$3, 6-person guesthouse US\$48) has some interesting fauna – woodland and berg bamboo – but little in the way of big flora. There are walks, horse trails, a guesthouse and camp sites.

Liphofung Cave Cultural Historical Site

San rock art and historical links that go back as far as the Stone Age are the attractions of this small 4-hectare **reserve** (adult/child US\$2/0.70; camping US\$3, rondavels per person US\$7), just off the main Butha-Buthe–Oxbow road. There are also horse trails and a small craft centre.

grasslands, wildflowers and silence provide a sense of isolation, which is indeed the case, apart from the prolific bird life (including the bearded vulture) and the odd rhebok. Hiking (and horse riding from Sani Top or the Drakensberg) is the main way to explore the waterfalls and surrounds.

You'll need to bring all your food, and be well prepared for the elements. This summer rainfall area has frequent thick mists, potentially hazardous to hikers. Winters are clear but cold at night, with occasional light snowfalls.

Sleeping & Eating

If you're travelling by public transport, the buses reach Sehlabathebe in the evening, which means you'll need to overnight in Mavuka village near the park gate.

Camping is permitted throughout the park, though there are no facilities besides plenty of water.

Sehlabathebe Park Lodge (☎ bookings 2232 3600; camping per person US\$4.50, r per person US\$11) Built in the 1970s for the prime minister of the time, and the park's only option with facilities, this time-warped lodge makes for a groovy stay. It's set on a remote flat grassland, and looks onto hills and ponds. Bring all your own food, plus extra petrol or diesel – there's none available at the park. Coal is available for purchase from the caretaker. The lodge takes up to 12 people, and has bedding and a fully equipped kitchen. Due to its isolation, it's not recommended for lone travellers. Bookings are made through the **National Environment Secretariat** (☎ 2231 1767, 2232 6075; Raboshabane Rd, Maseru).

Range Management Education Centre (dm US\$5) This clean and modern centre, 2km down the road to the left after the Mavuka Primary School, has dorm beds, but at the time of research had no water or gas.

Getting There & Away

A daily bus connects Qacha's Nek and Sehlabathebe, departing from Qacha's Nek at around noon and Sehlabathebe at 5.30am (US\$4.50, five hours). The bus terminates in Mavuka village, near the park gate. From here, it's 12km further on foot to Sehlabathebe Park Lodge. If you're driving, the main route into the park is via Quthing and Qacha's Nek but a 4WD is recommended. The road from Qacha's Nek is unpaved but in reasonable condition, and negotiable at most times of the

year in a 2WD. You can arrange to leave your vehicle at the police station in Paolosi village while you're in the park.

Keen walkers can hike the 10km up the escarpment from Bushman's Nek in Kwa-Zulu-Natal. From Bushman's Nek to the Nkonkoana Gate border crossing takes about six hours. Horses can also be arranged through **Khotsotrails** (☎ in South Africa 033-701 1502; www.khotsotrails.co.za) in Underberg.

QACHA'S NEK

This pleasant town was founded in 1888 near the pass (1980m) of the same name. It has an attractive church, several colonial-era sandstone buildings and California redwood trees, some over 25m high.

Letloepe Lodge (☎ 2295 0383; www.letloepelodge.co.ls; dm/s/d with breakfast US\$10/39/55) is the frilliest of accommodation choices. This 'palace just below the clouds' has a serene outlook.

The more modest **Anna's B&B** (☎ 2295 0374; annasb&b@leo.col.ls; s US\$14-42, d US\$25-39) offers a variety of rooms.

Minibus taxis go from Qacha's Nek and Maseru via Quthing (US\$13, six hours). An early morning bus runs between Maseru and Qacha's Nek (US\$9, nine hours), and the bus from Qacha's Nek to Sehlabathebe National Park departs around noon (US\$4.50, five hours).

SOUTHERN LESOTHO

Southern Lesotho – from Semonkong to Morija and southeast to Quthing – is less developed than the northwest between Maseru and Butha-Butha, with massive mountain ranges, awesome valleys, and villages that have an enticing off-the-beaten-track feel.

SEMONKONG

Semonkong (Place of Smoke) is a one-horse town in the serene and lofty Thaba Putsoa range. **Maletsunyane Falls** (Lebahane Falls; 204m) are a 1½-hour walk away and are at their most awesome in summer – especially from the bottom of the gorge, where there are **camp sites** (per person US\$3). **Ketane Falls** (122m) are an exciting day's ride (30km) from Semonkong.

The highly recommended **Semonkong Lodge** (☎/fax in South Africa 051-933 3106; www.placeofsmoke.co.ls; camping per person US\$5.50, dm/s/d US\$11/32/59),

near the Maletsunyane River, is one of the places to stay, with camping and rondavels up for grabs. Hikes and pony treks are on offer, as is the well-promoted world's longest commercially operated single-drop abseil (204m) down the Maletsunyane Falls (US\$63 per person; less if more people). The lodge is signposted from the town centre.

Buses between Maseru and Semonkong (US\$3.50) leave from either town in the morning, arriving in late afternoon.

MORIJA

Morija is a tiny town with a big history, and the site of the first European mission in Lesotho. It's a must for anyone interested in Lesotho's history and culture. **Morija Museum & Archives** (☎ 2236 0308; www.morijafest.com; admission US\$0.80; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), the best museum in Lesotho, holds well-presented Basotho ethnographical exhibits, archives and artefacts.

The annual **Morija Arts & Cultural Festival** (www.morijafest.com) is organised by the museum. This popular, annual event is held in early October and showcases the diversity of Sotho culture through dance, music and theatre, and includes horse racing and *moraba-raba* (similar to chess) competitions. The festival began in 1999 as a means of reuniting the people of Lesotho after the turmoil created by the 1998 political upheaval, and to revive aspects of culture and boost tourism.

Mophato Oa Morija (☎ 2236 0219; mophatooamo@leo.co.ls; dm US\$8.50) is an ecumenical conference centre that is sometimes willing to accommodate travellers.

Morija Guest Houses (☎ 6306 5093; mgh@leo.co.ls; r per person US\$25) is a selection of several comfortable guesthouses, some with stunning outlooks, around Morija. For reservations,

contact the manager through the details listed here.

Minibus taxis run throughout the day between Maseru and Morija (US\$1.50, 45 minutes, 40km).

MALEALEA

Shortly before reaching Malealea is the Gates of Paradise Pass. A plaque announces 'Wayfarer – pause and look upon a Gateway of Paradise'. This says it all – about the region, village and the lodge. The breathtaking mountains feature caves with **San paintings**, and you can enjoy a well-organised pony trek from here or wander on foot through the region.

Today, the heart of the village is Malealea Lodge, which offers a smorgasbord of cultural and outdoor activities.

Activities

PONY TREKKING

Malealea Lodge (p150) is one of the best places in Lesotho to arrange pony trekking, which offers a good chance to meet Basotho villagers and experience the awesome scenery of the mountains, valleys and waterfalls. The villagers provide the ponies and guide; this provides a significant contribution to the local village economy.

The pony treks are priced on a per-day basis (around US\$22). Overnight rides start at US\$36 to US\$46 per person, plus US\$7 for each night spent in one of the Basotho village huts.

WALKING

Malealea Lodge has route maps for overnight and longer jaunts and can arrange pack ponies for your gear. Stunning destinations include **Botso'ela Waterfall** (two hours return); **Pitseng Gorge** (six hours return, bring

MOVERS & SHAKERS: FANUEL MUSI

Throughout Lesotho you may spot massive gullies or ravines stemming from the tops of hills and snaking all the way to the bottom of a valley. Known as dongas, these eroded areas developed primarily from the use of steel ploughs and an increase in arable farming during the latter part of the 19th century. The unstable duplex soils were quickly disturbed by the heavy summer storms. In 1986 Mr Fanuel Musi of Malealea was one of the first Basothos to reclaim a donga. Over 11 years he painstakingly built rock dams (or terraces) to capture silt and detritus. As the area above the dam wall or terrace filled, he built another dam lower down, until the gully was refilled with fertile soils, grasses or stabilising tree species. Many external aid organisations come to view the project. Mr Musi died in 1997 at the age of 74, but you can visit his family at their working farm at Malealea to see his stunning green legacy (see p150).

swimwear); **Pitseng Plateau** (one hour return); and along the Makhaleng River. The walks include visits to surrounding villages and **San art sites**.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Village visits provide a stimulating insight into the local people and their customs. You can visit the tiny **museum**, housed in a traditional Basotho hut, a **sangoma** (witchdoctor; only for the genuinely interested) and a **reclaimed donga** (see the boxed text, p149). There are some good, scenic drives suitable for both 2WD and 4WD vehicles (see www.malealea.co.ls/scenic_drives.html).

Sleeping

Our pick Malealea Lodge (📍 in South Africa 051-436 6766, 082-552 4215; www.malealea.com; camping per person M50, backpacker huts with shared bathroom per person US\$11, r per person US\$14-28) The hub of local life, award-winning Malealea Lodge – a former trading post established by Mervyn Smith (1905) – provides an extraordinary entrée into the ‘Kingdom in the Sky’. The extremely friendly Jones family works closely with community – its foundation (from tourist revenue and donations) supports projects in the area. Almost every night the local choir performs at the lodge.

Hungry hikers love the bar, hearty meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner US\$5.5/7/10) and self-catering facilities. A village shop stocks basic goods. Bookings must be made through South Africa. September to November are the busy months.

Getting There & Away

Two Sprinter minibus taxis depart Maseru at around 11.30am and 4.30pm and Malealea at 6am and 2pm (US\$5.50, 2½ hours, 83km). Otherwise, catch a minibus taxi from near Maseru’s Shoprite/Sefika Mall to the junction town of Motsekuoa (US\$2, two hours); there are frequent connections to Malealea (US\$1.50, 30 minutes).

If you’re driving, head south from Maseru on Main South Rd for 52km to Motsekuoa. Look for the Malealea Lodge sign and the proliferation of minibus taxis. Turn left (east) onto a tarmac road. Ten kilometres further on take the right fork and continue another 15km. At the signposted turn-off to Malealea, head 7km along an unsealed road to the lodge.

You can also approach Malealea from the south, via Mpharane and Masemouse, but the road is rough and most drivers travel via Motsekuoa.

MAFETENG

Mafeteng (Place of Lefeta’s People) is named after an early magistrate Emile Rolland, who was known to the local Basotho as Lefeta (One who Passes By). Little has changed; you’d do best to move on. That said, the town is an important transport interchange, a border junction (it’s 22km to Wepener in Free State) and a possible stocking-up point.

Straight out of the ’60s TV sitcom *Lost in Space*, polygon-shaped **Mafeteng Hotel** (📍 2270 0236; r US\$28-35) is a blast from the past. To bring you back to earth, there’s a garden, restaurant and disco.

Frequent minibus taxis connect Mafeteng with Maseru (US\$2, 1½ hours) and Mohale’s Hoek (US\$1.50, 30 minutes). For Quthing, change at Mohale’s Hoek.

MOHALE’S HOEK

More agreeable than Mafeteng, this comfortable town is 125km from Maseru. The younger brother of Moshoeshe the Great, Mohale, gave this land to the British for administrative purposes in 1884.

Mohale’s Hoek has **Monateng Lodge** (📍 2278 5337; s/d US\$24/28), but it seriously lacks something – security and the ‘it’ factor. Much better is the quality **Hotel Mount Maluti** (📍 2278 5224; www.hotelmountmaluti.co.za; s/d with breakfast US\$36/52). There’s a large garden and a restaurant.

QUTHING

Quthing, the southernmost major town in Lesotho, is also known as Moyeni (Place of the Wind). It was established in 1877, abandoned during the Gun War of 1880 and then rebuilt at the present site.

The town comprises Lower Quthing and Upper Quthing, the former colonial administrative centre, with good facilities and even better views overlooking the dramatic Senqu (Orange) River Gorge. There are minibus taxis between Lower and Upper Quthing.

About 1.5km off the highway, 5km west of Quthing, is the intriguing **Masitise Cave House Museum** (📍 5879 4167; admission free, donation appreciated), now a museum, built into a San rock shelter in 1866 by Reverend Ellenberger. Ask for the key from the caretaker in the house

next to the small church. Accommodation is also available on a B&B basis or in the rustically unrenovated rondavels. There are San paintings nearby.

Quthing’s other claim to fame is a proliferation of **dinosaur footprints**. The most easily accessible are just off the main road to Mt Moorosi; watch for the small, pink building to your left. These footprints are believed to be 180 million years old.

Between Quthing and Masitise, and visible from the main road, is **Villa Maria Mission**, with a striking, twin-spired sandstone church.

At Qomoqomong, 10km from Quthing, there’s a collection of **San paintings**; ask at the General Dealers store about a guide for the 20-minute walk to the paintings.

The road from Quthing to Qacha’s Nek, along the winding Senqu (Orange) River Gorge and through some striking canyon scenery, is one of Lesotho’s most stunning drives. If you’re equipped, the whole area is ideal for hiking.

En route is the village of **Mt Moorosi**, named after a Basotho chieftain who in 1879 stuck it out for eight months against the British on his fortified mountain until he was killed; the pretty **Mphaki** village, a possible base for hiking; and **Christ the King Mission**, with wide views over the Senqu River valley. From the mission, it’s a good two- to three-day hike north to Semonkong (p148).

Sleeping & Eating

Fuleng Guest House (📍 2275 0260; r per person from US\$11) Perched in Upper Quthing, this is the place for excellent-value rooms and rondavels with a view, plus a friendly local experience.

Moorosi Chalets (📍 in South Africa 051-436 6766, 082-552 4215; www.malealea.co.ls; chalets per person US\$11-42) The chalets are part of a community programme and are secondary to amazing activities on offer – from village stays to fishing, best organised in advance. The chalets are 6km from Mt Moorosi village; take the turn-off to Ha Moqalo 2km out of the village in the direction of Qacha’s Nek.

Getting There & Away

Minibus taxis run daily between Quthing and Maseru (US\$7, 3½ hours) and Qacha’s Nek (US\$7, three hours). The Quthing–Qacha’s Nek road is tarmac the entire way despite what many maps indicate.

LESOTHO DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Maseru has a reasonable range of hotel accommodation. Most towns have small hotels that have survived from protectorate days, although many are run-down bars and liquor stores that also provide accommodation. New lodges and B&Bs have sprung up over recent years.

Camping is most viable away from population centres. Always ask permission of the local landowners and chief, and expect to pay a small fee. Camping is also possible in highland parks.

For a small fee, you can sometimes score a bed at the missions or Agricultural Training Centres; the latter are at Thaba-Tseka and Qacha’s Nek.

Prices for accommodation in this chapter are: budget US\$40 and below, midrange US\$40 to US\$100, top end US\$100 and above.

ACTIVITIES

Abseiling

Hit the heights at Semonkong Lodge for the longest commercially operated single-drop abseil (204m) down the Maletsunyane Falls (see p148).

Bird-Watching

About 280 species of bird have been recorded in Lesotho – a surprising number for a landlocked country. The mountainous terrain provides habitats for many species of raptor (birds of prey). You might see the Cape vulture or the rare bearded vulture or lammergeyer.

PRACTICALITIES

- Several newspapers such as *Southern Star* are available in Maseru and other towns. Day-old South African newspapers are also available in Maseru.
- Thanks to a transmitter, you can pick up the BBC’s World Service on short wave, medium wave (1197kHz) and FM.
- Lesotho’s electricity is generated at 220V. Appliances have three round prongs as used in South Africa.
- Lesotho uses the metric system.

Good bird-watching places include eyries in the Maluti Mountains and near the eastern Drakensberg escarpment.

Fishing

Trout fishing is very popular in Lesotho; the season runs from September to the end of May. There is a minimal licence fee, a bag limit of 12 fish and a minimum size limit of 25cm; only rod and line and artificial nonspinning flies may be used. For more information contact the **Livestock Division of the Ministry of Agriculture** (☎ 2232 3986; Private Bag A82, Maseru 100).

The closest fishing area to Maseru is the Makhalaneng River (a two-hour drive from Maseru). Other places where you can cast a line include Malibamat'so near Butha-Buthe, 2km below Oxbow Lodge; in the De Beers' Dam, Khubelu and Mokhotlong Rivers near Mokhotlong; the Tsoelikana River, Park Ponds and Leqooa River near Qacha's Nek; Thaba-Tseka main dam and Katse and Mohale Dams.

Indigenous fish include barbel in lowland rivers, yellowfish in the mountains and the Maloti minnow in the upper Tsoelikana.

Hiking

Lesotho offers great remote-area trekking in a landscape reminiscent of the Tibetan plateau. The eastern highlands and the Drakensberg crown attract serious hikers, with the walk between Qacha's Nek and Butha-Buthe offering the best challenge.

As well as the appropriate hiking gear, you will need a compass and the relevant 1:50,000 or 1:250,000 maps from the **Department of Land, Surveys & Physical Planning** (Map p142; ☎ 2232 2376; Lerotholi Rd, Maseru; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri).

Be prepared – walking can be dangerous – zero temperatures (even in summer), thunderstorms and thick fog are common. In summer many of the rivers flood, and fords can become dangerous: route changes might be necessary. By the end of the dry season clean water can be scarce.

Bring all your own supplies, especially specialist hiking supplies.

Hikers should respect the mounds of stones (cairns) marking graves. However, a cairn near a path, especially between two hills, can be added to by passing travellers; ensure your good luck by spitting on a stone and throwing it onto the pile.

Note that a white flag waving from a village means that *joala* (sorghum beer) has just been brewed; a yellow flag indicates maize beer; red is for fresh meat; and green is for vegetables.

Pony Trekking

This is an excellent and popular way of seeing the Lesotho highlands, and is offered by Malealea Lodge (p150), Trading Post Guest House (p144) and Semonkong Lodge (p148).

You will usually need to bring food, a sleeping bag, rainwear, sunscreen, warm clothing, a torch (flashlight) and water purification tablets.

BOOKS

A Backpacker's Guide to Lesotho by Russell Suchet features walks around Lesotho and is a must for hikers. Poignant personal accounts by Basotho include *Singing Away the Hunger* by Mpho Matsepo Nthunya et al, and *Shepherd Boy of the Maloti* by Thabo Makoa. For history, read *A Short History of Lesotho* by Stephen Gill.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most businesses are open from 8am to 5pm weekdays (8.30am to 1pm Wednesdays) and 8am to 1pm Saturdays. The civil service works between 8am and 4.30pm weekdays with a break for lunch from 12.45pm to 2pm.

CUSTOMS

Customs regulations are broadly the same as those for South Africa (see p583). Visitors from the South African customs union – Botswana, Swaziland and South Africa – cannot bring in alcohol.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

You may receive unmenacing requests for money, especially if hiking somewhere without a guide. In the highlands, you'll receive incessant requests for 'sweets! sweets!' from school children and herd boys. Tourists throwing out sweets has become an increasing problem in encouraging begging. Children throwing stones at cars is on the increase, mainly in the highlands.

Several lives (mainly herd boys) are lost each year from lightning strikes. Keep off high ground during electrical storms and avoid camping in the open.

Never go out into the mountains, even in summer or for an afternoon, without a sleeping bag, tent and sufficient food for a couple of days in case you get fogged in.

On the last Friday of the month, many people are paid and some get drunk; things can get boisterous.

There's a slight risk of being robbed in Lesotho; muggings are common in Maseru.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Lesotho Embassies & Consulates

Lesotho has an embassy in South Africa (see p584). Elsewhere in the world, countries with a Lesotho embassy include the following.

Belgium (☎ 02-705 3976; Blvd General Wahis 45, 1030 Brussels)

Germany (☎ 30 257 5720; Dessaur Strasse 28/29, 10963 Berlin)

Italy (☎ 06-854 2419; les.rome@flashnet.it; Via Serchio 8, 00198 Rome)

UK (☎ 020-7235 5686; 7 Chesham Pl, Belgravia, London SW1 8HN)

USA (☎ 202-797 5533/4; 2511 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20008)

Embassies & Consulates in Lesotho

A number of countries have representation in Maseru.

China (☎ 2231 6521; http://ls.china-embassy.org/eng; United Nations Rd, Maseru)

France (Map p142; ☎ 2232 5722; alliancefrancaise@ilesotho.com; Alliance Française Bldg, cnr Kingsway & Pioneer Rd, Maseru)

Germany (Map p142; ☎ 2233 2292; c/o Alliance Française Bldg, cnr Kingsway & Pioneer Rd, Maseru)

Ireland (Map p142; ☎ 2231 4068; Tonakholo Rd, Maseru)

Netherlands (Map p142; ☎ 2231 2114; Lancers Inn, Kingsway, Maseru)

South Africa (Map p142; ☎ 2231 5758; 10th fl, Lesotho Bank Tower, Kingsway, Maseru)

USA (Map p142; ☎ 2231 2666; http://maseru.usembassy.gov; 254 Kingsway, Maseru; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-4pm Mon & Wed)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Morija Arts & Cultural Festival (www.morijafest.com) is held in Morija in early October (see p149).

HOLIDAYS

Lesotho's public holidays:

New Year's Day 1 January

Moshoeshoe Day 11 March

Good Friday March/April

Easter Monday March/April

Hero's Day 4 April

Workers' Day 1 May

Ascension Day May

King's Birthday 17 July

Independence Day 4 October

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

INTERNET RESOURCES

African Studies – Lesotho Page (www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/Country_Specific/Lesotho.html) Reliable links to a number of other Lesotho websites.

Kingdom in the Sky (www.seelesotho.com) An excellent resource with all kinds of tourist information for planning a trip to Lesotho.

Lesotho Government (www.lesotho.gov.ls) Useful although sometimes outdated information.

LANGUAGE

The official languages are South Sotho and English. For some useful words and phrases in South Sotho, see p780.

MAPS

The **Department of Land, Surveys & Physical Planning** (Map p142; ☎ 2232 2376; Lerotholi Rd, Maseru; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) sells a good 1:50,000 map of Maseru (US\$7), a 1:250,000 map of Lesotho (US\$7), plus 1:50,000 hiking maps covering the country (US\$5). Look for the brown building marked 'LSPP'. Maseru's tourist information office also sells a Lesotho map (US\$0.80).

MONEY

The unit of currency is the loti (plural maloti; M), which is divided into 100 liesente. The loti is fixed at a value equal to the South African rand, and rands are accepted everywhere (however, maloti are not accepted outside Lesotho).

ATMs & Cash

If changing foreign currency, do it in South Africa before you come – rates are better. There are a few ATMs in Maseru, but not all take international cards.

The only banks where you can reliably change foreign currency, including travellers cheques, are in Maseru (see p141).

Credit Cards

Most hotels, restaurants and travel agencies will accept credit cards. As a last resort, you

can change money for low rates at larger hotels.

Tipping

Wages are low in Lesotho. In rural parts of Lesotho it's normal to round up the bill, and in tourist areas it's usual to tip around 10%.

POST

Post offices are open from 8am to 4.30pm weekdays and 8am to noon Saturday.

TELEPHONE

Lesotho's telephone system works reasonably well, but only where there is access – there's no telephone network in the highlands. The main mobile service is **Vodacom Lesotho** (www.vodacom.co.ls) – off the beaten track, signals can be picked up on a few mountain passes only.

There are no area codes within Lesotho. Lesotho's country code is ☎ 266; to call Lesotho from South Africa dial the prefix ☎ 09-266. To call South Africa from anywhere in Lesotho, dial ☎ 00-27 and then the South African area code and phone number.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The only **tourist information office** (Map p142; ☎ 2231 2427; touristinfo@ltdc.org.ls; Kingsway; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat) is in Maseru and is managed by the Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation. It provides brochures, lists of tour guides, information on public transport and basic maps.

VISAS

Citizens of most Western European countries, the USA and most Commonwealth countries are granted an entry permit (free) at the border or airport. The standard stay permitted is 14 days and is renewable by leaving and re-entering the country or by application to the **Director of Immigration & Passport Services** (☎ 2232 3771, 2232 1110; PO Box 363, Maseru 100).

For citizens of other countries, if you arrive at the Maseru Bridge border without a visa you might be given a temporary entry permit, which allows you to apply for a visa in Maseru at the Ministry of Immigration. Don't count on this, though, as it depends on the whim of the border officials.

Visa requirements change, so first check with an embassy. No vaccination certificates are required unless you have recently been in a yellow-fever area.

TRANSPORT IN LESOTHO

GETTING THERE & AWAY

This section covers travel between Lesotho and its neighbour, South Africa. (For information on reaching Lesotho from elsewhere on the African continent and from other continents, see p752.)

Entering Lesotho

Most travellers enter Lesotho overland from South Africa, although it's also possible to fly in from Johannesburg. A passport is required for entering Swaziland.

Entry permits are easy to get at any of Lesotho's borders and at the airport. If you are a citizen of a country for which a visa is required (see p749), it's best to arrange this in advance. Vaccination certificate requirements are the same as for South Africa.

Air

Lesotho's Moshoeshoe International Airport is 21km from Maseru.

South African Airways (SAA; ☎ 27 11 978 5313) flies daily between Moshoeshoe International Airport and Johannesburg for around US\$140, one way.

Border Crossings

SOUTH AFRICA

All Lesotho's borders are with South Africa. Most people enter via Maseru Bridge (open 24 hours). Other main border crossings include Ficksburg (open 24 hours), Makhaleng Bridge (open 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm Saturday and Sunday), and Sani Pass (open 8am to 4pm daily), but these often have long queues.

Most of the other entry points in the south and the east of the country involve very difficult, rough roads.

Bus

Big Sky Coaches (www.bigskycoaches.co.za) and **Intercape** (www.intercape.co.za) operate daily in each

DEPARTURE TAX

A US\$4.50 departure tax is payable on leaving the airport.

direction between Bloemfontein and Maseru Bridge (US\$5, three hours). For Big Sky, buy tickets at the Big Sky booths at Bloemfontein's Central Park, or on the bus at Maseru Bridge. There are express services from Bloemfontein (two hours) on Friday and Saturday morning, and from Maseru Bridge on Friday and Sunday afternoon. Intercape tickets can be purchased at Maseru's Shoprite.

Via minibus taxi, the best connections are from Bloemfontein to Botshabelo (Mtabelo; US\$4.50, one hour), and from there to Maseru (US\$2, 1½ hours).

There are at least three buses weekly between Johannesburg and Maseru (six to seven hours), as well as daily minibus taxis between both Johannesburg and Ladybrand (16km from the Maseru Bridge border crossing) and Maseru. All these services will bring you into Maseru coming from South Africa; if you are leaving Maseru, you'll need to go to the South Africa side of Maseru Bridge.

Car & Motorcycle

You can't enter Lesotho via Sani Pass unless your vehicle is 4WD, but you can leave in a conventional vehicle; however, most 2WDs won't have the necessary ground clearance to get to Sani Pass.

GETTING AROUND

Air

For charter flights within Lesotho, the best contact is **Mission Aviation** (☎ 2232 5699).

Bicycle

Extremely mountainous Lesotho is an excellent mountain-bike cycling destination – for the seriously fit only. Dangers include icy roads, thunderstorms and flooding. The classic mountain-bike route in Lesotho is over the Sani Pass. The odd lodge rents out bicycles (most on the South African) side of the Sani Pass.

Bus & Minibus Taxi

A good network of slow, no-frills buses and faster minibus taxis access many towns. Minibuses leave when full; no reservations are necessary. You'll be quoted long-distance fares on the buses but it's best to just buy a ticket to the next major town, as most of the passengers will get off there and you might be stuck waiting for the bus to fill up again, while other buses leave before yours. Buying tickets

in stages is only slightly more expensive than buying a direct ticket.

Car & Motorcycle

DRIVING LICENCE

An international or domestic driving licence is necessary.

FUEL & SPARE PARTS

Fuel – including unleaded fuel and diesel – is available in the major towns; fill up whenever possible and carry a jerry can with extra fuel. Spare parts are extremely limited; carry tools and spare tyres. Tyre repairers are as common as mountains in 'them-thar parts'.

HIRE

In Lesotho it is far more economical to use a car hired in South Africa; just ensure that you have the written agreement from the hirer. There is a road tax of US\$0.70, payable on entering Lesotho.

Avis (☎ 2235 0328) and **Budget** (☎ 2231 6344) have offices in Maseru (see p143).

INSURANCE

Insurance is strongly recommended (and in many cases incorporated in the rental price), including for third-party damage and damage to or loss of your vehicle. Check carefully what you are covered for – hail damage is a possibility in Lesotho.

ROAD CONDITIONS & HAZARDS

Driving in Lesotho is getting easier with new sealed roads in the country's north but a 4WD is obligatory for the country's rough unsealed roads. Main routes are numbered with the letter 'A'; secondary roads take a 'B'. Motorcycles are fine on the sealed roads. Beware of treacherously slippery roads in winter.

Unsealed roads can be rough. Before attempting a difficult drive, try to get local info on current conditions: ask at a police station as no warning signs are displayed. Major hazards are: steep hairpin bends, flooding rivers (after summer storms), ice and snow in winter, people and animals. The occasional army roadblock does random checks, usually for stolen cars.

ROAD RULES

In Lesotho, vehicles are driven on the left-hand side. The national speed limit is 80km/h and the speed limit in villages is 50km/h. Seat belts must be worn at all times. A vehicle

registration booklet must be carried always, along with your licence.

Tours

Tour operators in Lesotho are hard to find. The tourist information office in Maseru publishes a list of local operators.

Malealea Lodge (p150) and Semonkong Lodge (p148) probably offer the best range of tours, ranging from crosscountry horse treks to 4WD excursions and walks between the two lodges. However, they don't offer a comprehensive overland tour of the entire country.