

SOUTH AFRICA CLIMATE AND WEATHER (by regions)

Climatic conditions generally range from Mediterranean in the southwestern corner of the country to temperate in the interior plateau, and subtropical in the northeast. A small area in the northwest has a desert climate. Most of the country has warm, sunny days and cool nights. Rainfall generally occurs during summer (November through March), although in the southwest, around **Cape Town**, rainfall occurs in winter (from June through August). Temperatures are influenced by variations in elevation, terrain, and ocean currents more than latitude.

Temperature and rainfall patterns vary in response to the movement of a high pressure belt that circles the globe between 25° and 30° south latitude during the winter and low-pressure systems that occur during summer. There is very little difference in average temperatures from south to north, however, in part because the inland plateau rises slightly in the northeast. For example, the average annual temperature in **Cape Town** is 17°C, and in **Pretoria**, 17.5°C, although these cities are separated by almost ten degrees of latitude. Maximum temperatures often exceed 32°C in the summer, and reach 38°C in some areas of the far north. The country's highest recorded temperatures, close to 48°C, have occurred in both the **Northern Cape** and **Mpumalanga**.

Frost occurs in high altitudes during the winter months. The coldest temperatures have been recorded about 250 kilometers northeast of Cape Town, where the average annual minimum temperature is - 6.1° C. Record snowfalls (almost fifty centimeters) occurred in July 1994 in mountainous areas bordering Lesotho.

Climatic conditions vary noticeably between east and west, largely in response to the warm Agulhas ocean current, which sweeps southward along the Indian Ocean coastline in the east for several months of the year, and the cold Benguela current, which sweeps northward along the Atlantic Ocean coastline in the west. Air temperatures in **Durban**, on the Indian Ocean, average nearly 6° C warmer than temperatures at the same latitude on the Atlantic Ocean coast. The effects of these two currents can be seen even at the narrow peninsula of the Cape of Good Hope, where water temperatures average 4° C higher on the east side than on the west.

Rainfall varies considerably from west to east. In the northwest, annual rainfall often remains below 200 millimeters. Much of the eastern Highveld, in contrast, receives 500 millimeters to 900 millimeters of rainfall per year; occasionally, rainfall there exceeds 2,000 millimeters. A large area of the center of the country receives about 400 millimeters of rain, on average, and there are wide variations closer to the coast. The 400-millimeter "rainfall line" has been significant because land east of the rainfall line is generally suitable for growing crops, and land west of the rainfall line, only for livestock grazing or crop cultivation on irrigated land.

Western Cape Climate - Cape Town Weather

Overall, the Western Cape climate is typically Mediterranean, with warm, dry summers and mild, moist winters and low summer rainfall prevail. Near the coast, summer's temperature rises from a pleasant low of 15° C to a heart warming 27° C. Inland temperatures are some 3-5° C higher. Coastal winters see the mercury dropping to a mild 7° C at night and rising to a comfortable 18° C by day. Away from the beach, morning wakens to an invigorating 5° C and midday peaks at a summery 22° C.

To many, March and April signal idyllic weather. Summer's heat subsides, the wind settles and autumn casts its brightly coloured mantle over the vineyards, generating red, burnished vistas spreading from the mountain tops to the sea. In keeping with its sunny, tranquil character, a temperate climate with gentle, intermittent precipitation complements the Garden Route's warm summers and mild winters.

In winter (from May to July), the snow-capped peaks of the Boland and the Cederberg Mountains and the lush, moist earth evoke an atmosphere conducive to log fires in cosy taverns. However, with the onset of spring (from August to October), the fast-retreating winter merges with the summer sun, bringing forth some of the world's most spectacular wild flower displays.

Visitors not delighted by the endless sunshine may well be literally swept off their feet by the "Cape Doctor", a powerful south-easterly wind clearing the Cape air of pollution (hence the name "Cape

Doctor". Though forceful in character, the "Cape Doctor" visits infrequently, arriving only when the Fairest Cape needs to freshen up. The wind drapes Table Mountain's flat-topped summit with a white "tablecloth" of cloud.

An old Cape Legend: There is a legend about Table Mountain's tablecloth (the famous white cloud that spills over the mountain when the south-easterly wind blows in summer). Legend has it that Van Hunks, a pirate in the early 18th century, retired from his eventful life at sea to live on the slopes of Devil's Peak. (the mountain next to Table Mountain). He spent his days sitting on the mountain, smoking his pipe. One day a stranger approached him, and a smoking contest ensued which lasted for days. The smoke clouds built up and a strong wind blew them down towards the town. When Van Hunks finally won the contest, the stranger revealed himself to be the Devil (hence Devil's Peak), and the two disappeared in a puff of smoke.

This phenomenon is naturally also supported by a meteorological explanation. The moisture-laden south-easter blows against Table Mountain from over the False Bay and rises. At a height of approximately 900 meters the winds reach the colder layers of air and thick clouds form. These clouds roll over the mountain and down towards the City Bowl. The characteristic tablecloth forms when the clouds reach the warmer, lower air layers and dissolve once more.

Gauteng Climate

Gauteng is said to offer one of the world's best climates: summer days are warm and wind free and winter days are crisp and clear. Johannesburg and Pretoria differ in temperature by about 2% (Pretoria being the warmer of the two).

Johannesburg Weather: Johannesburg has a delightfully mild climate, neither humid nor too hot for comfort. There are about six weeks of chill in mid-winter (from July to August). Summer, offering warm African sunshine followed by balmy nights, runs from October to March.

The seasons are flexible, one running into the next, and summer habitually spills over into spring and autumn. The nights can be chilly particularly in winter. Bring a jacket to wear in the evenings. The rainy season is in summer rather than winter. Rainstorms are often harsh accompanied by much thunder and lightning and occasional hail, but they are brief and followed by warm sunshine.

Pretoria Weather: Pretoria's climate is similar to that of Johannesburg, but it lies at a somewhat lower altitude than its neighbour and its air temperatures are, on average, about two degrees higher. This is a summer-rainfall region. Between November and February summer thunderstorms produce flashes of lightning and brief but torrential afternoon downpours. Summer days are hot, though rarely to the point of discomfort.

KwaZulu Natal Climate: Visitor to KwaZulu Natal can look forward to a splendid climate. The largest city, Durban enjoys warmth and sunshine very occasionally mixed with light, steady rainfall. In Durban the air is heavy with humidity and the subtropical latitude of the city brings with it long, hot summers with rainfall, and very mild winters.

Durban Weather: Durban boasts an average of 320 days of sunshine a year. Temperatures range from 16 to 25° C in winter and from 23 to 33° C during the summer months between September and April. January is generally Durban's hottest month, with an average daily temperature of +/- 32°C. The warm Mozambique current flowing along the coast means wonderfully warm bathing throughout the year, the water seldom falling below 17° C even in the middle of winter. With these conditions, it's no accident that Durban is considered the "holiday city" of KwaZulu Natal.

Further north, conditions become subtropical to an even greater extent, and the estuarine environment of St Lucia and Kosi Bay brings steamy days and balmy nights.

Moving inland, the low-lying coastline makes way for the emerald hills of Zululand and Thukela regions, and still further east to the Great Escarpment, as altitudes rise and temperatures drop. The chilly towns of Bergville and Winterton provide a refreshing break from the swelter.

Eastern Cape Climate

The coastal area of the Eastern Cape lies directly between the subtropical conditions of KwaZulu Natal and the Mediterranean conditions of the Western Cape, while its inland area is bisected by the great escarpment resulting in the southern reaches defined by a series of rivers and corresponding wetland fauna and flora, while the northern areas are those of the altitudinous plains of the Plateau and great Karoo. These topographical differences are what cause the climatic differences and conditions experienced by the towns and cities within these areas.

In the North East along the Wild Coast, towns like Port St John's experience long, hot, balmy conditions and high rainfall, while Graaff Reinet, in the heart of the Great Karoo, experiences long hot summer months and moderate winters. Up towards the Free State (at towns such as Lady Grey and Aliwal North) the rise in altitude means the appropriate lowering in temperature and the towns, just a few hundred kilometres from the swelter of the other areas, experience conditions favoured more by skiers than sunbathers.

The coastal city of Port Elizabeth enjoys a daily average of +/- 7-8 hours of sunshine annually. In Winter (from April to August) the temperatures range from 7 to 20° C. In summer the temperatures range from 16 to 26° C.

On the whole the weather in the Eastern Cape is good to visitors, rarely reaching extremes, except perhaps in the height of the Karoo summer. The changes depend on how much you move across the province's expanse and in and out of different climatological zones.

Free State Climate and Weather:

The Free State, with its vast beauty, endures a fair amount of hardship due to its hot, arid climate. Almost uniformly at about 1,300m above sea level, the Free State has weather typical of an interior plateau with summer rains, chilly winters and plenty of sunshine.

To the north, the Vaal irrigation area nourishes the small assortment of farming towns below it, and the hue of the countryside is often green. The east is entirely different with its winter blanketed by mountain snow and summers by the flourishing valleys it is characteristic of nature's surprises. The west is warm and cold in equal measure, its inhabitants making use of the many man-made water recreation facilities to endure the heat as much as using heating facilities in winter's low temperatures. The south brings hot, dry summer days and long, cold winter nights. This semi-desert area also brings fluctuations of temperature from day to night.

Bloemfontein is the capital city of the Free State. Its average summer temperature is +/- 23°C and its average winter temperature is +/- 8°C. January is the hottest month, with a temperature range of 15 - 32°C, while June is the coldest, its range a cold 1°C to a mild 17°C. Bloemfontein receives an average rainfall of 500-600mm annually. The latitudes south of the city are even hotter, while in high-altitude north-east, temperatures are markedly lower.

Limpopo Climate and Weather

Finding itself at South Africa's northernmost area and bisected by the tropic of Capricorn, visitors to Limpopo can expect sunshine, long summer afternoons and dry days for most of their stay.

Pietersburg, the capital city of Limpopo, lies more or less in the centre of the province and its weather is reflective of most of it. Only the region east of the city offers markedly different climate, with most the subtropical conditions of the Lowveld providing weather more suited to dense forests than the thorny bushveld of the lands above the Great Escarpment. Pietersburg offers an extremely pleasant climate for most of the year. With almost all year-round sunshine, it can get rather hot in the summer months (October to March) averaging 27°C.

The lowveld is less forgiving in the swelter of summer afternoons, with towns such as Phalaborwa known to reach 45°C. Generally, however, visitors to the Kruger Park area can expect temperatures around 30°C in summer.

Don't be surprised to find late afternoon growing heavy with clouds and you can expect short thunderstorms. Winter is typical of the interior highveld plateau. A sunny season of chilly, early mornings, warm middays, dry afternoons and cool to cold nights. In general the weather of Limpopo will greet you with a hospitable display of sunshine and reserve.

Mpumalanga Climate

Mpumalanga's weather is naturally defined by its topography. Mpumalanga is a province of two halves, namely the high-lying grassland savannah of the highveld escarpment and the subtropical Lowveld plains. The western side of Mpumalanga, on the highveld escarpment, is like a rise of tropics, an ascent into an uncompromising range of temperatures. The west is drier, hotter and much colder than the rest of the province. Middelburg, in the heart of the highveld, experiences summer rain, and has a summer (October to February) to winter (April to August) range of around 19° C with average temperatures in the contrasting seasons, of 26° C and 8° C.

Nelspruit, the capital city of Mpumalanga, lies at the edge of the Lowveld near the Kruger National Park, and enjoys relatively plentiful summer rainfall (an average of around 620 mm falls between September and March) and mild to hot subtropical conditions in the [Kruger Park](#).

If your trip covers the entire province, make sure you are prepared for the differences in temperatures from the Highveld to the Lowveld. Mosquitoes unfortunately also thrive in the climate of the lowlands. Please ask your pharmacist about the best anti-malaria prophylaxis. Visitors to the [Mpumalanga Game Reserves](#) should consult a local pharmacist or their family physician for advice on the best anti-malaria drug or drug combination they should take

Northern Cape Climate:

Although the Northern Cape is mainly semi desert, the western areas of the Northern Cape, including Namaqualand, a small section of the Green Kalahari and Calvinia, Nieuwoudville and Loeriesfontein in the Karoo fall into the winter rainfall area from April to September. Sharing the same climate as Namaqualand, it's not surprising these two sub regions will give you breathtakingly beautiful explosive displays of wild flowers during spring months from July to October.

The eastern summer rainfall areas experience thunderstorms that resonate across the wide plains and powerful bolts of lightning puncture the earth. The Northern Cape's weather is typical of desert and semi desert areas. This is a large dry region of fluctuating temperatures and varying topographies. The annual rainfall is sparse, only 50 to 400mm per annum. In January, afternoon temperatures usually range from 34 to 40° C. In 1939 an all time high of 47.8° C was recorded at the Orange River. Summer temperatures often top the 40° C mark.

Winter days are warm. The onset of night bringing dew and frost to supplement the low rainfall of the region. Sutherland in the Karoo is one of the coldest towns in South Africa. It's average minimum is - 6° C. In winter snow often blankets the surrounding mountains. On the whole you can expect to enjoy hot summer days and chilly nights when visiting the Northern Cape, South Africa.

North West Province Climate

Forming the southern part of the Kalahari Desert the North West Province offers almost year-round sunshine, making suntan lotion and a hat a prerequisite when visiting the North West Province, South Africa. The capital city, Mafikeng, enjoys weather indicative of largely the entire North West Province, with towns in the western areas only slightly hotter and those further south a bit cooler.

The summer months (from August to March) bring brief but refreshing afternoon thundershowers. The town has an above average rainfall of 300 to 700 mm annually. Summer temperatures range between 22 and 34° C and winter brings with it dry, sunny days and chilly nights. The average winter (from May to July) temperature is 16°C but can range from an average of 2 to 20° C in a single day.

The North West Province in South Africa is all about the authentic African bush experience, and it is the hot, dry Africa that, if properly prepared for, is truly special. Small wonder, then, that so many indulge in the many water recreational facilities available throughout the region.