

## **SOUTH AFRICA GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Introduction**

The combination of South Africa's landscape, people, history and culture makes it one of the most enchanting countries in the world.

The country boasts some of the world's most breathtaking scenery, and features an extraordinary variety of bird and wildlife species, including the Big Five (lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and rhino), as well as a spectacular variety of plants with some 10% of the world's flowering species found within its borders.

South Africa is often called the Cradle of Humankind, for this is where archaeologists discovered 2,5-million-year-old fossils of our earliest ancestors, as well as 100 000-year-old remains of modern man.

### **The people**

#### **Population groups**

Population was estimated at about 46,9 million. Africans were in the majority (about 37,2 million) and constituted about 79% of the total South African population. The white population was estimated at 4,4 million, the coloured population at 4,1 million and the Indian/Asian population at 1,1 million.

The South African population consists of the following groups:

**Nguni** (consisting of the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swazi people);

**Sotho-Tswana**, who include the Southern, Northern and Western Sotho (Tswana people);

**Tsonga; Venda; Afrikaners, English, Coloureds; Indians;** and those who have immigrated to South Africa from the rest of Africa, Europe and Asia and maintain a strong cultural identity. A few remaining members of the **Khoi** and the **San** also live in South Africa.

### **The Constitution of South Africa**

South Africa's Constitution was the result of remarkably detailed and inclusive negotiations - difficult but determined - that were carried out with an acute awareness of the injustices of the country's non-democratic past.

It is widely regarded as the most progressive constitution in the world, with a Bill of Rights second to none.

#### **Human rights and freedoms**

Human rights are given clear prominence in the Constitution. They feature in the Preamble with its stated intention of establishing "a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights".

In the first chapter, human rights appear in the first of the Founding Provisions of the Republic of South Africa: "Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms." Spelt out in detail, they occupy 35 sections of chapter 2.

Among the rights stipulated are those of equality, freedom of expression and association, political and property rights, housing, healthcare, education, access to information, and access to courts.

And all are taken extremely seriously by the citizens of the country.

There must be few places in the world where constitutional rights feature as much in public and private discourse, and there has been no hesitation in testing the provisions and implications of the Bill of Rights in the Constitutional Court.

Some of the more unusually progressive rights have come under particular spotlight, such as the unqualified "Everyone has the right to life", and the inclusion of sexual orientation as one of the grounds upon which discrimination is forbidden.

Any limitation of rights must be "reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society" and must take several factors into consideration. And although chapter 2 also acknowledges the possible need to derogate certain rights under states of emergency, it lists a number of non-derogable rights.

The remaining three Founding Provisions of the Constitution reaffirm South Africa's determination to build on a bedrock of equality, law and democracy. They are:

- Non-racialism and non-sexism.
- Supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law.
- The provision that lays down the country's democratic philosophy by stipulating "universal adult suffrage, a national common voters roll, regular elections and a multi-party system of democratic government, to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness".

## **The Flag**

It's the only six-coloured national flag in the world. It's also one of the youngest, yet whatever shape it takes - and it's taken more than any other national symbol - it's instantly recognisable to South Africans everywhere.

### **Meaning of the flag**

Red for bloodshed  
Blue of open blue skies  
Green for the land  
Black for the black people  
White for the European people  
Yellow for the natural resources i.e. Gold  
The Y symbolizes the merging nationalities - i. e. unity



## **Languages**

According to the Contitution everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights. Each person also has the right to instruction in their language of choice where this is reasonably practicable.

## Official languages

The Constitution recognises 11 official languages, namely **Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga.**

Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages, the Constitution expects government to implement positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.

Although English is the mother tongue of only 8,2% of the population, it is the language most widely understood, and the second language of the majority of South Africans. However, government is committed to promoting all the official languages.

## Education

South Africa has 12.3-million learners, some 386 600 teachers and 26 292 schools, including 1 098 registered independent or private schools. Of all schools, roughly 6 000 are high schools (grade 7 to grade 12) and the rest primary (grade 0 to grade 6).

In government-funded public schools, the average ratio of scholars (known as "learners" in terms of the country's outcomes-based education system) to teachers ("educators") is 32.6 to one, while private schools generally have one teacher for every 17.5 scholars.

The national Department of Education is responsible for education across the country as a whole, while each of the nine provinces has its own education department.

The central government provides a national framework for school policy, but administrative responsibility lies with the provinces. Power is further devolved to grassroots level via elected school governing bodies, which have a significant say in the running of their schools.

The national Department of Education is responsible for higher education. Private schools and higher education institutions have a fair amount of autonomy, but are expected to fall in line with certain government non-negotiables - no child may be excluded from a school on grounds of his or her race or religion, for example.

School life spans 13 years or grades, from grade 0, otherwise known as grade R or "reception year", through to grade 12 or "matric" - the year of matriculation. General Education and Training runs from grade 0 to grade 9. Under the South African Schools Act of 1996, education is compulsory for all South Africans from age 7 (grade 1) to age 15, or the completion of grade 9. General Education and Training also includes Adult Basic Education and Training.

Further Education and Training takes place from grades 10 to 12, and also includes career-oriented education and training offered in other Further Education and Training institutions - technical colleges, community colleges and private colleges. Diplomas and certificates are qualifications recognised at this level.

Compared with most other countries, education gets a really big slice of the pie - usually around 20% of total government expenditure. In the 2006 Budget education received R92.1-billion, amounting to 17.8% of total spending.

More money is always needed to address the huge backlogs left by 40 years of apartheid education. Under that system, white South African children received a quality schooling virtually for free, while their black counterparts had only "Bantu education".

Education was viewed as a part of the overall apartheid system, which included the "homelands", urban restrictions, pass laws and job reservation. The role of black Africans was as labourers or servants only. As HF Verwoerd, the architect of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, conceived it: "There is no place for [the African] in the European community above the level of certain forms of

labour. It is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim, absorption in the European community."

Although today's government is working to rectify the imbalances in education, the apartheid legacy remains. The greatest challenges lie in the poorer, rural provinces like the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Schools are generally better resourced in the more affluent provinces such as Gauteng and the Western Cape.

Illiteracy rates are high at around 24% of adults over 15 years old (6- to 8-million adults are not functionally literate), teachers in township schools are poorly trained, and the matric pass rate remains low.

While 65% of whites over 20 years old and 40% of Indians have a high school or higher qualification, this figure is only 14% among blacks and 17% among the coloured population.

Like so much else in South Africa, our education system is characterised by diversity: schools and universities vary greatly in terms of quality, financial resources, ethos and size. Top-quality schools and universities are to be found in both the state and the private education sector.

Most institutions fall under the auspices of the state, but due to an emphasis on local or community-based governance, and a strong and growing private school and higher education sector, the educational landscape is colourful.

Most state schools are state-aided to some extent: the government provides the minimum, and parents contribute to basics and extras in the form of school fees. Fees vary considerably, depending on factors such as class size, facilities and the quality of teaching offered.

Although private colleges and universities are a more recent phenomenon, South Africa has had private for centuries. There are around 1 098 registered private schools, catering for some 340 000 students - 2.8% of the total schooling population.

Many private schools chart a path of excellence, adopting cutting-edge trends, or offering solid, religious-based education since their origins as mission schools. But there are many outstanding state-aided schools, on a par with some of the top private institutions.

## **Religion**

### **Religious groups**

Almost 76% of South Africa's population follows the Christian faith. Other major religious groups are the Hindus, Muslims, Jews and Buddhists. A minority of South Africa's population do not belong to any of the major religions, but regard themselves as traditionalists or of no specific religious affiliation.

Freedom of worship is guaranteed by the Constitution, and the official policy is one of non interference in religious practices.

The Muslim community in South Africa is small, but is growing rapidly. The major components of this community are the Cape Malays, who are mainly descendants of Indonesian slaves, and 20% of people of Indian descent.

The Jewish population is less than 100 000. Of these, the majority are Orthodox Jews.

Buddhism is barely organised in South Africa. However, the Nan Hua Buddhist temple has been built at Bronkhorstspuit near [Pretoria](#). The number of Parsees has decreased, while there is a small group of Jains in Durban. Followers of the Baha'i Faith are establishing groups and temples in various parts of the country.

### **Number of individuals by religion (Census 2001)**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>%</b>
Christian	79.8%
African tradition	0.3%
Judaism	0.2%
Hinduism	1.2%
Islam	1.5%
Other	0.6%
No religion	15.1%
Undetermined	1.4%
Total	100%

## **The land**

### **Introduction**

South Africa occupies the southernmost part of the African continent, stretching latitudinally from 22° to 35° S and longitudinally from 17° to 33° E. Its surface area is 1 219 090 km<sup>2</sup>.

The country has common boundaries with Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe, while Mozambique and Swaziland lie to the north-east. Completely enclosed by South African territory in the south-east is the mountain kingdom of Lesotho.

To the west, south and east, South Africa borders on the Atlantic and Indian oceans. Isolated, 1 920 km south-east of [Cape Town](#) in the Atlantic, lie the Prince Edward and Marion islands, annexed by South Africa in 1947.

### **The oceans**

South Africa is surrounded by the ocean on three sides – to the west, south and east – and has a coastline of about 3 000 km. The coastline is swept by two major ocean currents – the warm south-flowing Mozambique-Agulhas and the cold Benguela. The former skirts the east and south coasts as far as Cape Agulhas, while the Benguela current flows northwards along the west coast as far as southern Angola.

The contrast in temperature between these two currents partly accounts for important differences in climate and vegetation between the east and west coasts of South Africa. It also accounts for the differences in marine life. The cold waters of the west coast are much richer in oxygen, nitrates, phosphates and plankton than those of the east coast. Consequently, the South African fishing industry is centred on the west coast.

### **The coasts**

The coastline itself is an even, closed one with few bays or indentations naturally suitable for harbours. The only ideal natural harbour along the coastline is [Saldanha Bay](#) on the west coast. However, the area lacks fresh water and offers no natural lines of penetration to the interior.

Most river-mouths are unsuitable as harbours because large sandbars block entry for most of the year. These bars are formed by the action of waves and currents, and by the intermittent flow, heavy sediment load and steep gradients of most South African rivers. Only the largest rivers, such as the Orange and Limpopo, maintain narrow permanent channels through the bars. For these reasons, the country has no navigable rivers.

## **Relief features**

South Africa's surface area falls into two major physiographic categories: the interior plateau, and the land between the plateau and the coast. Forming the boundary between these two areas is the Great Escarpment, the most prominent and continuous relief feature of the country. Its height above sea level varies from about 1 500 m in the doleritecapped Roggeveld scarp in the south-west, to a height of 3 482 m in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg.

Inland from the escarpment lies the interior plateau, which is the southern continuation of the great African plateau stretching north to the Sahara Desert.

The plateau itself is characterised by wide plains with an average height of 1 200 m above sea level. The dissected Lesotho plateau, which is more than 3 000 m above sea level, is the most prominent. In general, the escarpment forms the highest parts of the plateau.

Between the Great Escarpment and the coast lies an area which varies in width from 80 to 240 km in the east and south, and a mere 60 to 80 km in the west. At least three major subdivisions are recognised: the eastern plateau slopes, the Cape folded belt and adjacent regions, and the western plateau slopes.

## **Climatic features**

The subtropical location, on either side of 30° S, accounts for the warm temperate conditions so typical of South Africa, making it a popular destination for foreign tourists.

The country also falls squarely within the subtropical belt of high pressure, making it dry, with an abundance of sunshine.

The wide expanses of ocean on three sides of South Africa have a moderating influence on its climate. More apparent, however, are the effects of the warm Agulhas and the cold Benguela currents along the east and west coasts respectively. While Durban (east coast) and Port Nolloth (west coast) lie more or less on the same latitude, there is a difference of at least 6° C in their mean annual temperatures.

Gale-force winds are frequent on the coasts, especially in the south-western and southern coastal areas.

## **Rainfall**

South Africa has an average annual rainfall of 450 mm, compared with a world average of 860 mm.

Sixty-five percent of the country receives less than 500 mm per year, which is generally accepted as the minimum amount required for successful dry-land farming. Twenty-one percent of the country, mainly the arid west, receives less than 200 mm per year.

In Cape Town, the capital city of the Western Cape, the average rainfall is highest in the winter months, while in the capital cities of the other eight provinces, the average rainfall is highest during summer.

South Africa's rainfall is unreliable and unpredictable. Large fluctuations in the average annual rainfall are the rule rather than the exception in most areas of the country. Below-average annual rainfall is more commonly recorded than above-average total annual rainfall. South Africa is periodically afflicted by drastic and prolonged droughts, which often end in severe floods.

## Temperatures

Temperature conditions in South Africa are characterised by three main features. Firstly, temperatures tend to be lower than in other regions at similar latitudes, for example, Australia. This is due primarily to the greater elevation of the subcontinent above sea level.

Secondly, despite a latitudinal span of 13 degrees, average annual temperatures are remarkably uniform throughout the country. Owing to the increase in the height of the plateau towards the north-east, there is hardly any increase in temperature from south to north as might be expected.

The third feature is the striking contrast between temperatures on the east and west coasts.

Temperatures above 32° C are fairly common in summer, and frequently exceed 38° C in the lower Orange River Valley and the Mpumalanga Lowveld.

## Frost, humidity and fog

Frost often occurs on the interior plateau during cold, clear, winter nights, with ice forming on still pools and in water pipes. The frost season (April to October), is longest over the eastern and southern plateau areas bordering on the escarpment. Frost decreases to the north, while the coast is virtually frost-free. Average annual relative humidity readings show that, in general, the air is driest over the western interior and the plateau. Along the coast, the humidity is much higher, and at times may rise to 85%. Low stratus clouds and fog frequently occur over the cool west coast, particularly during summer. The only other area that commonly experiences fog is the 'mist belt' along the eastern foothills of the escarpment.

## Sunshine

South Africa is famous for its sunshine. Generally speaking, April and May are the most pleasant months when the rainy season over the summer rainfall region has ended, and before the rainy season in the winter-rainfall area has begun. At this time of year, the hot summer weather has abated and the winds are lighter than during the rest of the year.

In certain areas, however, notably the hot, humid KwaZulu-Natal coast, Mpumalanga and Limpopo, June and July are the ideal holiday months.

## The Provinces

### Introduction

In terms of South Africa's [Constitution](#), the country is divided into nine provinces, each with its own legislature, premier and executive councils. The provinces, with their own distinctive landscapes, vegetation and climate, are:

**the Western Cape, the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, the Northern Cape, Free State, North West, Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Limpopo.**

## Provincial Map



## ROAD MAP



### WebPages about South Africa

<http://www.southafrica.info/>

<http://www.statssa.gov.za/>

<http://www.southafrica.net/>

<http://www.embajadasudafrica.org.ar>

<http://www.sa.c2a.co.za/>