



Welcome to South Africa

"Every day of my South African adventure was brightened by the laughter of the children I worked with. I felt proud knowing I was helping to rebuild the communities they lived in."

South Africa has blossomed from its turbulent and controversial history to become one of the most socially progressive countries in Africa. Described as "the Rainbow Nation" by Nelson Mandela, the newly developing modern South Africa is embracing its multicultural diversity in the wake of segregationist apartheid ideology. Cradled between the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, South Africa is a place of gold and diamonds where breathtaking mountains meet empty desert and dry savannas meet lush vineyards. This centre of biodiversity is home to 10% of all of earth's known plant species as well as lions, rhinos, leopards, hippos and giraffes offering visitors an unforgettable adventure for both body and mind.

Know your History

South Africa has experienced a significantly different history from other nations in Africa, resulting in a level of multicultural diversity not seen in any other African community. The global strategic importance of South Africa's cape has been a major influence on the turbulent history of this diverse country, creating European interest in this route to the riches of India and further afield.

Pre-history

Described by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and later by Nelson Mandela as "the Rainbow Nation", the socially progressive policies, economy and multicultural diversity which set present day South Africa apart from the rest of Africa have not come about without a turbulent and often controversial history. One of the oldest peoples in the world, thought by some to be the genetic parents of all modern races, are the Bushmen who have lived in South Africa for at least 20,000 years, although some estimates put this figure closer to 40,000 years. The Bushmen were skilled hunter gatherers with an early advanced culture. Following the migration of some groups of Bushmen further north, two predominant groups emerged with distinct characteristics. The Khoikhoi acquired livestock as they travelled north and their hunting and gathering gave way to herding and solidified community structures. On returning south and encountering the hunter gatherer Bushmen the Khoikhoi referred to them as "San", a slightly derogatory term. However subsequent intermingling between the two groups gave rise to the term "Khoisan".

Around 2,500 years ago Bantu people migrated into southern Africa from the Niger Delta area in western Africa, reaching the present day KwaZulu-Natal province by 500 AD. The Bantu speakers not only had domestic animals, but also practised agriculture, farming and skilled ironworks and lived in settled villages. Evidence suggests the Khoisan and Bantu people lived peacefully alongside each other, exchanging cultural and linguistic characteristics.

European history

The first European influence came in the form of Portuguese explorer Bartolomeu Dias, who achieved circumnavigation of the cape in 1488. At first described as Cabo das Tormentas ("Cape of Storms"), as the Portuguese battled with the fierce weather and rocky shorelines, the promise of a sea route to the riches of India which had been eagerly awaited by the Portuguese led to a new name, Cabo da Boa Esperança ("Cape of Good Hope"). The Portuguese, however, showed little interest in colonising the area, seeing it as too dangerous and inhospitable, instead focusing their efforts in Mozambique. South Africa did not experience European settlement until the arrival of the Dutch in the 17th century. In 1652, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) established a permanent settlement with the intention of establishing a secure base camp for passing ships.

Following difficulties trading with the neighbouring Khoikhoi and faced with a labour shortage, some of the Dutch workers established farms to create a harvest for the VOC settlement. A series of Cape frontier wars followed as the farmers, or "free burghers" as they became known, expended further north and east into Khoikhoi territory. The burghers became increasingly isolated and independent as they expanded, taking up a semi nomadic pastoralist lifestyle which was not dissimilar to that of the Khoikhoi whom they had displaced. These self sufficient wandering farmers, so well acquainted with the land on which they travelled, were the first of the "Trek Boers" whom we now know as the Boers. As Dutch mercantile power slowly faded, the British saw their chance to move in and use the Cape as a stopping stage on the route to India and Australia, as the Dutch had done before them.

1800s

In 1815 the VOC declared itself bankrupt and the British claimed sovereignty over this relatively divided area; power up to this point had resided solely with the white elite in Cape Town and the isolated pastoralists and dispersed natives populating the rest of the country. White South Africa was relatively unified at this point. However, the arrival of 5,000 British immigrants in 1820 divided the white population, which would only grow larger as English speakers began to dominate politics, finance and trade. Now the previously unchallenged Boers were relegated to their farms. Meanwhile, the Bantu people, who had lived largely untouched by European settlers, underwent immense upheaval in the early 19th century as a result of the military expansion of the Zulu kingdom. Led by Shaka Zulu, large armies set out on a massive programme of expansion, displacing people throughout southern Africa and beyond. This military expansion became known by Zulus as the *difaqane* (forced migration). Meanwhile, disillusioned with the British some groups of Boers, along with their servants and large numbers of Khoikhoi, set off on the "Great Trek" in search of greater independence in 1835.

Their confidence and hopes grew as they encountered vast tracts of uninhabited grazing lands, unaware that these deserted pasture lands were a direct result of the *difaqane* and did not represent the normal state of affairs. The Boers (or "Voortrekkers" as these trekkers were known) continued the "Great Trek" with hope of establishing a republic. Their optimism was soon to be met by the Zulu's who were skilled and experienced in war as the Voortrekkers headed into their territory in Natal. The Boers met resistance in the form of a series of attacks, eventually culminating in the Battle of Blood River in which the killing of several thousand Zulus reportedly caused the Ncome's waters to run red. In 1843 the British ensured the Boers dreams of establishing a Natal republic remained short lived when they annexed the area and following the Anglo Zulu wars established control over Natal, which was then known as Zululand.

The British began establishing sugar plantations soon after and, finding themselves with a labour shortage, turned to India for help, building the base for what would soon become the largest Indian community outside of India. The discovery of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1886 encouraged further immigration and economic growth. The Boers became increasingly resentful that their impoverished republics had missed out on the economic benefit of the mines which resentment grew into full blown

rebellion in 1880 in the first Anglo Boer war, known to Afrikaners as the War of Independence. The Boers defeated the British with guerrilla warfare tactics and the South African Republic (ZAR) regained its independence. In 1899 the government declared war on the British once more when they refused to withdraw troops from the ZAR's borders leading to the second Anglo Boer war. This time the British resorted controversially to scorched earth tactics and concentration camps, which forced the Boers to hand over sovereignty once more; a peace treaty was signed in 1902 which committed the British to reconstructing the areas under their control in return for retaining sovereignty over them.

1900s

The British, however, focused on rebuilding a mining industry responsible for almost a third of the world's annual gold production, leaving the Zulu, Boer and other ethnic populations marginalised. Thousands of Chinese workers were supplied to undercut resistance as the British imposed reduced wages and in 1910 the Union of South Africa was created which recognised English and Dutch as the official languages, not recognising Afrikaans until 1925. In the First World War, the Union automatically joined with Britain against the German empire, gaining control of present day Namibia and Tanzania. However, the anti British South African Prime Minister Barry Hertzog delayed South Africa's involvement in the Second World War until the United Party deposed him in favour of pro British Afrikaner Jan Smuts, who declared war on Germany and became an advisor to Churchill.

Apartheid

The international standing of South Africa was soon demolished with the rise of the National Party, which was elected by an impoverished Afrikaner community in 1948. This government would lead South Africa to eventual isolation from a world that would no longer tolerate discrimination based solely on race. The National Party imposed harsh segregationist laws which became collectively known as apartheid. During apartheid South Africa's black and mixed populations were subjected to a barrage of oppressive legislation which left only the white minorities with voting rights, 90% of the land and the highest standards of living in all of Africa. The South African Native National Congress, or the African National Congress (ANC) as it is now known, was formed by black and coloured opposition to apartheid to ensure that they retained an effective voice in the new union. In 1949 the ANC developed an agenda which advocated for the first time open resistance in the form of strikes, acts of public disobedience and protest marches. Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd declared a state of emergency, giving security forces the right to detain people without trial, leading to the arrest of over 18,000 demonstrators including much of the ANC leadership. In June 1964 Nelson Mandela with seven others was sentenced to life imprisonment for terrorism. Apartheid began to disintegrate towards the end of the 20th century following economic and cultural sanctions by the international community, pressure from the anti apartheid movement around the world and open revolt within the National Party. On 2nd February 1990 Nelson Mandela was released from prison after 27 years and the ANC was declared no longer banned, signalling the beginning of a transition to democracy.

Post-Apartheid & present day

Apartheid was dismantled and the first multi racial elections were held in 1994. The African National Congress won by an overwhelming majority and has been in power ever since. Nelson Mandela was elected President on 9th May 1994 and formed a government of national unity consisting of the ANC, the National Party and the Inkatha. The 1955 Freedom Charter which articulated a vision of a non racial democratic state became central to the ANC's vision of a new South Africa as did the fostering of a culture which recognised human rights. A new South Africa is slowly emerging from its turbulent history and although racial inequality still exists it is no longer recognised by the state or

accepted.

Mandela was succeeded by Thabo Mbeki in 1999. Mbeki overcame criticism of his "quiet diplomacy" with Zimbabwe and Mugabe and his stance on AIDS early on in his presidency and succeeded in manoeuvring the ANC into a two thirds majority in parliament for the first time. In 2009 Mbeki was succeeded by Jacob Zuma of the ANC, who has promised to continue much of Mbeki's careful work despite being previously removed from his post as deputy president by Mbeki following repeated rape scandals. Mbeki's reaction to these scandals was in large part the cause of his resignation in 2009; charges of corruption against Zuma were not upheld by the courts and the blame for the accusations fell onto Mbeki's shoulders who accordingly resigned.

Zuma's previous scandals have since faded somewhat and in his hands the ANC looks to be going from strength to strength.

Money Talks

South Africa's economy is two tiered – one rivalling other developed countries and the other with only the most basic of infrastructures. It is a productive and industrialised economy that also shows many characteristics of developing countries, including a division of labour between formal and informal sectors and an uneven distribution of wealth and income. It is the primary sector, based on manufacturing, services, mining and agriculture, which is the best developed, but South Africa's transportation infrastructure is also among the best in Africa – supporting both domestic and regional needs and its several major ports make it the central point for the majority of trade in the southern African regions.

South Africa's major trading partners include the UK, the USA, Germany, Italy, Belgium, China and Japan. The country's trade with other sub Saharan African regions has increased substantially, which is considered to be the result of climate change and the increasing number of droughts affecting these countries. In 2001 exports reached 29.1% of GDP, up from 11.5% a decade before.

Exports

Unlike other African countries South Africa's agricultural sector is not primarily subsistence based. Most farms, although family owned, are large commercial enterprises. South Africa is as a whole completely self reliant, with more than enough output to export massive amounts of agricultural produce. Many other southern African countries rely on South Africa for maize, which is grown predominantly in the Free State region.

Thanks to the country's varied climate, South Africa can grow a range of crops with the Western Cape being the most prolific producer. This area is popular for ostrich farming in the Oudtshoorn area and dairy farming along the Garden Route just to the south. South Africa has become the 5th largest producer of wine worldwide and exports large quantities of fruit such as grapes, apples, cherries, pears, peaches, and citrus to Europe. Wheat is largely grown in the Highveld of Mpumalanga and the Free State.

Further inland, the regions of the Karoo are ideal for livestock farming, especially sheep farming for wool and mutton. Along the more well watered eastern areas cattle farming is popular amongst the indigenous people. The KwaZulu-Natal coast as well as the Limpopo and Mpumalanga Lowveld areas are perfect for sugarcane and sub tropical fruits such as mangos, lychees, papaya, bananas and melons. Pineapples are cultivated around East London and the north and east of the country are popular regions for game farms, specialising in South African wild antelope. Despite this wealth of agriculture this sector contributes less than 4% to GDP and 10% of employment.

South Africa also boasts rich mineral resources – it is the largest producer and exporter of gold and platinum and it also exports significant amounts of coal and diamonds. Value added processing of minerals, which produce ferro alloys, stainless steel and similar products, is a major industry and is growing steadily economically. South Africa is also the world leader in many aspects of the manufacturing industry, including railway rolling stock, synthetic fuels and mining equipment and machinery.

Although the economic achievements since 1994 have been globally acknowledged, South Africa struggles to attract significant foreign direct investment. The largest single FDI occurred in 2005 when Barclays bought a majority share in Absa Group Limited bank and in 2006 deals were struck between the British company Vodafone and Vodacom.

Money

South African currency is the Rand (ZAR) and it is possible to change money at the airport. All major South African banks have ATM facilities in nearby towns and Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted. A credit card will come in useful in the event of an emergency. The rand takes its name from "Witwatersrand" (white waters ridge), an area outside Johannesburg where the majority of the country's gold deposits were found.

Get Culture Savvy

Bushmen

As a result of its ethnic diversity, it can be argued that there is no single culture in South Africa. Instead the food, music and ethnicity of the "Rainbow Nation" encompasses many cultures, mirroring the many groups of people who call South Africa home. The Bushmen, thought to be a "genetic Adam" from which the entire world's ethnic groups can ultimately trace genetic heritage, have been living in South Africa for up to 40,000 years and were probably the first people to migrate to the southern tip of the African continent as skilled hunter gatherers. Little archaeological evidence exists in view of the low environmental impact which they had resulting from their great respect for the land.

A series of striking rock paintings found at the Lapala Wilderness and Goudriver areas, however, which were made 10-20,000 years ago, sheds some light on the life and activities of the early Bushmen and include depictions of rhinoceros, elephant and antelope. Bantu speaking peoples also have cultural importance in present day South Africa, having migrated into southern Africa from the Niger Delta area in about 1000 BC. The Bantu speakers not only had domestic animals but also practised agriculture, farming and skilled iron works and lived in settled villages. Rock paintings show the Khoisan and Bantu groups interacting and early Khoisan language traits, such as the click consonant, have been incorporated into several Bantu languages.

Modern day South Africa

Modern day South Africa is a multi cultural country with the largest population of people from a mixed ethnic background, white people and Indian communities anywhere in Africa. This is mostly the result of European interest in the long sea route connecting Europe to India and Australia which encouraged Dutch (Boers) and British settlers which in turn led to the arrival of thousands of Indian, Indonesian and Malaysian workers, who were known as "Cape Malays" and "Cape Coloureds". In addition, large numbers of Chinese were introduced during the early 20th century and South Africa's multicultural diversity is now beginning to be celebrated.

Food

Popular South African cuisine includes the braai (barbecue) on which spicy sausages and maize is often cooked. Biltong, dried meat, is another favourite, usually eaten watching sport such as football, rugby union or cricket. South Africa became the first African country to hold the World Cup tournament in 2010.

Curry is popular especially in areas such as Durban which has large Indian populations as is "the bunny" or "bunny chow", a local Indian Durban speciality consisting of a hollowed loaf of bread filled with curry. Cape Malay dishes, which originate in South East Asia, include bobotie (made from curried lamb, fruit and bread and served with rice) and sosatie (a type of barbecued meat). More recently, Pakistani and Indian restaurants have been opened in major cities and the Portuguese favourite, spicy peri peri chicken, has made its mark with the South African Portuguese themed restaurant chain Nando's reaching popularity in the UK, Australia, Malaysia and Kenya.

Philosophies

Two major philosophies have their origins in South Africa:

Ubuntu

A traditional African concept, ubuntu has its origins in the Bantu language of the indigenous people of southern Africa. Ubuntu can be defined as "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity" or in the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good for he or she has a proper self assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed."

Satyagraha

Mahatma Gandhi's notion of "passive resistance" (Satyagraha) developed while he lived in South Africa facing the discrimination directed at Indians during apartheid. Gandhi called on his fellow Indians to defy the new discriminatory laws and suffer the consequences for doing so rather than resorting to violent resistance. Originating from Sanskrit, Satyagraha takes its meaning from "Satya" meaning truth, and "graha" denoting effort. Satyagraha therefore means "an effort to discover, discern, obtain or apply the truth" and, in accordance with Gandhi's interpretation, arms an individual with moral rather than physical power.

Holidays

1st January New Year's Day
21st March Human Rights Day
Varies (Friday before Easter) Good Friday
5th April Family Day
27th April Freedom Day
1st May Workers' Day
16th June Youth Day
9th August National Women's Day
24th September Heritage Day
16th December Day of Reconciliation
25th December Christmas Day

Learn the Lingo

South Africa's diversity is now recognised officially with its eleven official languages, which is only surpassed by India. The official languages of South Africa are: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu.

The majority of these are from the Bantu family, are spoken by most South Africans and branch into two principal groups: the Sotho-Tswana branch (Sotho, Northern Sotho, Tswana), and the Nguni branch (Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, Ndebele). Zulu is the most widely spoken home language in South Africa (24% of the population) as well as being understood by over 50% of the population, followed by Xhosa (18%), and Afrikaans (13%).

Whilst English is only the fifth most common home language, it is understood in most urban areas and dominates government and the media. The country also recognises 8 non official languages; among them are languages of the San and Khoikhoi people which contain regional dialects stretching northward into Namibia and Botswana and elsewhere. They have been marginalised to a great extent and many are in danger of becoming extinct.

Lay of the Land

South Africa's biggest border is with the ocean with a coastline that stretches more than 2,500 km from the Atlantic Ocean round to the Indian Ocean. On dry land the country shares long borders with Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe in the west, through to Mozambique and Swaziland in the east. Nestled in the curve of the bean-shaped Free State is the small mountainous country of Lesotho, completely surrounded by South African territory. The Limpopo river and the Orange river, with its tributary, the Vaal, are the two major rivers. Dams also feature heavily in this largely dry country with the largest dam being the Gariep on the Orange River.

Although thought of primarily as a dry country, South Africa has a great variety of climate zones and topography. The east coast along the border with Mozambique and the Indian Ocean has a lush subtropical climate. This low lying coastal zone soon gives way to the "Great Escarpment" which separates it from the high central plateau, including the Karoo and Highveld areas.

The Karoo ("Place of Great Dryness") is home to many desert animals, most notably the Black Eagle and various species of tortoise as well as endangered species such as the black rhinoceros and riverine rabbit.

North of the Vaal River, the Highveld stretches from east of Johannesburg through to the Swaziland border and is better watered. To the north of Johannesburg the altitude drops beyond the Highveld's escarpment and turns into the lower lying Lowveld where the Bushveld is to be found, an area of mixed, dry forest and an abundance of wildlife.

What's the Weather like?

South Africa has a subtropical climate moderated by the ocean on three sides and enjoying plentiful sunshine, making it extremely popular with visitors. It experiences mainly dry conditions with only 464 mm rainfall falling annually.

The geographical position of South Africa in the sub tropical climate zone is not as noticeable on the

Highveld, the central plateau, as in the Lowveld, where summer temperatures can climb above 40°C. Rainfall in the Lowveld averages 800 mm per annum and falls mainly during the summer months, which results in humid, sultry weather. The rainy season usually starts in September and can last until May.

The climate is much more tolerable in the dry winter months of June, July, and August when days are mild and the nights a little cooler. This time of year is also ideal for animal viewing in the Kruger National Park because the shrubs and trees don't have so many leaves to obstruct the view. Since it hardly ever rains in winter the game must come to the waterholes to drink in the mornings and afternoons and can easily be observed from a vehicle.

Biodiversity

South Africa is home to around 20,000 different species of plants, roughly 10% of all the known species of plants on earth, being the world's richest floral kingdom – with a brief but overwhelming flowering season between August and September.

The bushveld habitats are ideal for mammals such as lions, leopard, white rhinos, blue wildebeest, kudu, impala, hyena, hippo and giraffe. In fact, South Africa is the origin of several world records, the world's largest terrestrial mammal, the African elephant and the smallest, a shrew which is the size of a human fingertip, the world's tallest mammal, the giraffe, the world's fastest, the cheetah, the world's heaviest reptile, the leatherback turtle, the world's largest antelope, the eland, the largest bird, the ostrich, and the world's heaviest flying bird, the Kori bustard. There are 6,000 different spiders, 175 varieties of scorpion and 100 types of snake. In total, South Africa has more species of wild animals than Europe and Asia put together.

From the Big Five – lion, buffalo, leopard, elephant and rhino – to the marine Big Five: whale, shark, dolphin, tuna, and marlin, South Africa has plenty of opportunities to spot them all. With 2,954 km of coastline, covering the Indian Ocean and Atlantic, around one 6th of the world's marine species can be found. It is also the preferred breeding spot for a vast number of endemic and migratory birds.

Over the past four decades overpopulation and deforestation has led to devastating loss of natural habitat and the continued invasion of alien species poses a direct threat to the native biodiversity of South Africa. The South African government supports a scheme to promote sustainable development and the use of natural resources but misuse of the land and global climate change is having a noticeable effect and makes South Africa vulnerable to the loss of surface waters. Efforts are still needed to further conservation and sustainable development. Areas such as Table Mountain National Park are leading the way with policies to help preserve South Africa's biodiversity. The park has made it illegal to remove or cause harm to any plants, rocks or animals, feed any animals, fish without a valid permit or light a fire unless in a designated area. It is controls such as these that help to keep the beauty of the area.

Good Books

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- South Africa Lesotho and Swaziland. Mary Fitzpatrick. Lonely Planet Publications, 7th edition, 2006. ISBN 9781740599702
- South Africa (Eyewitness Travel Guides). Dorling Kindersley Publishers Ltd., 2005. ISBN 9781405311151
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- South Africa Berlitz Pocket Guide. Berlitz Publishing, 2005, ISBN 9789812466488

Wildlife

- Field Guide to Mammals of Southern Africa. Chris Stuart. Struik Publishers, 2001. ISBN 9781868725373
- Big Cat Diary: Cheetah. Jonathan Scott & Angela Scott. Collins, 2006. ISBN 9780007211807
- Field Guide to the Mammals of the Kruger National Park. Heike Schutze. Struik Publishers, 2002. ISBN 9781868725946
- Southern African Wildlife (Bradt Visitor's Guides). Mike Unwin. Bradt Travel Guides, 2003. ISBN 9781841620602
- Signs of the Wild: Field Guide to the Spoor and Signs of the Mammals of Southern Africa. Clive Walker. Struik Publishers, 5th edition, 1996. ISBN 9781868258963

Fiction / Travel Writing

- South Africa: Past, Present and Future. Tony Binns. Prentice Hall, 2000. ISBN 9780582356269
- South Africa Insight Guide. Jason Mitchell. Insight Guides, 5th edition, 2005. ISBN 9789812580290
- A Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela. Nelson Mandela. Abacus, 1997. ISBN 9780349106533
- The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock and the Environment 1770-1950. William Beinart. Oxford University Press, 2003. ISBN 9780199261512
- Poisoned Wells: The Dirty Politics of African Oil. Nicholas Shaxon. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. ISBN 9781403971944

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