

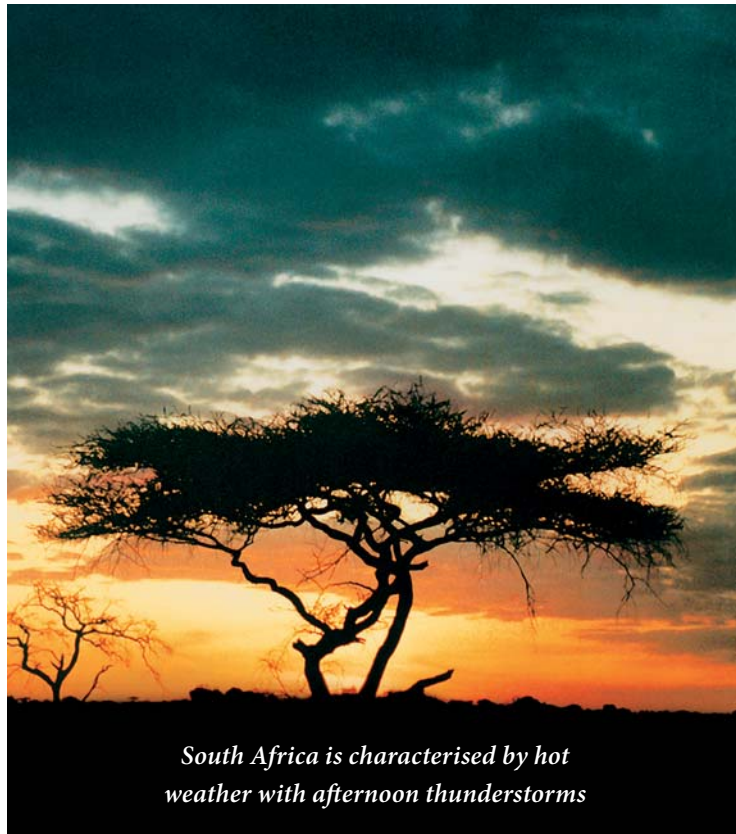
MANY CULTURES, ONE NATION

By Erica Wheeler

The South African economy is the largest in Africa and 24th largest in the world. Due to this it is the most socially, economically and infrastructurally developed country on the continent.



South Africa comprises a diverse population and large range of wildlife



South Africa is characterised by hot weather with afternoon thunderstorms



The country has a spectacular range of biodiversity

SOUTH AFRICA has experienced a different history from other nations in Africa because of early immigration from Europe and the strategic importance of the Cape Sea Route. European immigration began shortly after the Dutch East India Company founded a station at what would become Cape Town, in 1652. The closure of the Suez Canal during the Six-Day War highlighted its significance to East–West trade. The country’s relatively developed infrastructure made its

mineral wealth available and important to Western interests, particularly throughout the late nineteenth century and, with international competition and rivalry, during the Cold War. South Africa is ethnically diverse, with the largest Caucasian, Indian, and racially mixed communities in Africa. Black South Africans, who speak nine officially recognised languages, and many more dialects, account for slightly less than 80% of the population.

Location

South Africa is located on the southern tip of the African continent, bordered by northern neighbours Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. It encompasses the independent mountain kingdoms of Lesotho and Swaziland and is flanked by the Atlantic Ocean on the west and the warm Indian Ocean on the east—giving the country its spectacular range of biodiversity.

Size

South Africa occupies 4% of the continent's total landmass, covering an area of 1 221 040 square kilometres. The country is five times larger than Great Britain and three times the size of Texas.

Climate

South Africa enjoys a temperate and pleasant climate, with lovely warm sunny days most of the year. The seasons of the southern hemisphere are opposite to those in the northern hemisphere so our summers

run from November to February, when most of the country is characterised by hot weather with afternoon thunderstorms. Winters are generally mild and dry. South Africa enjoys one of the world's highest average daily hours of sunshine—8.5 compared with 3.8 in London, 6.4 in Rome and 6.9 in New York.

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People

South Africa is home to some 43 million people—a colourful population as diverse in makeup as the country's geography is varied. Almost 77% are black (or African), 11% white and 9% “coloured”, the local label for people of mixed African, Asian and white descent. Just over half the population lives in the cities. Three-quarters are Christian and most of the other major world religions are represented here.

River trips range from mostly scenic to grade five white water washing machines



Language

There are 11 officially recognised languages, most of them indigenous to South Africa. English is one of these, and everywhere you go, you can expect to find people who speak and understand it. English is the language of the cities, of commerce and banking, of government and official documents. Road signs and official forms are in English. The President makes his speeches in English and, at any hotel, the service staff will speak English.

Provinces & Major Cities

South Africa is divided into nine provinces, namely Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, North West and the Western Cape. Major cities include the modern economic hub of Johannesburg, coastal Cape Town picturesquely perched between mountain and sea, historic Pretoria and the “sun and surf” central city of Durban.

Outdoor Adventure

You've landed in adventure heaven. Whatever your particular preference, there is bound to be an adventure to keep you happy. We have some of the best climbing in the world. Our two oceans offer fantastic diving, surfing and sea kayaking. River trips range from mostly scenic to grade five white water washing machines. There are over a hundred listed paragliding or hang gliding launch sites. Thousands of kilometres of hiking trails wind around the country, in desert, forest, mountain or coast, and many have mountain bike trails as well. There are wonderful easy horse trails through vineyards, on the beach

or in the mountains and, for the adventurous, horseback safaris in big game country. We have the highest commercial bungy jump in the world, lots of pretty abseiling and bridge

swinging. For something combining adrenalin, peace, tranquillity, and sheer beauty, try the tree-top canopy tour in Tsitsikamma. The art of canyoning, known as kloofing in South Africa,

is a hot favourite with self-guided and escorted trips. Surprisingly, for such a sunny country, we even have a bit of skiing in winter!

Adventurous safaris in big game country



Time Differences

South Africa operates two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time throughout the year, making it an hour ahead of Central European Winter Time, seven hours ahead of Eastern Standard Winter Time and seven hours behind Australian Central Time.

Money

The currency unit is the Rand, denoted by the symbol R, with 100 cents making up R1 (one Rand). Foreign currency can be exchanged at local banks and Bureaux de Changes. Most major international credit cards such as American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard, Visa and their affiliates are accepted and major petrol/gas stations also accept credit cards.

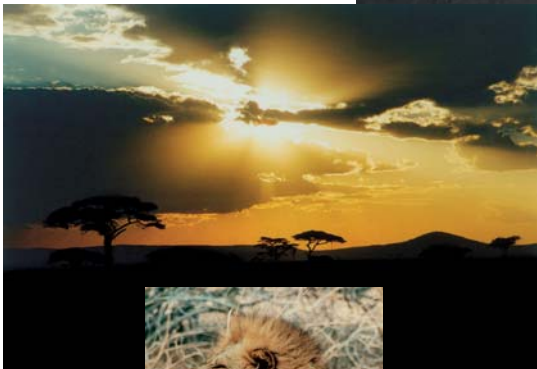
“ *Whatever your particular preference, there is bound to be an adventure to keep you happy.* ”



A sports-mad nation!

There are few countries in the world so deeply in love with such a wide spectrum of outdoor sports as South Africa. We have more sunshine than most countries, a good sporting infrastructure, established development programmes and many of our national heroes are sportsmen and women. Moreover, we have a land that lends itself to a wide variety of sports: 3 000 km of dramatic coastlines, ocean beds, mountain ranges, rivers, forests and plenty of wide-open space. The tale of South African sport falls into two historical categories: the Apartheid era and the Democratic era.

During the Apartheid years preceding the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the first democratic elections of 1994, most South African sportsmen and women were not welcome in the world arena. Although individuals like golfing icon Gary Player were active in their fields, SA cricket and rugby teams, for instance, were not allowed to participate in world sport. While black players were not included in national SA sides, their white counterparts had their careers stunted by the international boycotts. Today, after the dawn of democracy in South Africa, our sporting squads are flying all over the world in search of national—and individual—glory.



Best time to visit

South Africa is a fabulous all-year-round destination so when you visit depends on what you would like to do. The best time for game watching, for instance, is early spring (August to October). The southern right whales can be seen off our coasts from about mid-June to the end of October, and the humpback whales from August to December.



South African flag



The diving is generally best from April to September, and so is the surfing, but these activities are by no means limited to these periods. Flowers are at their best in August and September. River rafting is better at the end of winter in the Cape; and in

summer (late November to February) in KwaZulu-Natal. In Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces, activities are not quite as time-dependent but spring and autumn are best for hiking since summer can be very hot. If you want to lounge on the beaches,

midsummer is the best time to do so, though bear in mind that everyone else will be there too.



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