

South Africa

South Africa has always been a country that has made headlines. When apartheid crumbled and Nelson Mandela walked free, just three months after the Berlin Wall was torn down, it was a pivotal, hopeful moment in history. More recently, the news coming from the rainbow nation has included President Zuma's election, and new stadiums appearing, along with improved infrastructure, in preparation for the 2010 World Cup.

One of the first things travellers notice about South Africa is that, despite the rise of 'black diamonds' (middle-class black folk), racial inequality persists here. Black and coloured townships face problems such as a horrific HIV/AIDS rate and xenophobic tensions caused by economic refugees from nearby countries.

Nonetheless, Africa's southernmost nation is capable of worming deep into the imagination. Indeed, with South Africa's unique mix of epic landscapes, a healthy travelling scene, and vibrant cultures, you can easily have inspiring African experiences here. Whether you head into a national park on a wildlife-spotting mission, sample some homebrew in a township *shebeen* (unlicensed bar), or hike through landscapes such as the Drakensberg, this mind-bogglingly diverse country rewards travellers' exploratory efforts.

Once you've recovered from that, or from adrenaline-pumping activities such as the world's highest bungee jump, reflect on it all over a bottle in the Winelands, a braai (barbecue) in the wilderness, a beach session on the Wild Coast or a tour of Cape Town's galleries. Whatever you choose, it will probably be, as South Africans like to say, *lekker* (tasty).

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 1.2 million sq km
- **Capital** Pretoria (administrative), Bloemfontein (judicial), Cape Town (legislative)
- **Country code** ☎ 27
- **Famous for** Nelson Mandela, ending apartheid, Zululand, cosmopolitan Cape Town, Big Five wildlife
- **Languages** English, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Xhosa, Zulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Venda, Setswana, Swati and Tsonga
- **Money** Rand (R)
- **Phrases** *Dumela/Sawubona* (hello; Setswana & Sesotho/Zulu & Swati), *howzit* (hello; English), *sala sentle/sala hantle/sala kahle* (goodbye; Setswana/Sesotho/Zulu & Swati)
- **Population** 49 million



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Cape Town** (p403) Meet the Mother City, where Table Mountain looks down on Atlantic beaches and Long St's nightlife.
- **Kruger National Park** (p513) Don some khaki and join the rangers on a safari of the most involving kind – on foot.
- **Drakensberg range** (p504) Hike towards the peaks for a view of the Amphitheatre, an 8km mountain curtain.
- **Soweto** (p532) See where two Nobel Peace Prize winners were once neighbours, and learn about township life.
- **Wild Coast** (p477) Choose between a hammock and the beach at one of the laid-back hostels.

ITINERARIES

- **Two weeks** Touching down in Johannesburg (Jo'burg), spend a few hours at the moving Apartheid Museum (p530) before heading northeast to safari showpiece Kruger National Park (p513). The teeming wildlife here and in the adjoining private wildlife reserves (p518) will hold you captivated for several days. If time is tight, Madikwe Game Reserve (p556) and Pilanesberg National Park (p555) are easily reached from Jo'burg via Rustenburg. From Kruger, head south into KwaZulu-Natal, where the dramatic peaks and valleys of the Drakensberg range (p502) provide an endless array of hikes. Head up the Sani Pass (p507) to the Lesotho border for breathtaking views before returning to the throbbing heart of the country to get a taste of township life in Soweto (p532).
- **One month** After a few days in Cape Town (p403) and a trip up Table Mountain (p410), tear yourself away from the wonderful Mother City before you slip into a 'Cape coma'. Head to the fertile valleys of the Winelands, with a couple of nights in Stellenbosch (p429) or Franschhoek (p433), then continue the wine tour along scenic Rte 62 (p439) through the Little Karoo to ostrich-mad Oudtshoorn (p440). Possible coastal detours include Hermanus (p436) for whale watching (between June/July and November); Cape Agulhas (p437) for the thrill of standing at Africa's southernmost point; or De Hoop Nature Reserve (p437). Make your way south from Oudtshoorn

HOW MUCH?

- **Bottle of red wine** R55-80
- **Car hire per day** R200-300
- **Kilogram of biltong and droëwors** R140-160
- **Township tour** R350
- **Surfboard** R3000

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** R8
- **1L bottled water** R13
- **Can of Black Label beer** R7
- **Souvenir T-shirt** R70
- **Roasted mealie (corn)** R2

to the Garden Route (p441), joining the N2 near arty, lagoon-side Knysna (p446) and Plettenberg Bay (p448), a relaxed beach town. Recommended parks on the coast include Tsitsikamma National Park Area (p461) and, past Port Elizabeth, Addo Elephant National Park (p467). Move northeastwards through the striking Wild Coast (p477), and don't succumb to 'Pondo fever' in Pondoland, but carry onto Durban (p481) for more beaches. Head north to President Zuma's birthplace, Zululand (p496), or east to the Drakensberg range (p502); or hit the park-packed Elephant Coast (p497), where the wilderness areas include Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (p498) and uMkhuze Game Reserve (p500), before returning to Durban or making your way to Jo'burg for the flight home.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

South Africa has a temperate climate compared with many African countries, and it can be visited comfortably any time. However, depending on what you plan to do, it's worth paying attention to the seasons, which are the reverse of those in the northern hemisphere. Winter (June to September) is cooler, drier and ideal for hiking and outdoor pursuits. Because vegetation is less dense, and thirsty animals congregate around rivers and other permanent water sources, winter is also the best time for wildlife watching. In the eastern