

North-West Province



From safaris to slots, the pursuit of pleasure is paramount in the North-West Province. And with the top three reasons to visit less than a six-hour drive from Johannesburg, this region is more than fun. It's convenient. Gambling is the name of the game here, although not always in the traditional sense. Place your luck in a knowledgeable ranger's hands at Madikwe Game Reserve and bet on how many lions he'll spot on the sunrise wildlife drive. You have to stay to play at this exclusive reserve on the edge of the Kalahari, and the lodges here will be a splurge for many. But for that once-in-a-lifetime, romantic *Out of Africa*-style safari experience, South Africa's fourth-largest reserve can't be beat.

If you'd rather spot the Big Five without professional help, do a self-drive safari in Pilanesberg National Park. The most accessible park in the country is cheaper than Madikwe, and still has 7000 animals packed into its extinct volcano confines. Plus it's less than three hours' drive from Jo'burg. When you've had your fill betting on finding rhino, switch to cards at the opulent Sun City casino complex down the road. The final component of the province's big attraction trifecta is the southern hemisphere's answer to Las Vegas: a shamelessly gaudy, unabashedly kitsch and downright delicious place to pass an afternoon.

Madikwe, Pilanesberg and Sun City may be the North-West Province's heavyweight attractions, but there are more here than the province's 'Big Three'. Round out your journey with an exhilarating zip-line canopy tour of the Magaliesberg Mountains. Or check out the curios at the Welwitschia Country Market, one of Africa's biggest, on the shores of shimmering Hartbeespoort Dam.

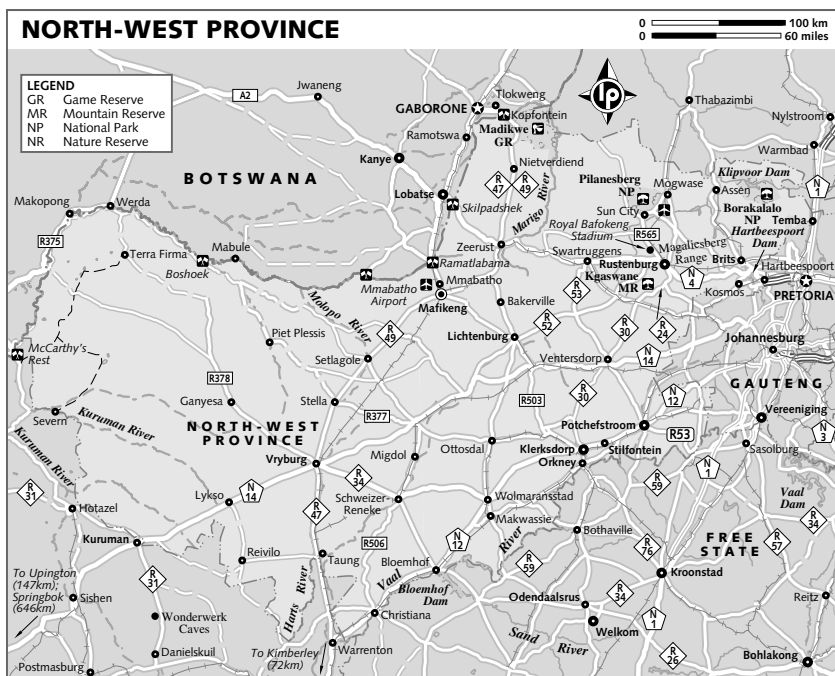
HIGHLIGHTS

- Stopping within metres of a pride of lions resting under a thorn tree on a sunset safari in wild and wonderful **Madikwe Game Reserve** (p516)
- Writing postcards from your private deck at Madikwe's **Tau Game Lodge** (p518), watching a stream of elephants and zebra pass by
- Shacking up with a cooler of Castles and a pair of binoculars at a waterhole hide in **Pilanesberg National Park** (p514) and waiting for the animals to come to you
- Body surfing the Valley of Waves and soaking up **Sun City's** (p513) deliciously gaudy ambience
- Stocking up on wooden giraffes, masks and handicrafts at the **Welwitschia Country Market** (p512) at Hartbeespoort Dam



■ POPULATION: 4 MILLION

■ AREA: 116,320 SQ KM



HISTORY

The North-West Province takes in much of the area once covered by the fragmented apartheid homeland of Bophuthatswana (often shortened to 'Bop'), a dumping ground for thousands of 'relocated' Tswana people. The nominally independent homeland became famous for the excesses of the white South African men who visited its casinos and pleasure resorts for interracial encounters with prostitutes, which would have been illegal elsewhere in South Africa.

During the Iron Age, the province was the site of a complex and sophisticated civilisation centred on the 'lost city' of Kaditshwene, about 30km north of modern-day Zeerust. The people who lived here had an economy so developed they traded copper and iron jewellery with China. By 1820, when European missionaries first visited the city, they found it to be bigger than Cape Town. In the end, the peace-loving inhabitants of Kaditshwene proved no match for the aggression of the Sotho, displaced by Zulu incursions into the Free State. The city was sacked by a horde of 40,000 people and fell into ruins.

Diamonds were discovered in the province in the 1870s, resulting in an enormous rush to the fields around Lichtenburg. Mining is still important here and there are extensive platinum mines near Rustenburg.

CLIMATE

Summer temperatures range between 22°C and 34°C and winter brings with it dry, sunny days and chilly nights. The average winter (May to July) temperature is 15.5°C but can range from an average of 2°C to 20°C in a single day. The summer months (August to March) bring brief, refreshing afternoon thunderstorms.

LANGUAGE

Tswana is the principal language; most whites speak Afrikaans, with a minority having English as their first language.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The N4 is the major east-to-west highway across the province, connecting Pretoria with Rustenburg and then Zeerust. The R47/R49 runs south to north and its main part joins