



# KwaZulu-Natal

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## Why Go?

Rough and ready, smart and sophisticated, rural and rustic: there's no doubt that KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) is eclectic. It's a region where glassy malls touch shabby suburbs, and action-packed adventurers ooze adrenalin while laid-back beach bods drip with suntan lotion. Mountainscapes contrast with flat, dry savannahs, while the towns' central streets, teeming with African life, markets and noise, are in stark contrast to the sedate tribal settlements in rural areas. Here, too, is traditional Zululand, whose people are fiercely proud of their culture.

Throw in the wildlife – the Big Five (lion, leopard, buffalo, elephant and rhino) and rare marine species – and the historic intrigue of the Battlefields, fabulous hiking opportunities, and the sand, sea and surf of coastal resort towns, and you get a tantalising taste of local heritage and authentic African highlights that should be on every 'must-do' list.

## Best Places to Eat

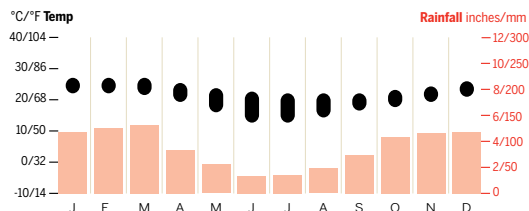
- ➔ Cafe 1999 (p242)
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## Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Napier House (p239)
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## When to Go

### Durban



**May–Oct** Dry season brings cooler days but savannah conditions, perfect for wildlife-viewing.

**Oct & Nov** Pleasant beach weather and wildflowers cover the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg.

**Nov–Feb** Brings hot weather but also the results of mating season – baby animals rule!

## History

Battled over by Boers, Brits and Zulus, Natal was named by Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, who sighted the coastline on Christmas Day 1497, and named it for the natal day of Jesus. It took the British Empire more than 300 years to set its sights on the region, proclaiming it a colony in 1843. Briefly linked to the Cape Colony in 1845, Natal again became a separate colony in 1856, when its European population numbered less than 5000.

The introduction of Indian indentured labour in the 1860s – sections of the province still retain a subcontinental feel – and the subsequent development of commercial agriculture (mainly sugar) boosted growth. The colony thrived from 1895, when train lines linked Durban's port (dredged to accommodate big ships) with the booming Witwatersrand.

The recorded history of the province up until the Union of South Africa is full of conflict: the *mfegane* (the forced migration of South African tribes; Zulu for 'the crushing'), the Boer-Zulu and Anglo-Zulu Wars, which saw the Zulu kingdom subjugated, and the two wars between the British and the Boers.

Just after the 1994 elections, Natal Province was renamed KwaZulu-Natal, acknowledging that the Zulu homeland of KwaZulu comprises a large part of the province. From that time, Ulundi (the former KwaZulu capital) and Pietermaritzburg (the former Natal homeland capital) enjoyed joint status as capital of KwaZulu-Natal until 2005, when Pietermaritzburg was named the province's official capital.

## Climate

The weather (and the water, thanks to the Agulhas current) stays warm year-round along much of the coast, with Durbanites claiming to lap up a heady 230 sunny days a year. In summer the heat and humidity, combined with the crowds that flood to the coast to enjoy it, can be exhausting, with temperatures regularly in the mid-30s (degrees Celsius). Most of the interior enjoys similarly balmy conditions, but sudden and explosive electrical storms, especially in the Drakensberg mountains and northern KwaZulu-Natal, often roll in during the afternoon. Winter brings a dusting of snow to the higher peaks.

## Language

Eleven official languages are spoken in South Africa, but English, Zulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans are most widely used in KwaZulu-Natal.

## Getting There & Around

With flights, buses and trains to destinations across the country, Durban is KwaZulu-Natal's undisputed transport hub, and, at least nationally, the city is well connected. However, getting around the province itself is a different story. While long-distance buses run to Port Shepstone, Margate and Kokstad in the south, Richards Bay and Vryheid in the north and a string of towns including Estcourt, Ladysmith and Newcastle in the west, many of the more remote locations are a headache to get to by public transport. Shared taxis provide a useful backup, but relying on minibuses as your sole means of getting about will mean many long hours in the back of a cramped van.

**Baz Bus** ([www.bazbus.com](http://www.bazbus.com)) links many of the province's hostels.

## DURBAN

POP 600,000

Cosmopolitan Durban, South Africa's third-largest city (known as eThekweni in Zulu), is sometimes unfairly passed over for her 'cooler' Capetonian cousin. But this isn't fair; there's a lot more to fun-loving Durbs (as she's affectionately known) than meets the eye.

The city had a major makeover leading up to the 2010 World Cup, with a sleek new stadium and a revamped waterfront. The renewal of the waterfront area and the sweeping away of the old sleaze has given municipal authorities new confidence and ambition – there are plans to extend the waterfront promenade right down the south coast.

Durban's downtown area – a buzzing, gritty grid comprising grandiose colonial buildings and fascinating art deco architecture – throbs to a distinctly African beat (but loses its shimmer when the sun goes down). The beachfront remains a daytime locus for beach lovers.

Home to the largest concentration of people of Indian descent outside of India, Durban also boasts an unmistakably Asian feel, with the marketplaces and streets of the Indian area replete with the sights, sounds and scents of the subcontinent.