

Understand South Africa, Lesotho & Swaziland

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The three countries are grappling with political, social and economic problems, yet every day their upbeat people strive forward.

HISTORY 510

The Dutch, Brits, Boers, Zulus and Xhosa have all fought for control of Southern Africa's fertile and strategically useful lands.

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From township jazz and kwaito to Lesothan shepherd music and Swazi gospel, musical discoveries await at the tip of Africa.

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South Africa's *lekker* (tasty) cuisine offers something for every palate, from aromatic Cape Malay curries to braais (barbecues).

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Lesotho has the Basotho people and Swaziland the Swazis, while South Africa is a melting pot with 11 official languages.

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Despite threats such as rhino poaching, the region's natural wonders range from Lesotho's rugged mountains to scuttling meerkats.

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Learn how to tell impalas from springboks, caracals from cheetahs and fynbos from savannah.

South Africa, Lesotho & Swaziland Today

More than two decades after Nelson Mandela came to power, life in South Africa remains dominated by social inequality. Central Cape Town's mountain and beach communities contrast with the townships sprawling across the Cape Flats, lining the N2 with shacks and portaloos. Seeing First-World wealth alongside African poverty is confronting for first-time visitors. Yet every day, millions of South Africans embrace progress by trying to understand and respect the vastly different outlooks of people from other economic and racial groups.

Best in Print

The Housemaid's Daughter (Barbara Mutch) Apartheid-era drama set in the Karoo.

Cobra (Deon Meyer) Captain Benny Griessel returns in the Cape Town crime king's latest.

Reports Before Daybreak (Brent Meersman) Moving novel set in '80s Cape Town.

50 People Who Stuffed Up South Africa (Alexander Parker) Pacey look at history's great villains.

Zoo City (Lauren Beukes) Crime thriller set in Jo'burg's underbelly.

Khayelitsha (Steven Otter) A white journalist living in Cape Town.

Best on Film

Invictus (Clint Eastwood) Covers the historic 1995 Rugby World Cup; stars Morgan Freeman and Matt Damon.

District 9 (Neill Blomkamp) Peter Jackson-produced sci-fi gem about giant alien 'prawns' overrunning Jo'burg.

Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom (Justin Chadwick) Condensed but enjoyable biography, covering Madiba's journey to presidency.

Chappie (Neill Blomkamp) In the director's *Elysium* follow-up, gangsters played by band Die Antwoord kidnap a robot in Jo'burg.

Race Relations

What makes South Africa an uplifting place to visit is the dissolution of racial divisions. Projects are in place that aim to empower inhabitants of the townships and former homelands, and to provide work in a country with 25% unemployment. Finding common ground can be challenging, but race relations are informed by the miracle that Mandela et al performed.

However, given the decades of segregation under apartheid, relations are never straightforward. South African society still lacks the cohesion enjoyed by many Western countries; different racial groups work together, but infrequently socialise or intermarry. There are periodic black-white flare-ups in the media and politics, and the ruling African National Congress (ANC) party often links current woes to apartheid, perhaps seeking to lessen its own culpability and reinforce its image as South Africa's liberator.

Relations between black ethnic groups are equally as sensitive as those between black and white groups – from the Xhosa and Zulus to foreign immigrants. Economic refugees flock to the townships from neighbouring countries, intensifying pressure on infrastructure and competition for jobs. Xenophobic violence swept the country in 2008, and periodic attacks on immigrants and looting of foreign-owned shops continue to be features of township life.

AIDS & Gender

South Africa has the world's largest population of people with HIV/AIDS (more than six million). Swaziland has the world's highest percentage of people living with HIV/AIDS, and Lesotho the second highest. Educational efforts face numerous taboos, *sangomas* (traditional healers) preach superstitious lore and, every day, funerals commemorate supposed 'tuberculosis' victims.

South Africa's record on gender issues exemplifies the country's contradictions. Its constitution, adopted in 1996, is the world's most progressive, promoting the rights of women and gay people (same-sex marriage is