



# Free State

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## Best Places to Eat

- » Avanti (p298)
- » O's Restaurant (p300)
- » Clementine Restaurant (p305)
- » Fish Cafe (p307)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Hobbit Boutique Hotel (p295)
- » Protea Hotel Willow Lake (p297)
- » Patcham Place (p305)
- » Cranberry Cottage (p307)
- » Old Jail (p308)

## Why Go?

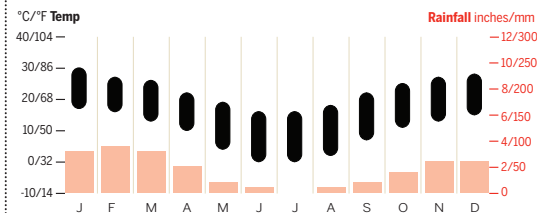
The Free State is one of South Africa's most relaxed provinces, where the country's notorious crime rate seems to dissolve into friendly smiles. It's a place where big skies, unbroken horizons, pistachio hills and craggy sandstone massifs are interrupted only briefly by a smattering of towns and villages.

Lying between the Vaal and Senqu (Orange) Rivers, with Lesotho nestled into the crook of its beanlike shape, the Free State is South Africa's heartland – her breadbasket. Here, farmers in floppy hats drive ancient sheep-packed *bakkies* (pick-up trucks) down dusty roads, and brightly painted Sotho houses languish by giant yellow sunflowers and rows of green corn.

The colour divide here remains stark and dreams of an Afrikaner Arcadia live on. Progress, however, is happening – in the buzzing university town of Bloemfontein, you'll find blacks and whites dining together with increased frequency. And even in the smallest rural enclaves the colour barrier is slowly starting to dissolve.

## When to Go

### Bloemfontein



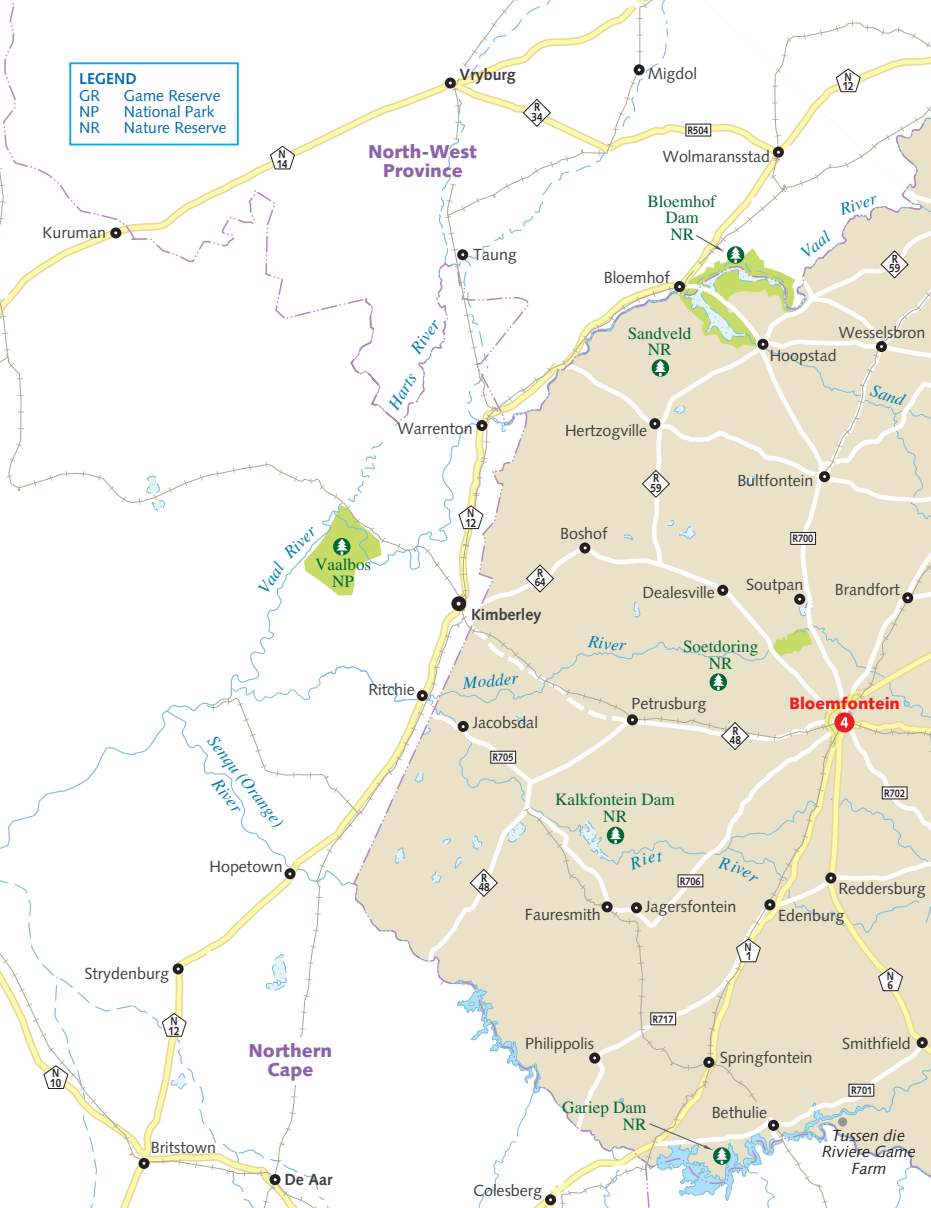
**Jun–Aug** Dry and sunny weather makes a road trip under big blue skies perfect

**Sep–Dec** Best time to view the cherry trees in full bloom and go wild at Ficksburg's cherry festival

**Jan–Mar** To escape the heat head for the snow at the foothills of the Maluti Mountains

**LEGEND**

- GR Game Reserve
- NP National Park
- NR Nature Reserve



## Free State Highlights

**1** Unearthing little gems among the small towns and big skies of the Free State such as **Clarens** (p304), a little nugget of sophistication, perfect for people-watching

**2** Exploring **Golden Gate Highlands National Park** (p303) and spotting the wildlife that inhabits the grasslands and spectacular sandstone formations

**3** Following the **Sentinel Hiking Trail** (p304) up over the dizzying heights of the Drakensberg plateau