

South Africa

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Best Places to Sleep

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Why Go?

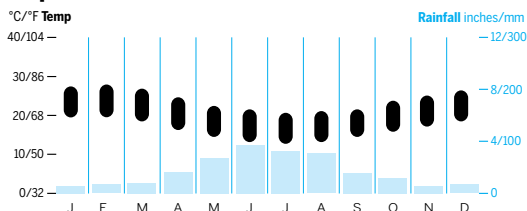
When Archbishop Desmond Tutu called South Africa the 'Rainbow Nation', his words described the very essence of what makes this country extraordinary. The blend of peoples and cultures that he referred to is instantly evident, but the country's diversity stretches far beyond its people.

Without straying beyond South Africa's borders you can sleep under the stars in a desert or hike to snow-capped peaks. The hills of Zululand and the Wild Coast provide a bucolic antidote to the bustle of large cities like Johannesburg and Durban. Wildlife watching ranges from remote safari walks to up-close encounters with waddling penguins.

Variety continues in the cuisine, with the delicate (West Coast seafood), the hearty (Karoo meat feasts), the fragrant (Cape Malay stews) and the spicy (Durban curries) all represented. And southwest of it all sits Cape Town, where gourmands, art lovers, thrill seekers and beach babes come together to sip, surf and sunbathe in beautiful surrounds.

When to Go

Cape Town



Nov–Mar Accommodation in national parks and the coast books up months in advance.

Apr–May, Sep & Oct Sunny weather. Best wildlife-watching conditions from autumn onwards.

Jun–Aug Ideal for wildlife watching. Rainy season in Cape Town and the Western Cape.

CAPE TOWN

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Prepare to fall in love, as South Africa's 'Mother City' is an old pro at capturing people's hearts. And who wouldn't swoon at the sight of magnificent Table Mountain, its summit draped with cascading clouds, its flanks coated with unique flora and vineyards, its base fringed by golden beaches?

Few cities can boast such a wonderful national park at their heart or provide the range of activities that take full advantage of it. From the brightly painted facades of the Bo-Kaap and the bathing chalets of Muizenberg, to striking street art and the Afro-chic decor of guesthouses, this is one good-looking metropolis. Above all it's a multicultural city where nearly everyone has a fascinating, sometimes heartbreaking, story to tell.

Long before the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie; VOC) established a base here in 1652, the Cape Town area was settled by the San and Khoekhoen peoples, collectively known as the Khoe-San. The indigenous people shunned the Dutch, so the VOC imported slaves from Madagascar, India, Ceylon, Malaya and Indonesia. In time the slaves intermixed with the Khoe-San; their offspring formed the basis of sections of today's coloured population.

In the 150-odd years of Dutch rule, Kaapstad, as the Cape settlement became known, thrived and gained a wider reputation as the 'Tavern of the Seven Seas', a riotous port used by sailors travelling between Europe and the East. Following the British defeat of the Dutch in 1806 at Bloubergstrand, 25km north of Cape Town, the colony was ceded to the British Crown. The slave trade was abolished in 1808, and all slaves emancipated in 1833.

An outbreak of bubonic plague in 1901 was blamed on black African workers (it actually came on boats from Argentina) and gave the government an excuse to introduce racial segregation. Blacks were moved to two locations; one near the docks and the other at Ndabeni on the eastern flank of Table Mountain. This was the start of what would later develop into the townships of the Cape Flats.

Sights


City Bowl, Foreshore, Bo-Kaap & De Waterkant

The City Bowl, where the Dutch first set up shop, includes many historic sights and businesses. Landfill created the Foreshore

district in the 1940s and 1950s, now dominated by Duncan Dock and the convention centre. Tumbling down Signal Hill are the colourfully painted houses of the Bo-Kaap and, to the northeast, Cape Town's pink precinct De Waterkant, a retail and party hub.


★ **Bo-Kaap**

AREA

(Map p332;  Dorp/Leeuwen) Meaning 'Upper Cape', the Bo-Kaap with its vividly painted low-roofed houses, many of them historic monuments, strung along narrow cobbled streets, is one of the most photographed sections of the city. Initially a garrison for soldiers in the mid-18th century, this area was where freed slaves started to settle after emancipation in the 1830s. The most picturesque streets are Chiappini, Rose and Wale.


★ **Company's Gardens**

GARDENS

(Map p332; City Bowl; ☀️ 7am-7pm;  Dorp/Leeuwen) These shady green gardens, which started as the vegetable patch for the Dutch East India Company, are a lovely place to relax. They are planted with a fine collection of botanical specimens from South Africa and the rest of the world, including frangipanis, African flame trees, aloes and roses. Cecil Rhodes' statue stands in the centre of the gardens, and there's a newly recreated VOC Vegetable Garden.


Open House

PUBLIC ART

(Map p332; cnr Dorp & Long Sts, City Bowl;  Dorp/Leeuwen) This creation by Kimberley-born artist Jacques Coetzer was the winning design in a World Design Capital competition for a piece of public art. Rising up three stories to 10.5m, the bright-red house facade with stairs and balconies is envisioned as a place where people can go to speak, sing, cry or simply wave to passers by. Coetzer drew inspiration from corrugated metal structures, RDP homes (Reconstruction and Development Programme – government subsidised houses) and Long Street itself.

Greenmarket Square

ARCHITECTURE, MARKET

(Map p332; Greenmarket Sq, City Bowl;  Church/Longmarket) This cobbled square is Cape Town's second-oldest public space after the Grand Parade. It hosts a lively and colourful crafts and souvenir market daily. Apart from the Old Town House, the square is also surrounded by some choice examples of art deco architecture, including **Market House**, an elaborately decorated building with balconies and stone-carved eagles and flowers on its facade.