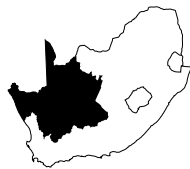


Northern Cape



Welcome to South Africa's last great frontier. The republic's largest, least-populated and downright strangest province is a playground for off-the-grid explorers. A journey through this super-sized land of half-human trees and singing sands, of big orange-ball sunsets and bright starry nights is like stepping into the pages of a swash-buckling adventure by Laurens Van der Post *and* Dr Seuss. Ride a snowboard down a dune in the candy-cane striped desert. Drive a 4WD along a shipwrecked coastline by a diamond sea. Hike across surreal moonscapes in harsh but rewarding |Ai-|Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park. Or search for black-maned lions in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier's remote and crimson outback. The choice is yours.

The Northern Cape's story is filled with quirky cultural trivia and unexpected twists. It's home to the world's oldest tribes (the Khoe-San, Nama and Griqua), most successful jewellery marketing jingle ('a diamond is forever' by De Beers) and the only bar built specifically to ride a horse into (Kimberley's Halfway House). The Northern Cape is also a talented magician, capable of pulling wildflower carpets, buckets of diamonds and even bottles of wine from her parched and barren desert hat. For a few short weeks in spring, Namakwa's scorched lunar landscape transforms into a rainbow-coloured wildflower blanket.

But it is on the Senqu (Orange) River's banks that our favourite trick plays out. Here a mighty river defies the laws of nature, flows through the Kalahari, and gives birth to South Africa's hottest new wine region (producing 10% of the country's grapes) along the way.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Watching a black-maned lion nap under a thorn tree in the wild crimson Kalahari wonderland of **Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park** (p537)
- Taking a spring hike through a sea of brilliant blue, purple and golden wildflowers in **Namakwa National Park** (p546)
- Riding rough middle-of-nowhere 4WD trails then soaking in a solitary hot mineral pool under a star-studded sky in wild **Riemvasmaak** (p542)
- Stopping to taste grapes at hot new vineyards along the excellent, still growing **Senqu (Orange) River Wine Route** (p541)
- Embarking on an adventure across surreal mountainous desert in ultra-remote **|Ai-|Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park** (p545)



■ POPULATION: 850,000

■ AREA: 361,830 SQ KM



HISTORY

The Northern Cape's first residents were the San: skilled hunter-gatherers who gradually became settled pastoralists known as the Khoekhoen (men of men) – see p30 and p33 for more on the history of these people.

In northwest Namakwa (previously known as Namaqualand) is another well-known Khoekhoen tribe, the Nama (also known as Namaqua or Namakwa, which means 'Nama people'), who are famous for their copper metalworking skills. Not surprisingly, this attracted the attention of Dutch explorers, who came into contact with the tribe in 1661. Because of the region's isolation, however, the Namaqualand copper rush did not properly begin until the 1850s. The first commercial

mine (now a national monument) was established just outside Springbok in 1852, and there are still a number of working mines, including one at Nababeep.

Diamonds were first discovered in the Kimberley area in 1866, when a young man by the name of Erasmus Jacobs stumbled upon a pretty white pebble, picked it up and altered the course of South African history. In his hand he held a 21.25-carat yellow diamond called Eureka. Five years later, an even bigger 83.5-carat stone – later named the Star of Africa diamond – was discovered on a small hill called Colesberg Koppie, and South Africa's great diamond rush officially began. As miners poured into the area, the hill disappeared and was replaced by the