An introduction to South Africa

Overview of South Africa

Roughly the size of Spain and France combined, or Texas, South Africa is situated at the very southern tip of Africa. The Atlantic and the Indian Oceans wash its shores and meet at Cape Agulhas – one of the only places in the world where a person can watch two oceans meet.

People who have never been to Africa often think of Africa as a homogenous whole, like the United States, for example. In reality, according to the United Nations Membership Roster, the continent of Africa is made up of 54 very different and separate African states.

South Africa may be at the bottom of Africa, but it’s widely regarded as being top in terms of its superb infrastructure, its legendary sunny climate, and its incredible geographic diversity – expect superb beaches, dramatic mountain ranges, sophisticated cities, quaint villages, historic battlefields, oceans, valleys, bushveld teeming with game, hundreds of species of birds, great and small semi-deserts, wide open spaces … and much more.

That’s why South Africa offers something for every potential visitor.

About South Africa

South Africa is a dream destination in so many ways because of its incredible geographical diversity, its superb infrastructure, its legendary sunny weather, its super-friendly people and its affordability.

South Africa has nine provinces. Probably the best known to international visitors are the Western Cape, home of Cape Town and the Cape Winelands; Mpumalanga, famous for its spectacular scenery and the Kruger National Park; and KwaZulu-Natal, with its capital city, Durban, historic
battlefields and wonderful beaches. The other six provinces – the Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Limpopo, North West and Free State – also offer their own unique sights and experiences, and you’ll find out about them later on when you study the different province modules.

South Africa, since its first democratic election in 1994 after which Nelson Mandela became president, is a fully integrated society of more than 50-million people with a rich, fascinating mix of cultures ranging from Zulu and Xhosa (pronounced koh-sa), to Afrikaans and English and many, many more. There are 11 official languages – but don’t worry, nearly everybody in the ‘Rainbow Nation’ understands and speaks English.

**Brief history**

Between 200 000 and 100 000 years ago, modern humans began to evolve throughout Africa – including South Africa. They became the San, who later met up with south-bound Khoi pastoralists from the north and became known collectively as the KhoiSan.
The San were South Africa's first people

The KhoiSan drifted down into the Western Cape at about the same time (300AD) that early Iron Age groups crossed the Limpopo – whose descendants, about 1 000 years later, formed the African kingdom of Mapungubwe and began to trade with India, Arabia and China.

In 1652, Jan van Riebeeck and his 90-strong party arrived from The Netherlands and set up a ship-refuelling station at Cape Town – an important stop both geographically and politically, as it was on the only early trade route from Europe and the Americas to India, the ‘Spice Islands’ of the East Indies, and the East. Over the next 200 years, various waves of other European and Indian settlers also arrived.

Subsequently, the Dutch, British and to an extent, the French, fought for control of the Cape, with the British finally triumphant in 1806. Dutch Boers prepared to trek into the hinterland to escape British rule.

This was also the start of the Mfecane (‘the scattering, the crushing’) of Africans that began in Zululand, crossed the Drakensberg and swept through the present Free State province. Spurred on by the Zulu warrior king Shaka’s growing militarism, it became a confusing maelstrom of movement and massacre. Adding the land-hungry Voortrekkers and the newly arrived 1820 British Settlers into this mix brought further conflict.

The late 1800s saw the discovery of South Africa’s immense gold and diamond wealth, and later, the great platinum finds.

The 20th century saw the end of the South African War (also known as the Second Anglo-Boer War), which was fought from 1899 to 1902; the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910; the involvement in World War I and World War II on the side of the Allies; a narrow victory for the mostly Afrikaner National Party in 1948; and, in the years to come, the formulation of apartheid.

Apartheid was a nearly 50-year period of institutionalised racism and the suppression of non-whites, during which the African National Congress was banned and its leaders, including Nelson Mandela, banished to prison on Robben Island.

The unbanning of the ANC, the release of Mandela and his fellow prisoners, and the 1994 democratic elections heralded the birth of the new South Africa.

Sights and activities
Wilson’s Warf, Durban, is popular among locals

Accredited specialist tourist guides cover a wide range of areas and interests, from safaris and game viewing, to sport, natural attractions and adventure activities. (Did you know that South Africa has the highest commercially operated bridge bungee jump in the world on the gorgeous Garden Route.

Tourist guides can be found for more than 30 languages from Arabic to Yoruba, but remember, nearly everybody understands and speaks English.

Need to know

Here is some need-to-know information that will help you to better sell South Africa.

How to get to South Africa
More than 70 international airlines fly into South Africa’s world-class airports from all over the world. There are also African airlines that have regular routes in and out of South Africa to the rest of the continent.

South Africa’s seasons
South Africa is in the southern hemisphere, so it’s summer here when it’s winter up north. Travellers can usually find fantastic bargain prices in the low (winter) and shoulder (spring and autumn) seasons.

- **Spring**: September, October, November
- **Summer**: December through March
- **Autumn**: April, May
- **Winter**: June through August
What's the weather like?
Great. Average day temperatures in summer range from a minimum of 15°C (59F) to a maximum of 28°C (82F). In winter, average day temperatures are 19°C to 23°C (66F to 73F). Cape Town winters tend to be wet and windy, but a winter beach holiday in Durban or on the KwaZulu-Natal coast is fine as average temperatures hover around the 26°C mark. Winter in Mpumalanga and Limpopo is dry and cold at night but sunny and warm in the day, perfect for spotting game because the vegetation is low and game is forced to drink at waterholes.

What about crime?
Advise your client to take all the usual precautions that he/she would in any foreign country, such as locking valuables away, not wearing expensive jewellery, keeping to tourist-friendly areas, and locking car doors and windows. Guides or accommodation hosts will put your client in the relevant local picture and alert them if necessary.

Top 10 reasons to visit South Africa
South Africa is a rewarding country to sell because it offers so much for everyone. Your visitors can expect a wealth of unique sights and experiences.

1. **Affordability:** Although there are plenty of globally award-winning five-star establishments and luxury lodges, there are also superb value-for-money budget accommodation, tours and experiences all over the country.

2. **Wildlife:** South Africa is one of the world’s top game-viewing destinations. Choose the world-famous Kruger National Park or any of the scores of other safari destinations – one of life’s great experiences.

3. **Beaches:** South Africa has some of the world’s finest beaches, from the popular Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban ones, to many that are unspoiled and remote.

4. **Scenic beauty:** South Africa really is many worlds in one. Expect stunning coastlines, dramatic mountainscapes, huge areas of untamed bushveld, starkly beautiful semi-deserts, lakes, waterfalls, spectacular canyons, forests and wide plains, plus Cape Town, undeniably one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

5. **Friendliness:** Over and over again, visitors comment on the friendliness they encounter everywhere in South Africa. The people of our ‘Rainbow Nation’ are made up of many diverse cultures and will give visitors a warm welcome wherever you go.

6. **Weather:** South Africa has some of the best weather in the world – rarely too hot, rarely too cold, and the sun shines most of the time. Your clients will be able to get out and about as and when they feel like it.

7. **Adventure activities:** It’s hard to beat South Africa when it comes to the Great Outdoors and adventure activities. Whether your clients are adrenalin junkies or just want to get active, choose from bungee jumping and shark cage diving, to hiking, horse riding, whale watching, snorkelling, scuba diving, hiking and scores more adventures.

8. **History:** Travel back in time to some of the oldest mountains on Earth; some of our early ancestors at the Cradle of Humankind; the ruins of an ancient African royal kingdom; South Africa’s oldest castle; historic battlefields where Boers, Zulus and Brits clashed and died; gold-rush towns; and iconic sites of the Freedom Struggle.

9. **Excellent infrastructure:** South Africa has excellent major transport networks, good tourist facilities, safe drinking water nearly everywhere, a superb banking system with numerous ATMs countrywide, good accommodation for all pockets, and mouth-watering eating options.
10. **Responsible tourism:** South Africa is recognised globally for its major conservation efforts and its protected areas. It is also committed to community and conservation projects, and aims to be as ‘green’ as possible.