Roots and Culture

From the very first origins of humanity to ancient African kingdoms and a more recent history involving a diamond and gold rush and the rise of apartheid, South Africa has no shortage of visitor experiences for those interested in delving a bit deeper.

Soweto, Johannesburg
Soweto

Robben Island, South Africa
Robben Island

The Cradle of Human Kind, South Africa
The Cradle of Humankind

Durban, South Africa
Battlefields of Kwazulu-Natal. Image courtesy of Battlefield Routes

Kimberley, South Africa
Kimberley. Image courtesy of Scott Hadfield
Cradle of Humankind

This is well worth a visit for anyone interested in human history, as it is renowned for its extraordinary contribution to our understanding of the origins of humankind.

Thousands of fossils have been found in many limestone caves that occur here, and continue to be excavated, the reason why it is a World Heritage Site.

Maropeng (in Setswana this means ‘returning to a place of origin’), the official visitor centre for the Cradle of Humankind, is located in a building designed to look like an early burial mound, blending harmoniously with its surroundings. Inside, visitors are transported on a short boat trip back in time to the start of the universe, before they enter an exhibition hall.

Advise your clients to also pay a visit to the Sterkfontein Caves, where Dr Robert Broom famously found an adult skull of an *Australopithecus africanus*, known as Mrs
The Sterkfontein Caves now belong to the University of Witwatersrand, a world leader in palaeosciences, and there are regular guided tours here, including a combined tour of both Sterkfontein and Maropeng.

**Did you know?**

The Cradle of Humankind is renowned for its extraordinary contribution to our understanding of the origins of humankind. Image courtesy of Maropeng

**Travel fact**

Thousands of fossils have been found in the Cradle of Humankind. Image courtesy of Maropeng

**Travel fact**

Maropeng, the official visitor centre for the Cradle of Humankind, is located in a building designed to look like an early burial mound. Image courtesy of Flowcomms

**Mapungubwe**

Known as Mapungubwe, evidence is that from as early as 900AD an Iron Age community traded with visitors from Egypt, India and China, building a large, walled citadel.

It is here that a golden rhino was discovered in a grave in 1932, which has come to symbolise the heritage of this ancient civilization.

Mapungubwe today lies within a national park that draws visitors, not only for its sites of archaeological interest, but also for its natural beauty reflected in the sandstone cliffs, mopane woodlands and riverine forest of the area.

The Mapungubwe National Park lies at the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo rivers on the border of Zimbabwe and Botswana, offering spectacular views over the riverbeds.
You can tell your clients they can see game like elephant, giraffe and even leopard, and birders will be delighted with a species list that numbers around 400.

There are several accommodation options, from camping to safari tents and a luxury lodge. The golden rhino can be seen in the award-winning interpretive centre. Visitors can take part in several activities, including a walk through a forest on a raised walkway, a game drive or a heritage tour.

**What to look out for...**

Natural beauty reflected in the sandstone cliffs, mopane woodlands and riverine forest; and elephant, giraffe, leopard and over 400 species of birds

**Did you know?**

The Limpopo river runs past the reserve

**Golden rhino**

It was in Mapungubwe that a golden rhino was discovered in a grave in 1932, which has come to symbolise the heritage of this ancient civilization. Image courtesy of Limpopo Tourism and Parks

**Rain Queen**

Modjadjii is traditionally the matriarchal leader of the Lobedu dynasty and believed to have special powers to control the clouds – she could bring rain to her allies and drought to her enemies, and each November directed a rainmaking ceremony.

Since the 1600s there have been six Rain Queens, all of whom were expected to bear a girl child by a male relative to continue the matrilineal heritage.

There is currently no ruling queen as the last incumbent, Makhobo Modjadji VI, died at the age of 27 in 2005, leaving behind a five-month-old daughter, Masalanabo, who was too young to take her place. In the meantime, Makhobo’s brother, Mpapatla, is the designated regent.

Visitors to this lush area can experience something of the mystique of the Rain Queen at the nearby 300ha Modjadji Cycad Reserve, where a hillside contains the world’s
largest concentration of a single cycad species, known as the Modjadji palm.

There are walking trails and accommodation available at Modjadji Camp, and visits to the royal kraal (homestead) can be arranged.

**Did you know?**

Visitors to the area can visit the Modjadji Cycad Reserve, which contains the world’s largest concentration of a single cycad species – the Modjadji palm.

**Travel fact**

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**Rain Queen**

Modjadji is traditionally the matriarchal leader of the Lobedu dynasty and believed to have special powers to control the clouds. Image courtesy of (H) Foto-gràfic.

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**Battlefields of KwaZulu-Natal**

This area, which lies in the central and northern part of the KwaZulu-Natal province, is reputed to have the highest concentration of significant battle sites in southern Africa.

Over a period of some 80 years from the early 1800s, several wars raged between the Zulus, Afrikaners and British.

Sites of particular interest include the famous Battle of Isandlwana, where the British were defeated by a far larger force of Zulu warriors during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, and Rorke’s Drift, where a small group of British soldiers repulsed a subsequent attack by a much larger Zulu force.

And there are numerous South African War (also known as the Anglo-Boer War) sites of interest, among them Spioenkop, which saw bloodiest battle fought during the Siege of Ladysmith, involving early trench warfare.
There are also several specialist guides who will be able to bring this history alive. Fugitives’ Drift at Rorke’s Drift, for instance, has achieved international recognition for its exceptional battlefield interpretation and re-enactments.

**Did you know?**

Over a period of some 80 years from the early 1800s, several wars raged between the Zulus, Afrikaners and British. Image courtesy of Clifford Els

**Did you know?**

The battlefields area lies in the central and northern part of KwaZulu-Natal. Image courtesy of Battlefield Routes

**Travel fact**

This area is reputed to have the highest concentration of significant battle sites in southern Africa. Image courtesy of Battlefield Routes

## Gold Reef City

One of the best places for your clients to explore this history is a visit to Gold Reef City, which offers an experience beyond simply being a theme park.

Here your clients can book a heritage tour and learn about Jozi’s Story of Gold (Jozi is a nickname for Johannesburg). This includes an underground mine tour, gold panning and witnessing the pouring of a gold bar, an experience not to be missed.

Five two-hour tours a day take place from Wednesdays through Sundays (except on public holidays and Christmas Day).

Your clients might also wish to partake in some of the other entertainment on offer at Gold Reef City, including a casino and the theme-park rides.

For a more sobering look into South Africa’s past, a visit to the nearby Apartheid Museum is essential.

**Travel fact**
Here your clients can book a heritage tour and learn about Jozi’s Story of Gold. Image courtesy of Tsogo Sun

Travel fact
Your clients might also wish to partake in some of the other entertainment on offer at Gold Reef City, including a casino and the theme-park rides. Image courtesy of Tsogo Sun

Soweto

There are several tour operators that offer Soweto tours, so your clients can learn first-hand about the country’s apartheid past, experience a taste of modern-day township life, visit sites of recent historical interest, and meet the locals over a beer and some typical township fare.

A tour usually includes a visit to the Hector Pieterson memorial and museum, commemorating the Soweto uprising of 1976, a few blocks away from where 13-year-old Pieterson was shot and killed by police during the uprising.

They will also be taken to Soweto’s most famous address, Vilakazi Street, which was once home to former president Nelson Mandela and Anglican Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, both Nobel Peace Prize laureates.

Other sites of interest include the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital (one of the biggest hospitals in the world), the Orlando cooling towers (which offer bungee jumps) and FNB Stadium, built for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, when it was known as Soccer City.

There are several restaurants and taverns in Soweto where your clients will be able to have a bite to eat and a drink while mulling over all they’ve seen. Advise them to take along some extra cash for gratuities.

Vilakazi Street

Soweto’s Vilakazi Street was once home to two Nobel Peace Prize laureates – former president Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu.
Travel tip

Experience a bike tour through Soweto

Did you know?

On a township tour your client can learn first-hand about the country’s apartheid past, experience a taste of modern-day township life and visit sites of recent historical interest

Did you know?

The Orlando cooling towers offer bungee jumping. Image courtesy of 350.org

Robben Island

Since his release, the prison has been closed and today it is a World Heritage Site, museum and one of Cape Town’s leading tourist attractions.

The island was not only a prison to Mandela and his fellow ANC leaders – it was also used as a hospital for lepers and mentally and chronically ill people from the mid-1800s to the 1930s.

Your clients can retrace Mandela’s footsteps by booking one of four tours a day from the Nelson Mandela Gateway at the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town. From here they will go on a half-hour ferry ride to the island, which lies about 7km offshore.

On the tour, usually led by a former political prisoner, they will be shown the quarry where Mandela once worked alongside other prisoners, as well as his single-bed cell from which he could see Table Mountain. For many visitors, this is a deeply moving experience.

On the tour

On the tour, usually led by a former political prisoner, guests will be shown the quarry where Mandela once worked alongside other prisoners
The cell where Nelson Mandela spent 18 years of his life as a political prisoner on Robben Island

Did you know?
The island was also used as a hospital for lepers and mentally and chronically ill people from the mid-1800s to the 1930s

Kimberley

This event played a pivotal role in the history of South Africa, attracting, among others, controversial British colonialist and mining magnate Cecil John Rhodes, who was to go on to become prime minister of the Cape Colony.

A major attraction in Kimberley today is the Big Hole, the largest hand-dug excavation in the world. Here your clients can go on a guided tour that includes a visit to a diamond vault and a simulated trip down a mine, before taking a closer look at the hole from a special viewing platform.

Afterwards, they can stroll around the ‘old town’, a precinct of shops and restaurants in replica buildings typical of a 19th-century mining town.

Another site of interest in Kimberley is the Wildebees Kuil Rock Art Centre, where rock engravings can be seen. Of interest to history enthusiasts are the many South African War (also known as the Anglo-Boer War) battlefields in the vicinity as well as the well-appointed McGregor Museum.

Major attraction
Kimberley’s Big Hole is the largest hand-dug excavation in the world
Travel fact

Of interest to history enthusiasts are the many South African War (also known as the Anglo-Boer War) battlefields in the vicinity as well as the well-appointed McGregor Museum. Image courtesy of Flowcomm

Did you know?

Kimberley was the scene of a diamond rush in the 1870s. The picture above shows the De Beer's Dispensary in Kimberley. Image courtesy of Flowcomm