

AFRICA · WILDLIFE · ROAD TRIPS · WINE · BEACHES · HIKING · FOOD



South Africa

South Africa delivers Big Five safaris, two oceans and a world-class wine country in a single trip. Kruger's bushveld, Cape Town's Table Mountain and the self-drive Garden Route form the classic loop, while the Drakensberg, Zululand and the Karoo add space to roam. For UK visitors, excellent food and wine are remarkably good value.



Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for South Africa and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 8 July 2026.

 CAPITAL Pretoria	 CURRENCY South African rand (ZAR) £1 ≈ ZAR 21.92	 LANGUAGE English, Zulu Xhosa, Afrikaans	 BEST TIME Mar–Apr, Sep–Nov
 DAILY BUDGET £40–£220 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, D, M, N 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 11h direct ~£650–£1,250 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+2 standard time

Few countries pack in such contrasts: Kruger's bushveld in the north-east, the subtropical Indian Ocean coast around Durban, the Drakensberg's basalt walls, and the Cape's fynbos, vineyards and cold Atlantic surf. South Africa has three capitals — Pretoria, Cape Town and Bloemfontein — and twelve official languages. The classic first trip spends four or five days in Cape Town and the Winelands, drives the Garden Route east towards Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth), then flies to Kruger or a private reserve on its edge. With more time, add Durban, the Drakensberg or neighbouring Eswatini.

Distances are huge and public transport limited, so most visitors self-drive on generally good roads or fly between hubs, which makes the trip feel like a road trip with a safari attached. Prices are moderate for UK visitors and wine is cheap. The time difference from the UK is only one or two hours, so there is no jet lag. Street awareness matters in cities, and the country's apartheid history is unavoidable and worth confronting at Robben Island, the Apartheid Museum and in Soweto. Many first-timers are surprised by how cold and wet Cape winters can be.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

WILDLIFE

Kruger National Park

Nearly two million hectares of bushveld with the Big Five, wild dogs and more than 500 bird species. Self-drive between fenced rest camps on a modest budget, or stay in a private reserve on its unfenced western edge.
- 2

NATURE

Table Mountain

The flat-topped massif above Cape Town, reached by a rotating cableway or a steep climb of around two hours up Platteklip Gorge. Its slopes hold an astonishing density of fynbos plants found nowhere else.

3

NATURE

Garden Route

Roughly 200 km of coast between Mossel Bay and Storms River, with Knysna's lagoon, Plettenberg Bay's beaches and the forested gorges of the Tsitsikamma section of Garden Route National Park. Drive it slowly over several days.

4

FOOD

Cape Winelands

Cape Dutch homesteads and vineyards beneath jagged mountains around Stellenbosch, Franschhoek and Paarl, all within an hour of Cape Town. Expect superb Chenin Blanc and Pinotage, and some of the country's best restaurants.

5

ADVENTURE

uKhahlamba-Drakensberg

A towering basalt escarpment along the Lesotho border, UNESCO-listed for its scenery and thousands of San rock paintings. Hike to the top of Tugela Falls on the Amphitheatre, or walk the valleys of the central Berg.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Johannesburg

≈ 4.8 million people

Gritty, creative and the country's economic engine. Visit Soweto, Constitution Hill and the Apartheid Museum, then eat and drink in Maboneng or Rosebank before heading to Kruger.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Cape Town

≈ 4.8 million people

Spread beneath Table Mountain, with Robben Island, the Bo-Kaap's painted houses, Cape Point and the penguins of Boulders Beach close by. The country's most rewarding city.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Durban

≈ 4.2 million people

A warm Indian Ocean city of surf beaches, a long promenade and South Africa's strongest Indian influence; come for bunny chow, then move on to the Drakensberg or Zululand.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

Holiday regions in South Africa

These areas have their own season and weather — see their guides for sea temperatures, resorts and flights.

**Cape Town & the Western Cape**

South Africa Best: Nov–Mar 11h 30m from London

Sea up to 17°C ~£100/day

When to go to South Africa

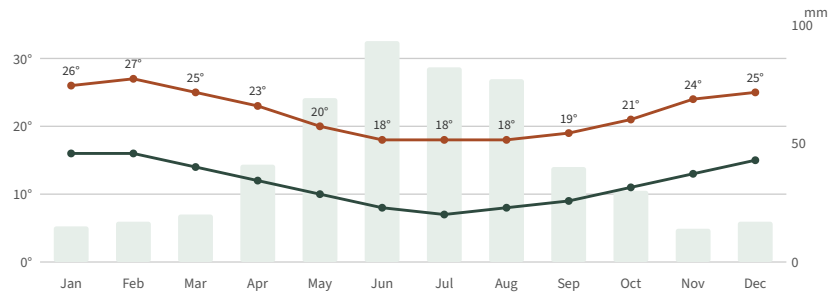
Best time: **Mar–Apr, Sep–Nov.**



Best Good Mixed Poor

Average climate in Cape Town

High °C Low °C Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan	Cape Town Minstrel Carnival On 2 January, Tweede Nuwe Jaar, satin-suited troupes of the Kaapse Klopse march through Cape Town with banjos, drums and painted umbrellas, a tradition with 19th-century roots.
Jun–Jul	National Arts Festival Africa's largest arts festival takes over the university town of Makhanda (Grahamstown) for around ten days in late June and July, with theatre, music, comedy and a sprawling fringe.
Sep–Oct	Hermanus Whale Festival Held in late September or early October, when southern right whales gather to calve close to the cliffs of Hermanus, about two hours from Cape Town.

How much does South Africa cost?

SHOESTRING £40 per person / day ≈ ZAR 877 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £90 per person / day ≈ ZAR 1,973 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £220 per person / day ≈ ZAR 4,823 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
---	---	--

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Bobotie

Cape Malay spiced minced meat with dried fruit, baked under a savoury egg custard and served with yellow rice and chutney.

Braai

Far more than a barbecue: a social ritual of boerewors sausage, lamb chops and sosaties grilled over wood coals, with pap and chakalaka.

Bunny chow

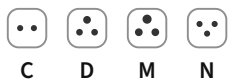
Durban's hollowed-out loaf filled with fiery mutton, chicken or bean curry, created by the city's Indian community and eaten by hand.

Getting around

Most visitors hire a car: roads are generally good, distances long, and you drive on the left. Cheap domestic flights connect Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, George and the Kruger area. Uber and Bolt work well in cities and are the sensible choice after dark. Long-distance coaches fill the gaps, and the Gautrain links Johannesburg's main airport with Sandton and Pretoria.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



230V — bring a UK-to-C/D/M/N adapter

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

All emergencies from mobiles: **112**

Ambulance and fire: **10177**

Police: **10111**

National Sea and Rescue Institute: **112** or **+27 87 094 9774**

Wilderness Search and Rescue: **+27 21 937 0300**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

DIALLING CODE

+27

TIME ZONE

UTC+2 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the left

TIPPING

Tip 10–15% in restaurants. Fuel stations are full-service, so tip attendants a few rand, and give car guards a small coin when you leave.

ETIQUETTE

Greetings matter: ask how someone is before making a request. Visit townships with community-run guides rather than on bus tours, and expect frank conversations about race and history.

MAIN AIRPORTS

O. R. Tambo International Airport (JNB), Johannesburg; Cape Town International Airport (CPT), Cape Town; King Shaka International Airport (DUR), Durban

Visas & entry for South Africa

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit South Africa without a visa for up to 90 days for business or tourism.

Check the expiry date of your visa or entry stamp and ensure you do not overstay.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

 See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Cholera

Hepatitis B

Measles

Rabies

Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

Malaria risk in some areas

- There is a risk of malaria in the low altitude areas of Mpumalanga and Limpopo particularly those bordering Mozambique, Estwatini and Zimbabwe; this includes the Kruger National Park: antimalarial tablets recommended.
- There is a low risk of malaria in the far northeast of KwaZulu-Natal and in designated areas of Mpumalanga, Limpopo during the transmission season, September to May: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.
- There is a very low risk of malaria in designated areas of northeast KwaZulu-Natal during the transmission season, September to May: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in South Africa

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Wed 4 Nov 2026	Local Government Elections
Wed 16 Dec 2026	Day of Reconciliation
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Sat 26 Dec 2026	Day of Goodwill
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Sun 21 Mar 2027	Human Rights Day
Mon 22 Mar 2027	Human Rights Day (observed)
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Family Day
Tue 27 Apr 2027	Freedom Day
Sat 1 May 2027	Workers' Day
Wed 16 Jun 2027	Youth Day
Mon 9 Aug 2027	National Women's Day
Fri 24 Sep 2027	Heritage Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Know before you go

- Book Kruger's SANParks rest camps months ahead for South African school holidays, especially December and January, when camps and coastal towns fill up.
- The Table Mountain cableway closes in strong wind or thick cloud, so go up on the first clear, calm morning rather than saving it for your last day.

Use Uber or Bolt after dark rather than walking, keep valuables out of sight in parked cars, and check the FCDO travel advice before you travel.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.