

2023/24

OFFICIAL GUIDE TO  
SOUTH AFRICA



PROVINCES

South Africa has nine provinces, which vary considerably in size. The smallest is tiny and crowded Gauteng, a highly urbanised region, and the largest the vast, arid and empty Northern Cape, which takes up almost a third of South Africa's total land area.

Each province has its own Legislature, Premier and Executive Council. The country has common boundaries with Namibia, Botswana and Zimbabwe, while Mozambique and Eswatini lie to the north-east. Completely enclosed by South African territory in the south-east is the mountain kingdom of Lesotho. South Africa has three capitals:

- Cape Town, in the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, Western Cape, is the legislative capital and is where the country's Parliament is found.
- Bloemfontein, in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, Free State, is the judicial capital and home to the Supreme Court of Appeal.
- Pretoria, in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, Gauteng, is the administrative capital, and the ultimate capital of the country. It is home to the Union Buildings and a large proportion of the Public Service.

## Eastern Cape

The Eastern Cape, lying on the south-eastern South African coast, is a region of great natural beauty, particularly the rugged cliffs, rough seas and dense green bush of the stretch known as the Wild Coast. In the Eastern Cape, various floral habitats meet. Along the coast, the northern tropical forests intermingle with the more temperate woods of the south. The province is serviced by airports situated in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth), East London, Mthatha and Bhisho.

The top 15 iconic tourist destinations have been digitised and are available on the virtual platforms, where potential tourists could virtually tour them. The province has since renamed a number of government facilities and places after the legends who fought against apartheid:

- The Bhisho State House is now Lillian Diedericks House, (Bhisho), Lillian Diedericks Municipal Building.
- In the Nelson Mandela Metro, the Brister House has been renamed after Mama Lillian Diedericks, Port Elizabeth Airport to Dawid Stuurman Airport and East London Airport to King Phalo Airport.

**Capital:** Bhisho

**Principal languages:**

- isiXhosa 82,7%
- Afrikaans 10,3%
- English 3,9%

**Population:** 7 176 230

**Percentage share of the total population:** 11,4%

**Area:** 168 966 km<sup>2</sup>

Source: Stats SA's Census 2022 and *Mid-year population estimates of 2024*.

## Free State

The Free State – a province of wide horizons and blue skies, farmland, mountains, goldfields and widely dispersed towns – lies in the heart of South Africa. Between the Vaal River in the north and the Orange River in the south, this immense rolling prairie stretches as far as the eye can see. Mining, particularly gold, is the biggest employer, followed by manufacturing.

The Free State also produces high-quality diamonds from its kimberlite pipes and fissures, and the country’s largest deposit of bentonite is found in the Koppies district. The National Development Plan has intensified the mining potential that still exists in the goldfields region of Matjhabeng in the Lejweleputswa District as a job intervention zone.

The capital, Bloemfontein, houses the Supreme Court of Appeal, a leading university and some top schools. Important towns include Welkom, Sasolburg, Odendaalsrus, Kroonstad, Parys, Phuthaditjhaba, Bethlehem. The charming village of Clarens situated in the rolling foothills of the Maluti Mountains.

Some of South Africa’s most valued San rock art can be found in the Free State. Other key tourist attractions in the province include the majestic Golden Gate National Park, the annual air show in Bethlehem, the Cherry Festival in Ficksburg, and the Fauresmith International Endurance Ride equestrian event. The annual Mangaung African Cultural Festival, known as Macufe, is hosted in partnership with the Tourism Authority and the Performing Arts Centre of the Free State. The Vredefort Dome, 10 km in diameter, is on the United Nations’ (UN) World Heritage Site List.

**Capital:** Bloemfontein

**Principal languages:**

- Sesotho 71,9%
- Afrikaans 10,9%
- isiXhosa 5,7%

**Population:** 3 044 050

**Percentage share of the total population:** 4,8%

**Area:** 129 825 km<sup>2</sup>

Source: Stats SA’s Census 2022 and *Mid-year population estimates of 2024*.

## Gauteng

Gauteng is the smallest of South Africa’s nine provinces but comprises the largest share of the South African population. Financial and business services, logistics, manufacturing, property, telecommunications and trade are some of the most important economic sectors.

The province is an integrated industrial complex with major areas of economic activity in three sub-regional areas, namely the Vaal Triangle; the East, West and Central Rand, and Pretoria. Johannesburg houses the Johannesburg Stock Exchange Limited, the largest securities exchange in Africa.

Most overseas visitors enter South Africa via OR Tambo International Airport. Pretoria is the administrative capital of South Africa, and home to the Union Buildings and most of the national government departments.

**Capital:** Johannesburg

**Principal languages:**

- IsiZulu 23,0%
- Afrikaans 10,1%
- Sesotho 12,7%
- English 11,3%

**Population:** 15 931 824

**Percentage share of the total population:** 25,3%

**Area:** 18 178 km<sup>2</sup>

Source: Stats SA's Census 2022 and *Mid-year population estimates of 2024*.

### KwaZulu-Natal

KwaZulu-Natal, one of the country's most popular holiday destinations, is the province with the second largest population. This verdant region includes South Africa's lush subtropical east coast. Washed by the warm Indian Ocean, it stretches from Port Edward in the south, and northwards to the Mozambique boundary. In addition to the magnificent coastline, there is the sweeping savanna in the east, and the majestic Drakensberg mountain range in the west that offers some of the country's most awe-inspiring landscapes. A vast sweep of basalt summits and buttresses was formally granted World Heritage status in November 2000 and renamed uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park.

Visitors can enter the province through the King Shaka International Airport at La Mercy, north of Durban or use the extensive national road network. There are also two major harbours – the port of Durban, which is one the busiest in Africa, and Richards Bay, which is an important coal-export harbour. There are several tertiary institutions of learning, including the University of KwaZulu-Natal, University of Zululand, Mangosuthu University of Technology and Durban University of Technology. KwaZulu-Natal is the only province with a monarchy specifically provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996.

**Capital:** Pietermaritzburg

**Principal languages:**

- isiZulu 82,5%
- English 12,5%
- Afrikaans 1,0%

**Population:** 12 312 712

**Percentage share of the total population:** 19,5%

**Area:** 94 361 km<sup>2</sup>

Source: Stats SA's Census 2022 and *Mid-year population estimates of 2024*.

## Limpopo

Limpopo, South Africa's northernmost province, borders onto Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Botswana, making it the ideal entrance to Africa. Named after the Limpopo River that flows along its northern border, the province is rich in wildlife, spectacular scenery and a wealth of historical and cultural treasures. This province is in the Savanna Biome, an area of mixed grassland and trees, which is generally known as bushveld. The province's natural resources include more than 50 provincial reserves, as well as several private game reserves. The largest section of the Kruger National Park is situated along the eastern boundary of Limpopo with Mozambique.

**Capital:** Polokwane

**Principal languages:**

- Sepedi 56,0%
- Tshivenda 17,1%
- Xitsonga 16,6%

**Population:** 6 402 594

**Percentage share of the total population:** 10,2%

**Area:** 125 755 km<sup>2</sup>

Source: Stats SA's Census 2022 and *Mid-year population estimates of 2024*.

## Mpumalanga

Mpumalanga means Place where the sun rises. Owing to its spectacular scenic beauty and abundance of wildlife, the province is one of South Africa's major tourist destinations. Mpumalanga falls mainly within the Grassland Biome. The escarpment and the Lowveld form a transitional zone between this grassland area and the Savanna Biome.

The area has a network of excellent roads and railway connections, making it highly accessible. Mpumalanga is also served by a number of small airports, such as the Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport. Mbombela is the capital of the province and the administrative and



business centre of the Lowveld. Other important towns are eMalahleni, Standerton, Piet Retief, Malalane, Ermelo, Barberton and Sabie.

Large-scale manufacturing occurs especially in the northern Highveld area, particularly chrome-alloy and steel manufacturing. The Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains were added to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s prestigious World Heritage List in July 2018, becoming the 10th World Heritage Site for South Africa. The site comprises 40% of the Barberton Greenstone Belt, one of the world’s oldest geological structures. The Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains represent the best-preserved succession of volcanic and sedimentary rock dating back 3,25 to 3,6 billion years.

**Capital:** Mbombela  
**Principal languages:**

- Siswati 29,1%
- isiZulu 28,8%
- Xitsonga 9,6%
- isiNdebele 10,1%

**Population:** 5 057 662  
**Percentage share of the total population:** 8,0%  
**Area:** 76 495 km<sup>2</sup>

Source: Stats SA’s Census 2022 and *Mid-year population estimates of 2024*.

## Northern Cape

The Northern Cape is the largest province in South Africa. However, it remains the province with the smallest share of the South African population. It is noted for its San rock art, diamond diggings, 4X4 safaris and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. It is a vast stretch of semi-desert land. The province is renowned for its spectacular display of spring flowers, which, for a short period every year, attracts thousands of tourists.

Sutherland hosts the southern hemisphere’s largest astronomical observatory, the multinational-sponsored Southern African Large Telescope. The Northern Cape is one of two sites to host the Square Kilometre Array radio-telescope, the largest and most advanced radio telescope in the world.

Among many other benefits, the province’s tourism and hospitality industry is profiting from the project, as scientists and other interested parties are flooding into the town of Carnarvon. Electrical power generation presents an opportunity for greater economic diversification and growth in the province.

**Capital:** Kimberley

**Principal languages:**

- Afrikaans 56,8%
- Setswana 33,4%

**Population:** 1 372 943

**Percentage share of the total population:** 2,2%

**Area:** 372 889 km<sup>2</sup>

Source: Stats SA's Census 2022 and *Mid-year population estimates of 2024*.

## North West

North West lies in the north of South Africa, on the Botswana border, fringed by the Kalahari desert in the west, Gauteng to the east, and the Free State to the south. Sun City, the Pilanesberg National Park, the Madikwe Game Reserve, the Cradle of Humankind Site, the Taung Heritage Site, the De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Trust and the Lesedi Cultural Village are some of the tourist attractions.

Some of the largest cattle herds in the world are found at Stellaland near Vryburg, which explains why this area is often referred to as the Texas of South Africa. Marico is also cattle country. North West is South Africa's major producer of white maize. Mining contributes immensely to North West's economy and the South African mining industry. It is known as the Platinum Province due to its abundant mineral riches of platinum, chrome and the platinum group metals.

It is also home to a strong dimension stone sector, due to the riches of its slate, marble and granite deposits. The Rustenburg and Brits districts produce 94% of the country's platinum. In addition to granite, marble, fluorspar and diamonds, the province also produces a quarter of South Africa's gold.

**Capital:** Mahikeng

**Principal languages:**

- Setswana 71,5%
- Afrikaans 8,96%
- isiXhosa 5,51%

**Population:** 4 155 303

**Percentage share of the total population:** 6,6%

**Area:** 104 882 km<sup>2</sup>

Source: Stats SA's Census 2022 and *Mid-year population estimates of 2024*.

## Western Cape

Situated on the south-western tip of Africa, the Western Cape with its wide beaches and breath-taking scenery, complemented by a rich variety of cultures, historical landmarks, world-class restaurants and entertainment, is a world-famous tourist destination.

With several local attractions and venues, the Western Cape is one of the domestic travel destinations in South Africa preferred by foreign tourists. The province is bordered by two oceans – the Indian Ocean to the south and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. It is also well known for its scenic beauty and a wealth of flora and fauna. With an abundance of hiking trails you have a choice between coastal or mountain hikes. Table Mountain, the Cape winelands, Robben Island and the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens are among the province’s most popular tourist attractions.

Other popular attractions include the Victoria and Alfred (V&A) Waterfront, the Company’s Gardens, the District Six Museum, the houses of Parliament and the South African National Gallery.

**Capital:** Cape Town

**Principal languages:**

- Afrikaans 46,6%
- isiXhosa 31,1%
- English 19,6%

**Population:** 7 562 588

**Percentage share of the total population:** 12,0%

**Area:** 129 462 km<sup>2</sup>

Source: Stats SA’s Census 2022 and *Mid-year population estimates of 2024*.