

Destination South Africa, Lesotho & Swaziland

Every country in the world displays some diversity, but South Africa, stretching from the hippos in the Limpopo River to the penguins waddling on the Cape, takes some beating. It befits its position at the southern end of the world's most epic continent, with more types of terrain than photographers can shake their zoom lens at. There's the deserted Kalahari, Namakwa's springtime symphony of wildflowers, iconic Table Mountain and Cape Point, northern Swaziland's hills and ravines, Kruger National Park's wildlife-stalked savannah (scene of the famous lion-buffalo-crocodile battle watched more than 40 million times on YouTube) and, running through the east of the country and into Lesotho, the Drakensberg. KwaZulu-Natal's iSimangaliso Wetland Park alone has five distinct ecosystems, attracting both zebras and dolphins.

Interacting with this smorgasbord of scenery couldn't be more fun, with opportunities such as the world's highest bungee jump, Basotho pony trekking in Lesotho, white-water rafting in Swaziland, and numerous wildlife-watching locations including the world's best spot to sight a whale from dry land. If you're interested in another kind of wildlife, hit the nightclubs on Cape Town's jumping Long St or sample African homebrew in a township shebeen (unlicensed bar). When it's time to reflect on it all, do it over seafood on the Garden Route, curry in Durban's Indian Area, a sizzling Cape Malay dish, or a braai (barbecue) in the wilderness – accompanied by a bottle of pinotage produced by the oldest wine industry outside Europe.

Of course, this mind-boggling diversity extends to the country's people, and that's where discussion about South Africa becomes less comfortable. The most developed country on the continent may have seen off apartheid in the early 1990s, when Nelson Mandela walked free after 27 years in jail and the African National Congress (ANC) party triumphed in South Africa's first democratic election, but racial inequality is still rife. In the black-dominated townships, millions of people live in tin shacks without basic amenities and face daily realities such as HIV/AIDS (South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland are in the top six countries worldwide in terms of HIV prevalence) and xenophobia. While news reports in previous decades focused on racial segregation and repression under apartheid, tensions within the black population made headlines in May 2008. Xenophobic riots and attacks, sparked by the intensified competition for jobs and housing from economic immigrants from other African countries, displaced some 40,000 people, mostly Mozambicans. Certainly, you will notice that many tourist businesses employ staff from countries such as Zimbabwe – who are often willing to work for less money than locals.

Stemming from such social difficulties, South Africa has legendarily high crime rates, and Johannesburg in particular generates all manner of urban myths. A recent criminal trend in and around the city is blowing up ATMs, while people might tell you that vehicles there have flamethrowers to combat carjackers. In fact, the product was discontinued after selling only a few hundred units, although razor wire is certainly a common sight in Gauteng. Many property owners use private security firms as an unofficial police force, lacking confidence in an official force that the Safety and Security Minister has admitted is riddled with corrupt officers.

FAST FACTS South Africa

Population: 48.8 million

Area: 1.2 million sq km

Unemployment: 21.7%

Average life expectancy:
48.9 (49.6 for males and
48.1 for females)

Deaths from AIDS per
day: almost 1000

Official languages: 11
(English, Afrikaans,
Ndebele, Xhosa, Zulu,
Sepedi, Sotho, Tshivenda,
Tswana, Swati and
Xitsonga)

Elephants in Kruger
National Park: 13,050

HIV prevalence: 18.8%

World's longest wine
route: Route 62, Western
Cape

World's largest diamond:
3106.75 carats uncut,
mined in 1905

FAST FACTS Lesotho & Swaziland

Lesotho population: 1.8 million

Length of Lesotho–South Africa border: 909km

World's 20th-largest diamond: 478 carats uncut, discovered in Lesotho in 2008

Swaziland population: 950,000

HIV prevalence: Swaziland 33.4% (world's highest according to official figures); Lesotho 23.2%

Number of times Swaziland could fit into South Africa: 70

However, every story in Africa has as many perspectives as the continent has people, and nothing is ever black and white in the rainbow nation and its neighbours. Swaziland's King Mswati III, one of the world's last absolute monarchs, has attracted criticism for his lavish lifestyle in a country where, as in Lesotho, most people eke out a living from subsistence agriculture, yet the monarchy contributes to many Swazis' patriotic pride. South African townships such as Soweto and Khayelitsha may produce depressing statistics, but visiting a crèche and seeing a knee-high tidal wave of tykes with ear-to-ear grins surge towards you is an uplifting experience. Meanwhile, a growing black middle class is making inroads into balancing out racial inequality, with the government helping this process with its Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) legislation. In 2008, the MasterCard Worldwide Index of Consumer Confidence found South Africa to be the third most optimistic nation in the Middle East, Africa and Asia Pacific, with Durban and Johannesburg ranked first and second within the country.

Certainly, South Africans are some of the most upbeat, welcoming and humorous folk you'll encounter anywhere, from farmers in the rural north who tell you to drive safely on those dirt roads, to Khayelitsha kids who wish you *molo* ('good morning' in Xhosa). Another point of unity in the diverse country is that, in malls and minibus taxis, bush pubs and shebeens, two popular topics of conversation are the 2010 FIFA World Cup and recent political upheavals.

Thabo Mbeki resigned as president after almost 10 years in 2008, although he has continued his much-criticised efforts to mediate the power-sharing agreement in Zimbabwe. Kgalema Motlanthe stepped in as 'caretaker president' until the 2009 elections; Mbeki had lost the ANC's support after a power struggle with his former deputy Jacob Zuma, who was elected as president in the April 2009 elections. A controversial figure, Zuma was assured of electoral victory when corruption charges against him, relating to a US\$4.8 billion arms deal, were dropped just weeks before the 2009 polls opened. The reasons for dropping the charges involved the alleged compromising of the evidence by those opposed to him. Controversy also surrounds Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, another successful ANC candidate and Nelson Mandela's former wife, who opponents say should have been barred from running for office due to her 2003 conviction for fraud.

The 2010 World Cup is more straightforward. Concerns surround the progress of the five new stadiums and various infrastructure improvements, but most people believe it will be as great a moment for South Africa as its Rugby World Cup triumphs in 1995 and 2007.

Getting Started

South Africa's infrastructure is well developed, with an excellent network of tarmac roads, modern buses and trains linking the major centres, ready access to ATMs and the internet, and an extensive selection of good-value, high-quality accommodation. Except during school holidays (when accommodation in popular areas is invariably booked out), it's possible to visit the country almost on the spur of the moment. Swaziland and (especially) Lesotho have less-developed infrastructure than South Africa. In Lesotho, for example, only a few major roads are paved, and ATMs and internet access are only available at a handful of places in or near the capital. Both countries are so small and easily navigated that it is usually no problem to sort things out as you go, but, wherever you visit, you'll get more out of your time with some advance planning. Tourism in all three countries is big business and a much-welcomed source of revenue, resulting in a raft of tourist offices and a generally high level of tourism awareness throughout the region.

If travelling by public transport, allow plenty of time to pick up connections, especially away from the major routes. It's quite popular and easy to journey around South Africa by private car – and this is often the only way to get around when away from the major routes. With advance planning and thorough searching, you can generally find good rental deals. Car travel is also easy and reasonably priced in Lesotho and Swaziland, although, unlike in South Africa, public transport will take you almost everywhere you want to go, cheaply and with minimum hassle.

WHEN TO GO

South Africa can be visited comfortably any time. However, depending on what you plan to do, it's worth paying attention to the seasons, which are the reverse of those in the northern hemisphere. Winter (June to September) is cooler, drier and ideal for hiking and outdoor pursuits. Because vegetation is less dense and thirsty animals congregate around rivers and other permanent water sources, winter is also the best time for wildlife-watching. In the eastern highveld, nights are often crisp and clear, with occasional frosts, so come prepared with a jacket.

Summer (late November to March) brings rain, mists and – in the lowveld, including much of eastern Swaziland – some uncomfortably hot days. Along the Indian Ocean coast, conditions are sultry and tropical, with high humidity. Spectacular summer thunderstorms are common in

See Climate Charts (p609)
for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Binoculars for wildlife-watching and a zoom lens for taking great wildlife shots
- An appetite for biltong, *boerewors* (Boer sausages) and mealie pap (see p72)
- Making room in your schedule to visit at least one township
- Your yellow-fever vaccination card (p649) if you've been travelling elsewhere in Southern Africa
- Reading up on malaria in the Health chapter (p648) if you'll be travelling in malarial areas
- A torch (flashlight) and warm, waterproof clothing for those cold, black, starry nights in the highlands, especially in Lesotho
- A sleeping bag if you're planning on camping
- Reading a few of the books listed (p22), or bringing one along for long bus rides

Swaziland and Lesotho, and in Lesotho flooding sometimes washes out sections of road.

The 2010 FIFA World Cup takes place from 11 June to 11 July, with the quarter- and semi-finals and the big showdowns taking place in Johannesburg (Jo'burg), Cape Town and Port Elizabeth from 2 July. Some 350,000 fans of the beautiful game are expected to descend on South Africa for the tournament, so travellers will have to book ahead to get beds and also seats on transport – particularly in the larger cities, where most matches will take place. Prices will also rise in line with the increased demand.

More of a consideration than weather are school holidays. From mid-December to January, waves of vacation-hungry South Africans stream out of the cities, with visitors from Europe and North America adding to the crush. The absolute peak is from Christmas to mid-January, followed by Easter. At this time, accommodation in tourist areas and national parks is heavily booked, and prices can more than double. If you visit Cape Town, the Garden Route or other popular areas during this time, it's essential to book accommodation in advance. On the plus side, the high summer months offer some great festivals, including Cape Town's Kaapse Klopse (p136) and Swaziland's Incwala ceremony (p585). See p612 for information on other festivals.

Spring (mid-September to November) and autumn (April and May) are ideal almost everywhere. Spring is also the best time to see vast expanses of the Northern Cape carpeted with wildflowers.

HOW MUCH?

Bottle of wine R55-80

Kruger National Park
entry R160

Car hire per day R200-300

Township tour R320

Surfboard R2500

COSTS & MONEY

Travelling in South Africa is not as cheap as in many less-developed African countries. However, it usually works out to be less expensive than travelling in Europe or North America, and the quality of facilities and infrastructure is generally high. Among the best deals are national parks and reserves, which offer excellent and accessible wildlife-watching at significantly less cost than you would pay in parts of East Africa.

At the budget level, it's quite possible to get by on about R250 (US\$25) per day with a bit of effort, by camping or staying in hostels or self-catering accommodation, and using public transport.

CUTTING COSTS

In popular tourist areas, it's easy to pay much more than the averages listed under Costs & Money if you don't keep a watch on expenses. Cape Town in particular has a long history of enticing travellers, showing them a good time and emptying their wallets. However, there are also plenty of excellent-value options, both in accommodation and dining, that won't break your budget. Some ways to save include the following:

- avoid travelling during school-holiday periods and during the 2010 FIFA World Cup
- always ask about midweek or weekend discounts, as well as reduced rates for children
- take advantage of self-catering facilities and camping grounds
- save your receipts to reclaim your value-added tax (VAT; see p617)
- focus on just one or two areas of the country, and don't try to cover too much distance
- use public transport and minimise use of a car, or try to travel in a group to share car-rental costs
- book car rentals well in advance for better deals
- book domestic air tickets online; savings can be as high as 50% of published fares

TOP 10

PARKS & RESERVES

Heed the call of the wild and explore Southern Africa's great open spaces by 4WD, car, mountain bike or foot.

- 1 Kruger National Park (p464) – 1600 lions, 7700 giraffes etc, quite simply an African icon
- 2 Table Mountain National Park (p98) – the famous mountain and also the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve
- 3 Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (p537) – black-maned lions nap under thorn trees in the crimson-coloured Kalahari
- 4 iSimangaliso Wetland Park (p336) – lakes, beaches, wetlands and woodlands alongside the Indian Ocean
- 5 Namaqua National Park (p546) – hike through a springtime sea of blue, purple and golden wildflowers
- 6 Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (p333) – white and black rhinos roam between the White iMfolozi and Black iMfolozi Rivers
- 7 Mapungubwe National Park (p496) – a great civilisation lived here when the ancient baobabs were just whippersnappers
- 8 Camdeboo National Park (p267) – dolerite pillars rise more than 100m above the Karoo
- 9 Tsitsikamma National Park (p238) – activities from zip-sliding between the treetops to hiking some of South Africa's best trails
- 10 Ts'ehlanyane National Park (p562) – indigenous forest and rugged wilderness at high altitude

ACTIVITY HOT SPOTS

The 2010 FIFA World Cup will be a once-in-a-lifetime experience, but Southern Africa offers a plethora of memorable activities such as the following.

- 1 Table Mountain National Park (from p128) – hiking, rock climbing and abseiling
- 2 Lion's Head (p128) – paragliding
- 3 Hermanus (p183) – whale-watching
- 4 Bloukrans River Bridge (p239) – bungee jumping
- 5 Jeffrey's Bay (p241) – surfing
- 6 Sodwana Bay (p339) – scuba diving and snorkelling
- 7 Drakensberg Escarpment (p443) – trout fishing, climbing, hiking and mountain biking
- 8 Riemvasmaak (p542) – 4WD trails and a hot mineral pool
- 9 Lesotho (p563 and p568) – pony trekking, hiking and fishing
- 10 Swaziland (p595 and p591) – rafting and hiking

CLASSIC BOOKS

The anti-apartheid struggle produced an unsurpassed collection of literature – essential reading to get into the heart of the country.

- 1 *Long Walk to Freedom*, by Nelson Mandela
- 2 *The Marabi Dance*, by Modikwe Dikobe
- 3 *My Traitor's Heart*, by Rian Malan
- 4 *A Burning Hunger: One Family's Struggle Against Apartheid*, by Lynda Schuster
- 5 *Singing Away the Hunger: Stories of a Life in Lesotho*, by Mpho 'M'atsepo Nthunya
- 6 *The Mind of South Africa*, by Allister Sparks
- 7 *Let My People Go*, by Albert Luthuli
- 8 *The Heart of Redness*, by Zakes Mda
- 9 *Cry, The Beloved Country*, by Alan Paton
- 10 *The Lying Days*, by Nadine Gordimer

For midrange travel – where the best value and most choice are found in South Africa – plan on about R450 (US\$45) per person per day; more if you hire a vehicle and less if you stay in self-catering places (many of which are quite comfortable).

Life in the luxury lane starts at about R1400 (US\$140) per person per day, and can climb to more than five times this if you decide to ensconce yourself in some of the continent's top wildlife lodges.

Costs in Lesotho and Swaziland for travellers are the same as, or somewhat less than, in South Africa, with savings coming from cheaper local transport, inexpensive food and (in Lesotho) plentiful opportunities to camp or stay in economical lodges in former trading posts. The unit of currency in Lesotho is the loti (plural maloti; M), which is divided into 100 lisente, while in Swaziland the lilangeni (plural emalangen; E) is used. Both currencies are fixed at an equal value to the South African rand.

Although accommodation in South Africa isn't quite as full or expensive during other school holidays as during the main December to January break, prices still rise and reservations are recommended. See p614 for holiday periods.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

From Jo'burg to Jozi, edited by Heidi Holland and Adam Roberts, is an eminently readable collection of short takes on this famous city by some 80 writers. The follow-up volume, *Soweto Inside Out*, edited by Roberts and Joe Thlooe, offers more of the same, this time with the focus on South Africa's most famous township.

Cape Town has inspired a range of contemporary reads. *Khayelitsha* is the account of the years journalist Steven Otter (see p160) spent in the township, drinking in shebeens (unlicensed bars) and challenging his preconceptions about race. A good anthology is *Cape Town Calling: from Mandela to Throux on the Mother City*, edited by Justin Fox, and if you want a really fresh perspective, Lauren Beukes' sci-fi novel *Moxyland* imagines the city as a high-tech dystopia.

Power Lines: Two Years on South Africa's Borders, by Jason Carter, chronicles a Peace Corps volunteer's perspectives on the still-deep divisions between white and black South Africa.

While not travel literature, Nelson Mandela's superb and inspirational autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, is one of the best ways to prepare for a South Africa trip. To pick up where Mandela leaves off, try the less profound but insightful *Rainbow Diary: A Journey in the New South Africa*, by John Malathronas. David Robbins' *After the Dance: Travels in a Democratic South Africa* is another intriguing chronicle of travels through post-apartheid South Africa.

For a dated but still relevant perspective, look for *South from the Limpopo: Travels Through South Africa*, in which inveterate Irish writer Dervla Murphy details her bicycle journey through the rainbow nation before, during and after the 1994 elections.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Government of Swaziland (www.gov.sz) The Swazi government's homepage.

Lesotho Government Portal (www.lesotho.gov.ls) The Lesotho government's homepage.

Linx Africa (www.linx.co.za) Links to all things South African, including dozens of hiking and biking trails.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) South Africa travel tips and the Thorn Tree forum.

Mail & Guardian Online (www.mg.co.za) South African news.

See Lesotho (www.seelesotho.com) Background and cultural information.

South Africa Info (www.safica.info) South Africa's info-packed official gateway.

South African National Parks (www.parks-sa.co.za) The best place to start your safari.

Times of Swaziland (www.times.co.sz) Local Swazi news.

See p620 for regional tourism websites.

Itineraries

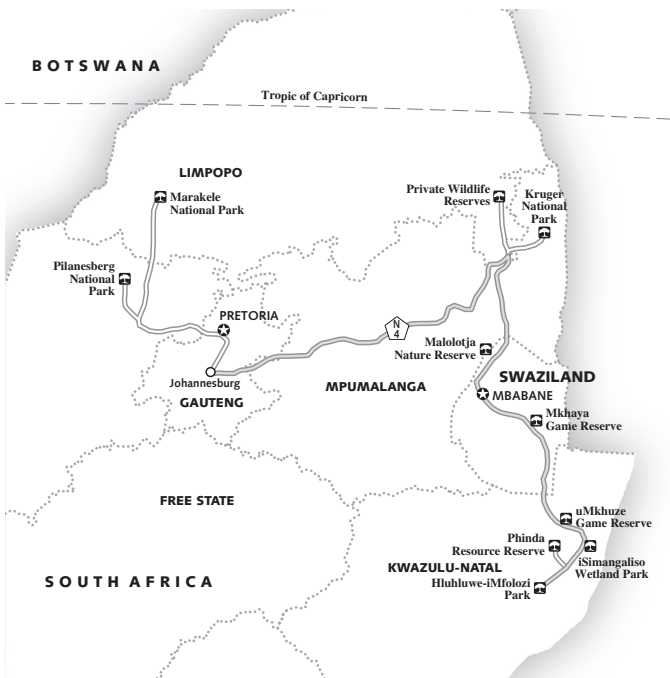
CLASSIC ROUTES

SAFARI SPECIAL

One to Two Weeks / Johannesburg to KwaZulu-Natal

South Africa is one of the continent's best safari destinations, and with as little as a week or two it's possible to do some serious wildlife-spotting. From Johannesburg (Jo'burg), head east to Mpumalanga and plunge into South Africa's safari showpiece, **Kruger National Park** (p464). The wildlife here and in the adjoining **private wildlife reserves** (p478) will hold you captivated for several days. If time is tight, nip to **Pilanesberg National Park** (p514) or **Marakele National Park** (p493), both just a few hours' drive northwest of Jo'burg.

From Kruger, continue south to Swaziland, where you can spend a few days hiking through the grasslands and forests of **Malolotja Nature Reserve** (p591) before proceeding, via the capital Mbabane, to the wildlife-rich **Mkhaya Game Reserve** (p595), known for its unsurpassed black and white rhino populations. From here, continue south into KwaZulu-Natal, with its collection of top-notch wildlife-watching areas. These include **uMkhuze Game Reserve** (p342), its pans surrounded by fever trees, and the **Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park** (p333), where hiking the wilderness trails is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Nearby are the upmarket **Phinda Resource Reserve** (p342) and the waterways and diverse ecosystems of the 200km-long **iSimangaliso Wetland Park** (p336).



You can concentrate on just one or two of the parks on this 1500km-plus route, or, if you have three weeks or more, check out Kruger, Swaziland and several of KwaZulu-Natal's parks. Roads are good throughout, although the parks have some gravel and dirt tracks.

CAPE & COAST

Two Weeks / Cape Town to Plettenberg Bay

Beautiful natural scenery, excellent infrastructure and a platter of attractions make this the South Africa of the glossy brochures. The loop can be done by public transport, but a car offers many possibilities for detours.

After a few days in **Cape Town** (p89), staying in a township B&B and visiting the District Six Museum as well as must-see icons such as Table Mountain and the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve, bid a tearful farewell and head to the Winelands. Spend a night or two wine-tasting in the fertile valleys of **Stellenbosch** (p164) or **Franschhoek** (p171).

Possible detours include to **Hermanus** (p183) for watching southern right whales (from June to December); **Cape Agulhas** (p188) for the thrill of standing at Africa's southernmost point, where the Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet; or the beaches of the 34,000-hectare **De Hoop Nature Reserve** (p189).

Clutching your new case of pinotage, continue east to **Montagu** (p199), an artists' enclave overlooking the Cogmanskloof mountains, and on scenic Route 62 through the Little Karoo to **Oudtshoorn** (p202), South Africa's ostrich capital.

Oudtshoorn makes a good springboard for heading into the Karoo via the magnificent **Swartberg Pass** (p205), its road an engineering feat, and on to the 18th-century village of **Prince Albert** (p224), near the N1 back to Cape Town. Alternatively, make your way south, joining the N2 along the Garden Route near **Knysna** (p215), with its sylvan setting between a lagoon and ancient forests. Further east, the come-as-you-are resort of **Plettenberg Bay** (p221) could have been tailor-made for brochures, boasting mountains, white sand and crystal-blue water. If you're not tempted to stay until, like the locals, you refer to the town as 'Plett', return to the 'Mother City' via the N2 or the more circuitous Route 62.

This delightful itinerary will take you 1000km on good roads through some of the most beautiful country in Southern Africa. You could whiz along in about 10 days, or relax along the way and stretch things out to three weeks or more.



GRAND CIRCUIT

Two Months / Cape Town to Cape Town

Starting in **Cape Town** (p89), head east either on Route 62 or the Garden Route (N2), or bits of both. If you enter the Eastern Cape from Prince Albert via the Karoo, don't miss the 220 national monuments in **Graaff-Reinet** (p264), South Africa's fourth-oldest European-settled town

If coming via the coast, recommended stops include **Tsitsikamma National Park** (p238), stretching between the mountains of the same name and a marine protected area, and the **Addo Elephant National Park** (p252), where great white sharks and southern right whales complete the 'Big Seven'. Moving east, **Amathole** (p270), formerly the Xhosa homeland of Ciskei, is well worth exploring, before the next batch of stellar highlights on the rugged **Wild Coast** (p279) and in fascinating **Durban** (p300). From here, it's in, up and over the **Sani Pass** (p565) for a Lesotho detour.

Back in KwaZulu-Natal, enjoy a plethora of parks including **Hluhluwe-iMfolozi** (p333) and **iSimangaliso Wetland Park** (p336). In **Sodwana Bay** (p339) you can dive to Africa's southernmost coral reefs, before heading to **Swaziland** (p576). Next up, **Kruger National Park** (p464) is an essential detour before hitting sprawling **Johannesburg** (p393) and stately **Pretoria** (p425). En route from Kruger, stay in the perfectly preserved gold-rush town of **Pilgrim's Rest** (p449).

Time permitting, pop up to the biodiverse **Soutpansberg** (p493), then continue between baobab trees to the majestic **Mapungubwe National Park** (p496). Otherwise, head from Jo'burg to **Kimberley** (p527), gateway to the country's vast northwest, detouring to **Clarens** (p384) for a double bill of mountains and art. Explore the vast **Kalahari** (p533) and swing down through the similarly inclined **Namakwa** (p542). After that desert action, relax with a bottle or so in the **Winelands** (p163) before finishing in Cape Town.



Even if you can't squeeze everything in on this 5000km-plus journey, you'll gain an excellent overview of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. Six weeks is the bare minimum (more by public transport); give yourself at least two months to allow time for detours.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

THE WILD NORTHWEST

Four to Six Weeks / Cape Town to Cape Town

South Africa's northwest offers a pervasive sense of space. Starting in **Cape Town** (p89), head north via the towns of **Citrusdal** (p232) and **Clanwilliam** (p233), both excellent bases for exploring the Cederberg mountains. From Vanrhynsdorp, detour over spectacular Vanrhyns Pass to **Calvinia** (p547), a wild outpost in the Hantam Karoo. Continue north to **Namakwa** (p542) to catch the technicolour spring flowers, before exploring the rugged and remote **|Ai-|Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier National Park** (p545), with its mountainous desert landscapes and gorges. Plan on four days here to take advantage of the 80km of hiking trails. Next, head east and reacquaint yourself with civilisation among hundreds of date palms in **Upington** (p534). If you yearn to return to the wilderness, close by is **Augrabies Falls National Park** (p541), which offers hiking, rafting and canoeing, and **Witsand Nature Reserve** (p536), where the wind sings over the dunes.

Further away, but well worth the trip, is **Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park** (p537), where 1000-plus predators roam the red-and-white sands. Heading southeast, pause in **Kuruman** (p533), an unassuming but feisty frontier town, and the diamond capital of **Kimberley** (p527) with its Anglo-Boer battlefields and atmospheric pubs. From here, the route turns south through the Karoo, with possible stops including **Karoo National Park** (p226) and historic **Matjiesfontein** (p225), before entering the Winelands at **Paarl** (p176) and finishing in Cape Town. An alternative route from Kimberley: continue eastwards to **Bloemfontein** (p372), with its rich history and thriving nightlife, and on to **Johannesburg** (p393).

After travelling some 2500km through South Africa's vast, open northwest, settling back into an urban lifestyle won't be easy. Consider a 4WD for |Ai-|Ais/Richtersveld, Kgalagadi and Augrabies Falls parks, and allow six weeks to include more hiking and activities.



TRADITIONAL TRAILS

One Month / Swaziland to Johannesburg

For an introduction to traditional culture, there's no better place to start than in the mountains and wilderness of **Swaziland** (p576). If possible, be there for the *umhlanga* (reed) dance (p585) in August/September, when Swazi debutantes help to rebuild the queen mother's house, or the equally colourful Incwala (p585) or 'first fruits' ceremony in December/January. Swazi crafts are top-notch and include tapestries and woodcarvings. The selection is especially good in the **Malkerns Valley** (p589) and nearby **Ezulwini Valley** (p587).

From Swaziland, head south into the Zulu heartland of KwaZulu-Natal. In **Zululand** (p327), you'll find traditional villages and you can catch a Zulu festival (p330); September/October is a good time to come. Continue to **Durban** (p300), where you can swot up on tribal traditions at the Campbell Collection and Phansi Museum and browse craftwork at the African Art Centre, before exploring the Indian Area (p308). Then head to **Lesotho** (p550). A **Basotho pony trek** (p568) or a hike through Basotho villages is an excellent way to get acquainted with local life and culture. The distinctive attire includes Basotho blankets and conical hats. Crafts here are also well worth seeking out; **Teyateyaneng** (p560), the unofficial craft centre, is known for its tapestries, which you can watch being made. Back in South Africa, make your way south to the **Wild Coast** (p279), with its brightly painted Xhosa *rondavels*. Belief in witches and spirits is strong here, and spiritual healers are highly respected in traditional Xhosa society. You'll likely pass through the rough-and-ready regional capital, **Mthatha** (p289), where *muti* (traditional medicine) sellers trade outside Western doctors' surgeries. Finish off by making your way to **Johannesburg** (p393). A recommended excursion from Jo'burg takes in Limpopo's fascinating artists and holy sites in the **Venda region** (p497).



Escape the blandness of Western culture and visit some of Southern Africa's most colourful corners on this 3000km-plus loop. It's easy to cover the distance in three weeks, but worth allowing more time. In general, the rougher the road, the more vibrant the local traditions.

TAILORED TRIPS

HIKER'S CHOICE

To truly experience South Africa's stunning topography, hit the country's hiking trails. Hardcore ramblers should head to the Eastern Cape, where **Tsitsikamma National Park** (p238) and the 121km **Amathole Trail** (p271) offer outstanding views and challenging terrain.

In the Western Cape, the beautiful **Greyton McGregor Trail** (p197) leads 14km through the Riviersonderend mountains, and the 83,000-hectare **Cederberg Wilderness Area** (p231) has sandstone formations and San rock paintings.

In the Drakensberg, try **Royal Natal National Park** (p347), with its dramatic peaks and cliffs; **Golden Gate Highlands National Park** (p382), with beautifully coloured sandstone outcrops and sublime sunsets; and the wide vistas and sheer drop-offs in **Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve** (p451). The five-day **Giant's Cup Trail** (p355) from Sani Pass to Bushman's Nek is another highlight.

Lesotho (p550), seemingly created with hiking in mind, offers walks through Basotho villages in the hills. Swaziland's **Malolotja Nature Reserve** (p591) is another wonderful hiking destination, with 200km of trails and 280-plus bird species.

The bush walks and wilderness trails in **Kruger National Park** (p470) offer fine opportunities to get into the wild. For something a bit tamer, the **Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve** (p159) has trails with

backdrops of wind-whipped sea and spray. Table Mountain is also highly rewarding, and can be explored on the **Table Mountain Trail** (p131) over its top.



GREEN ROUTES

Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa was the first such scheme established worldwide, and the country offers ecotourism opportunities from green accommodation to 'avitourism' (birding ecotourism). Limpopo's three **Fair Trade lodges** (p494) are excellent bases for exploring the subtropical **Soutpansberg** (p493) and the **Venda Region** (p497). The many options in and around **Kruger National Park** (p464) include **Makuleke Contract Park** (p480), in which the local community is an active tourism partner; if you fancy a pedal, take part in the **Tour de Kruger** (p470). En route south, stay in Malelane's **Serenity Lodge** (p459) with its thatched suites reached by elevated forest walkways, or cross the Swazi border to the **Phophonyane Lodge & Nature Reserve** (p592), run by conservationists.

KwaZulu-Natal has several parks, including **iSimangaliso Wetland Park** (p336), with five ecosystems and many 'ecotour' operators; in neighbouring Lesotho, **Basotho pony trekking** (p568) or hiking through Basotho villages is an immersive experience. Further west, the desert terrain transforms into **Namakwa's spring bloom** (p543), one of South Africa's greatest shows; in the Kalahari, Khomani San-run **IXaus Lodge** (p539) in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. The south is awash with opportuni-



ties, including the 'ecoshrine' and other gardens in Tolkienesque **Hogsback** (p272), whale-watching in **De Hoop Nature Reserve** (p189), and Cape Town's Fair Trade hostel, **Backpack** (p139).

THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

Following in the footsteps of freedom fighters provides an excellent overview of recent South African history. An essential introduction is **Robben Island** (p95), where Nelson Mandela was incarcerated for so long, together with Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki. Between nearby Paarl and Franschhoek is **Drakenstein Prison** (p177), from where Mandela walked to freedom in 1990.

The Eastern Cape was the birthplace of some of the anti-apartheid struggle's most famous figures, including the founder of the Pan African Congress (PAC), Robert Sobukwe. The Old Library museum in his hometown, **Graaff-Reinet** (p264), tells his story. Nelson Mandela, Chris Hani and Steve Biko studied at the **University of Fort Hare** (p271) near Alice, and the campus museum is worth a look; Biko is buried outside nearby King William's Town in **Ginsberg cemetery** (p270). Other famous local sons include Oliver Tambo, born in Pondoland (near Mthatha), Govan Mbeki and his son Thabo.

The province also has the moving **Mandela Museum** (p291) in Mthatha, **Qunu** (Mandela's boyhood home and current residence; p289) and tiny **Mveso village** (his birthplace; p289).

In KwaZulu-Natal, Groutville's **Luthuli Museum** (p326) is dedicated to Chief Albert John Mvumbi Luthuli, the former African National Congress (ANC) president and Africa's first recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace. In 1962 it was just outside **Howick** (p361) that Mandela's 28 years in prison began. He was driving to Johannesburg when the police arrested him; a memorial marks the spot on Rte 103.

Continue to **Soweto** (p416), passing near Sharpeville, site of the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960. It was in Soweto that the ANC resistance to apartheid reached its fullest voice. The ANC's Freedom Charter was declared in Soweto's Kliptown (Freedom) Sq, and the Soweto uprising was ignited here (at Orlando West Secondary School on Vilakazi St). It was also to Soweto that Mandela and Sisulu returned after being released from prison, and where many other ANC activists lived. The **Mandela House Museum** (p419), occupying his humble former home, is just off Vilakazi St, near Archbishop Desmond Tutu's residence. The excellent **Hector Pieterse Museum** (p419) gives a good overview of the apartheid struggle, plus insights into life in Soweto. **Regina Mundi Church** (p419) was a central rallying point in the struggle and, later, the site of several Truth & Reconciliation Commission hearings.

In **Jo'burg** (p393), you can see the **Mandela & Tambo Law Offices** (p399), where the two men set up their pioneering law firm in the 1950s, and **City Hall** (p397); there are also various jails, including the notorious **Old Fort** (p400), where Mandela and Gandhi were held, and now the site of the Constitutional Court. **Museum Africa** (p399) is a worthwhile stop for its exhibit on the infamous 1956–61 Treason Trials, in which Mandela testified. It was in Pretoria's **Palace of Justice** (p430) that the Rivonia Trial was held in which Mandela, Sisulu, Govan Mbeki and other key ANC figures were sentenced to life imprisonment. The city's new **Freedom Park** (p429) is a memorial to people everywhere who have sacrificed their lives in the name of social equality, freedom and humanity.



The Authors



JAMES BAINBRIDGE

Coordinating Author, Limpopo

James has contributed to Lonely Planet books ranging from *Middle East* to the guide to his native Great Britain, but Africa is his speciality. He has written about the continent (mostly Francophone countries) for publications including the *Guardian*, various travel magazines and Lonely Planet's *Africa* and *West Africa* guidebooks. For this gig, he happily ditched his French dictionary and returned to a country he first visited while en route to Benin and Togo to start his first LP assignment. When he's not dodging nefarious mopane-worm pushers in Limpopo's Venda region, he lives in northeast London. As well as the Limpopo chapter, James wrote many of the front and end chapters of this edition.



KATE ARMSTRONG

KwaZulu-Natal, Lesotho & Swaziland

Kate was bitten by the African bug when she lived and worked in Mozambique, and has returned to Southern Africa frequently. For this edition she drove over 10,000km in a 2WD sedan. Memorable moments include inadvertently cruising up alongside a leopard while *not* on safari, coaxing her wheels over Lesotho's remote mountainous passes, and learning more about catalytic converters (see p564) than she ever intended. Kate is obsessed with the Zulu culture (plus giraffes) and is continually humbled by the generosity of the local people. When Kate's not eating, hiking and dancing her way around parts of Africa, Europe and South America, her itchy feet are grounded in Sydney where she is a freelance writer.



BECCA BLOND

Free State, North-West Province & Northern Cape

Becca made her eighth journey to Africa in 2008 to research this guide. She has worked on the previous two editions of *South Africa, Lesotho & Swaziland*, and wrote the South Africa, Namibia and Botswana chapters of *Africa on a shoestring*. She was also the coordinating author of Lonely Planet's *Madagascar* guide. Becca first travelled to the 'dark continent' in 1998, when she did a study abroad in Zimbabwe. It was love at first sight, and Becca has returned nearly every year since. When not on the road for Lonely Planet – which isn't often, as she has written more than 40 titles for the company in less than six years – she lives in Boulder, Colorado with her husband Aaron and their bulldog Duke.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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MARY FITZPATRICK

Kruger National Park

Mary is from the USA, where she spent her early years in Washington, DC – dreaming, more often than not, of how to get across an ocean or two to more exotic locales. After finishing graduate studies, she set off for several years in Europe. Her fascination with languages and cultures soon led her further south to Africa, where she has spent the past 15 years living and working all around the continent, including numerous forays to South Africa, where Kruger National Park was always a favourite haunt. She has authored and co-authored many guidebooks and articles on the continent, and never tires of planning her next trip south. Mary also wrote the History and Environment chapters for this edition.



NANA LUCKHAM

Gauteng & Mpumalanga

Born in Tanzania to a Ghanaian mother and an English father, Nana started life criss-crossing Africa by plane and bouncing along the roughest of roads. She first made it to Southern Africa in 1994, when she spent six months living in a then-thriving Zimbabwe, and visited South Africa for the first time the following year. After stints as an editor and a UN press officer, she is now a full-time travel writer and has worked on several titles for Lonely Planet including *Southern Africa*, *Africa* and *Algeria* guides. When not hauling her backpack around the world, she lives in the exotic wilds of southwest London.



HELEN RANGER

Western Cape & Eastern Cape

Helen is so passionate about South Africa that she even took out citizenship to vote in the first democratic elections. During her almost 30 years in Cape Town, she paddled the Senqu (Orange) River, hiked the Cederberg, climbed Table Mountain, explored the forests of Knysna and Hogsback, watched elephants at Addo and whales in Hermanus, ate ostrich in Oudtshoorn, revelled in the Grahamstown Arts Festival and sampled wines from coast to coast. What Helen likes most about South Africa is the enormous sense of excitement and positivity that pervades the country. It's that vibrancy that keeps her coming back for more. Helen also wrote the Food & Drink chapter.



SIMON RICHMOND

Cape Town

Simon has been hooked on Cape Town since he first visited in 2001 to research Lonely Planet's *South Africa*, *Lesotho & Swaziland* guide and the *Cape Town* guide. He's returned for every edition since, including this one, during which time he has explored practically every corner of the Cape and the surrounding area, taking full advantage of a travel-writer's licence to indulge in eating, shopping, adventurous activities and sipping delicious wines. Ultimately, it's the wonderful Capetonians, each with a fascinating story to tell, that keep him coming back. Simon works as a full-time writer and photographer from a base in Boston.

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