

TRAVELLER'S TIPS TO SOUTH AFRICA: 2025 GUIDE



Millions of travellers visit South Africa each year and enjoy their trips safely. Being informed and prepared, as you would when visiting any global destination, helps ensure a comfortable experience. This guide provides clear, practical advice to support your planning, help you navigate the country with confidence and know where to find assistance during your stay.

Entry Requirements and Visas

Travellers must hold a passport with at least two blank pages and generally at least 30 days' validity after departure. Visa requirements differ by nationality, so please check the latest information on the Department of Home Affairs website - dha.gov.za.

South Africa's electronic travel authorisation (ETA) system is being rolled out in phases. It currently applies to travellers from China, India, Indonesia and Mexico entering via OR Tambo or Cape Town International Airports. Broader implementation is expected from 2026. You can visit the ETA website to find out more - eta.dha.gov.za.

Health and Safety

We encourage travellers to download the Namola safety app (namola.com), which provides quick access to emergency services.

There are no mandatory vaccinations for most visitors, except for travellers arriving from yellow fever endemic areas who must present a valid certificate. Routine travel vaccines such as Tetanus, Diphtheria, Hepatitis A and Typhoid are recommended. For longer stays or rural travel, consult your healthcare provider or local travel clinic.

Access to Healthcare Services

South Africa has both public and private healthcare systems. Private facilities offer high standards of care and are widely used by international visitors. Comprehensive travel insurance is strongly recommended to cover medical treatment and emergencies.

Malaria

Most of South Africa is malaria-free. If you are travelling to regions where malaria is present, speak to your healthcare provider about appropriate precautions.

Useful resources: nicd.ac.za, cdc.gov or who.int

satsa.co.za

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Transportation and Self-Drive Tips

South Africa can be easily explored through a mix of guided travel, transfers, public transport options and self-drive routes. When using taxis or rideshare services, choose reputable providers recommended by your accommodation or tour operator. You may also opt to pre-book a transfer with a reputable operator.

Self-Drive Overview

Self-driving is a popular way to explore the country. Major roads are generally in good condition with frequent fuel stations and good mobile coverage. Rural areas may have potholes, livestock on the road or limited signal, so take extra care.

Planning Your Drive

- Plan routes using trusted navigation apps, offline maps or guidance from your host.
- Share your expected arrival time with someone you trust.
- Avoid driving after dark where possible.
- Load shedding may affect traffic lights, so allow extra time in urban areas.

On the Road

- South Africans drive on the left.
- Obey posted speed limits and take note of rural intersections where stop signs may be placed unusually.
- Be alert for pedestrians, animals and changing road conditions.
- Seat belts are mandatory and mobile phones may only be used hands-free.

Vehicle Safety

- Park in well-lit or secure areas and keep valuables out of sight.
- Ensure the vehicle has a spare tyre, jack and wheel spanner.
- Keep windows closed and doors locked when stationary at intersections.

If Something Goes Wrong

- In case of a breakdown or accident, stop safely, switch on hazard lights and call roadside assistance or emergency services.
- Avoid any protest activity and turn around if you come across one.
- If stopped by police, pull over in a public area and cooperate. Fines are not paid in cash; they are processed through official channels only.

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Avoiding Scams

- There is no “tourism permit” or “road tax” payable at an ATM.
- Never hand over your bank card to anyone claiming to be an official.

Useful Tools

- A local SIM or eSIM is recommended. You can purchase a SATSA eSIM at satsaesim.com.
- Offline maps are helpful in remote areas.

ATM and Card Safety

ATM and card-related scams can occur, particularly where criminals impersonate officials. Officials will never request your bank card, PIN or tell you to withdraw cash for a tourism fee. If you are uncertain, seek assistance from an authorised tourism office, your accommodation/ host or the local police.

Tourist support has been strengthened through enhanced surveillance, trained tourism monitors and improved signage in key visitor areas. For help at any time, contact the 24/7 E2 National Monitoring Control Centre on +27 83 318 2475.

Political Environment

South Africa is a stable democracy with active civic engagement. Peaceful protests occur from time to time and may cause temporary disruption. These usually do not affect tourists directly, though it is advisable to avoid protest areas and monitor local guidance.

Travelling with Minors

Foreign minors travelling to South Africa no longer need to show birth certificates or parental consent letters. Visa-exempt minors do not require additional documents. Visa-required minors submit their documents during the application process and do not need to present them on arrival. Unaccompanied minors may be asked for documentation confirming guardianship and contact details. School groups registered with education authorities may travel using a letter from the school principal. Always check current requirements on the Department of Home Affairs website - dha.gov.za.

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SARS Traveller Declaration

Travellers are encouraged to complete the SARS Online Traveller Declaration before entering or leaving South Africa. This helps reduce queues at ports of entry and ensures you have the correct paperwork ready.

You can complete the form at:

- www.sars.gov.za/travellerdeclaration
- The SATMS App or SARS MobiApp
- QR codes at Customs facilities

Enter your travel details, list any goods or currency and submit your form. You will receive a confirmation SMS or email with next steps. Customs officials remain available for assistance.

Responsible Travel and Local Customs

South Africans are known for their warmth and hospitality. As in any major global destination, it is advisable to remain aware of your surroundings and keep personal belongings secure. If you would like to support social initiatives, consider donating to registered charities rather than giving directly to individuals. Please also avoid feeding wildlife and follow all safety guidance in natural areas.

Solo Travel

South Africa is well suited to solo travel, with many visitors exploring independently each year. Staying in well-populated areas, avoiding isolated places after dark and using reputable transport providers will help ensure a smooth trip. Inform your accommodation of your plans and expected return time for added reassurance.

Visiting Townships

Township visits offer meaningful insights into South African culture and daily life. Thousands of travellers enjoy guided tours each year. For safety and cultural sensitivity, book through reputable operators who work closely with local communities. Follow your guide's instructions, keep valuables secure and stay with your group.

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LGBTIQA+ Travellers

South Africa is one of the most LGBTIQA+ inclusive countries in the world, with a Constitution that protects against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Same-sex marriage and adoption are legal, and large cities and tourism hubs are generally very welcoming.

As in many countries, attitudes may vary in more rural areas. Travellers are encouraged to exercise awareness, plan ahead and seek advice from experienced tour operators when needed.

Additional SATSA Resources

satsa.co.za/travellers-guide-sa-tips-requirements

Emergency Contacts

- Tourism SOS (E2 Centre): +27 83 318 2475
- Police: 10111
- Crime Stop Reporting: 08600 10111
- Medical emergencies, fires, or rescues 10177
- Emergency from a mobile phone (South African SIM): 112
- ER24: 084 124
- Netcare: 082 911
- NSRI Sea Rescue: 082 911
- AA Roadside Assistance: 0861 000 234
- [Namola Safety App](http://namola.com) - namola.com

In Cape Town, the Cape Town Tourism Band-Aid Team can support visitors who require assistance with lost documents, emergency accommodation or general guidance.

- CTT Band-Aid Programme: +27 (0) 21 487 6552

For the Kruger Lowveld region, you can contact a 24hr Tourist Emergency Helpline, covering the entire Mpumalanga province.

- Kruger Lowveld Tourist Emergency Helpline: +27 (0) 66 3000 991