

# FAQs on Tourism Safety in South Africa

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The Voice of Inbound Tourism



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# TRAVELLING TO SOUTH AFRICA?

These useful tips on tourism safety in South Africa will guide your holiday or business visit to ensure you have a safe and enjoyable stay.



## IS IT SAFE TO VISIT SOUTH AFRICA?

If you're concerned about tourism safety in South Africa, take comfort in the fact that there are some practical things you can do to mitigate the impact of crime while you're travelling around the country.

As many locals will tell you, it's all about being cautious and remaining constantly aware of your surroundings. Follow this advice, and you'll make life-long memories while meeting captivating people from a mix of cultures and experiencing our beautiful landscapes, wildlife offering, and fascinating history.

It is easy to discover the numerous reasons why South Africa features at the top of many tourism bucket-lists and sees huge numbers of **repeat visitors**. A happy visitor is a repeat visitor, and South Africa enjoys a high percentage of these. Keep in mind that millions of tourists visit South Africa without incident every year.

Like many cosmopolitan destinations, however, South Africa grapples with crime. Primarily, this crime is not targeted at tourists and does not occur in areas frequented by tourists. Although there are exceptions and tourism safety in South Africa is our utmost priority as the tourism industry.

The media frequently highlights South Africa's

reputation for crime and corruption. These reports often do not provide a balanced perspective and can exaggerate the situation. We, therefore, do not recommend that you base perceptions on such news reports. Rather, consult your agent or tour operator for a more accurate picture of what is happening on the ground.

In most cases, common sense prevails, and you should take the same precautions you would when travelling in any foreign country or city in the world. A properly planned itinerary through a reputable tour operator with a proper tourism safety protocol will also help to mitigate any risks and, if an incident does occur, ensure you are swiftly assisted by experts and local authorities.

If you are travelling solo, planning well and knowing how to get around is key to ensure that you make the most out of your visit and stay safe.

It is advisable to inform someone from your accommodation of your plans. Most importantly, do not venture anywhere isolated. If you do not consider yourself to be very travel-savvy, there are several tours you can join that will offer peace of mind, as well as convenience.



# SOUTH AFRICA TOURISM SAFETY TIPS



## Never let your guard down

Tourists are often targeted when they travel because they are unfamiliar with the area, and their body language shows this. In many cases, they may let their guard down more easily than when at home and forget to remain aware of what is going on around them as they attempt to navigate unfamiliar territory.

With tourism safety top of mind, it's essential to remember where you are and how to behave when visiting South Africa.

Remain alert, and you should be able to avoid falling victim to opportunistic crime for the duration of your stay, regardless of whether you're travelling alone or in a group.



## What do I do in case of an emergency?

There are three phone numbers you should have handy, should an emergency arise when you are in South Africa:

**10111** is for any emergency that requires police response and can be dialled from anywhere in the country.

**112** can be dialled on any cell phone, whether you have airtime or not, and will transfer you to a call centre that will connect you to the nearest emergency service.

**10177** is for medical emergencies that require an ambulance response.

Guests booking through reputable tour operators and staying at reputable hotels, lodges etc. will always be able to contact the relevant points during their stay. These organisations are well equipped with the necessary means to assist in the case of medical and security emergencies. We also encourage guests to always travel with travel insurance.



## General tips to help you stay safe:

- Do not venture into unknown or isolated areas. Have a clear plan as to where you are heading. Make sure to have the name and contact details of your accommodation on hand.
- Keep your head up when you're walking around town and be aware of your surroundings. Do not walk around at night.
- Always keep your belongings close to your body. Keep your handbag or backpack securely closed and do not hang it off the back of your chair when sitting at a restaurant or bar.
- Do not call attention to yourself by displaying expensive items, e.g. flashy jewellery or electronics. Do not carry large amounts of cash. Leave your valuables in a safe at your hotel, if possible.
- It is ok to use your phone or camera but be discreet and stay alert, e.g. don't walk around with headphones in or while texting, etc. on your phone.
- Be aware of common pickpocketing scams. If someone approaches you and attempts to step into your personal space or direct your attention elsewhere, walk away. Do not worry about appearing rude.
- It is always preferable for you to withdraw cash at an ATM in a more secure location such as a hotel or shopping mall. Avoid using ATMs on the street or at night.
- If you hire a car, be sure to park in safe, well-lit areas and do not leave anything visible in the car. Check that all of the doors are locked before you walk away.
- Follow the [traveltosouthafrica.org](http://traveltosouthafrica.org) information site to stay up to date on current events in the country that may affect your trip.

# WHICH PARTS OF SOUTH AFRICA ARE 'SAFE' TO VISIT?

It is important to note that you need to be careful wherever you travel in South Africa because 100% safety can never be guaranteed. However, similar to many places in the world, if you take the right precautions, you're likely to have a carefree trip, enjoying the countless experiences in South Africa.

## Is it safe to travel to Cape Town?

Visitors to Cape Town should feel safe exploring the city's many highlights. However, as with any large city, certain areas are not advised for tourists and should be avoided.

Use common sense when going out and, when in doubt, enquire at your accommodation or with a local travel professional whether a certain area is safe to visit.

In general, avoid areas in which there are few other people or tourists, and do not walk around at night. Be sure always to stay aware of your surroundings and keep your belongings secure or out of sight.

Much of the crime in the city centre is opportunistic petty crime (i.e. pickpocketing, theft, car break-ins, etc.) and can be reduced, in part, by staying vigilant. Reports of more violent crime tend to occur in locations far away from key tourist areas.

There are certain areas in Cape Town flagged as high-risk for this opportunistic crime. You must exercise extra caution, even during the day, if visiting the central business district (CBD), the train station, Long Street, and Bo-Kaap. If you wish to visit the outskirts of Cape Town, you should use a reputable tour operator and local guide with knowledge of the area.

The **V&A Waterfront** is a massive hub of activity and a very safe area for tourists to visit. There is a significant security presence here because of the hotels, and it is well lit and busy until late. That said, it is advisable to take an Uber or arrange a transfer to and from the Waterfront in the evenings.

The **Western Cape Government's Safety Plan** launched in September 2019 by Premier Alan Winde, in partnership with the City of Cape Town has put Tourism Safety as a top priority and will go a long way to ensure that we remain a bucket list destination.

## Highlights of the Western Cape Government's Safety Plan include:

- The deployment of 3 000 new law enforcement officers to crime hotspots across the province
- The use of data and intelligence to identify the most vulnerable areas that require additional law enforcement
- The deployment of 150 new investigators to assist in the preparation of dockets for prosecution
- A world-class, evidence-led and integrated violence prevention programme
- Assignment of safety priorities to Ministers who have undertaken personal accountability to deliver on each outcome



## Is it safe to visit South Africa's townships?

If you're planning a holiday in South Africa, you may have come across warnings about crime in the townships or even advice that you should avoid these areas completely. While it is true that crime rates are often higher in these areas, tours of the townships occur every day without incident.

Visiting one of the townships is a great way to get an authentic glimpse of how many South Africans live and gives context to the complexity of South African society. Engaging with local people and seeing everyday life in these vibrant communities is a rewarding cultural experience for many tourists.

However, it is important to ensure you go into the "right" places within these townships. To ensure that your visit goes smoothly, always opt for a guided tour with a **SATSA**-registered operator who has knowledge of the area and a planned itinerary.

Whether you're in Jo'burg and want to explore the vibrant township of Soweto or in Cape Town and wish to trek your way through Langa – the Mother City's oldest township – you will have no trouble finding a

guide to share the colourful stories, sights and sounds of these areas.

Along with improved safety, guided township tours are carefully structured by people who know these areas best. In most cases, the guides are people who have actually grown up within the township, have experienced living there first-hand, and have close personal ties to the area and its residents. As a result, you can count on a day of authentic sights and activities – making for a more meaningful excursion.

While you definitely shouldn't be fearful when embarking on a guided township tour in South Africa, as always, be sure to follow your guide's directions, be aware of your surroundings, and keep the following safety tips in mind:

- Do not carry large sums of money on you
- Do not wear flashy jewellery
- Keep personal belongings such as handbags and backpacks secure at all times
- Always be aware of your surroundings
- Stick close to your tour group

**As long as you remain cautious and make use of the services provided by a reputable township tour company, you will enjoy this truly South African experience to its fullest.**







There were over 200 rescues on Table Mountain in 2017, very often in poor weather conditions. Following safety measures when hiking, prevents putting rescuers and support personnel in danger.



### Can I hike safely on Table Mountain?

Hiking up Table Mountain and in the Table Mountain National Park is a great way to experience the rich nature on Cape Town's doorstep.

To ensure you make the most out of your excursion, please take the same preparations and safety measures you would when hiking in other locations.

Never hike alone, always go in a group and ensure that someone has a mobile phone with a local SIM card in case of emergencies. It is most advisable to use a local guide who has good knowledge of the trails and conditions. If you are a solo traveller, there are guided hikes you can join.

Hiking on Table Mountain shouldn't be underestimated and requires a relative level of fitness. Bring along enough water, snacks, and an additional layer or outerwear as the conditions can change rapidly on the mountain. Follow **SANParks' guide** for more safe hiking tips.

Taking the cable car to the top of Table Mountain is a good alternative for those without a hiking group, with limited time, or concerns about fitness.



### Will my accommodation in South Africa be safe to stay at?

While security at accommodation can vary, if you have booked through a reputable agent, you will likely be staying at a property that has been selected as an accommodation provider for its ability to provide a safe and comfortable stay.

Most hotels and guest houses will take the necessary security measures and more. While some tourists can find it unsettling to see the high walls, alarm systems, security guards, and barred windows – serving as confirmation of their fears – know that this is standard in South Africa, especially for properties that cater to tourists, and does not indicate that the area is necessarily more prone to crime.

Enquire at your accommodation if you have specific concerns about their security measures. A hotel concierge is also a good source of information about the safer areas to explore, how to get around, where to find safe parking, etc.

Do not leave any valuable items or documents such as your passport lying in the open when you leave your room. Theft can occur. If your room or accommodation has a safe, leave valuable items secured in here. Make copies of important documents before you travel and keep them in a separate location – either at the bottom of your bag, in a different piece of luggage, or with a travel companion.

# GETTING AROUND SOUTH AFRICA SAFELY

Whether you're traversing the country or heading out to dinner in Cape Town, getting around South Africa safely is a priority concern for many travellers.

If you are planning your own transport in South Africa in lieu of an agent or tour operator, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Many tourists from overseas will be accustomed to and enquire about public transport in South Africa. In most cases, you'll be advised against using public transport both due to safety and convenience factors – with a few exceptions.

The Gautrain is a reliable commuter train that connects Johannesburg, Pretoria, and O. R. Tambo International Airport. In Cape Town, the MyCiti bus system offers relatively good service with routes and schedules integrated into Google Maps.

Both these options require you to possess specific reloadable travel cards. Be sure to check the **Gautrain** and **MyCiti** websites for any disruptions before using.

Your best alternative to public transport in South Africa's cities is arranging transfers through your travel agent or accommodation. **Uber** is also extremely accessible in urban areas. As is always advisable with Uber, be sure to check the licence plate number to ensure that it corresponds with your app before you get in.

If you wish to walk around, find out from your accommodation or a local travel professional where it is safe and recommended to do so. Cape Town, for instance, has neighbourhoods where you'll see a lot of foot traffic, sidewalk cafes, and little shops to browse.

Both Cape Town and Durban have seafront promenades that are popular with walkers, joggers, and cyclists. Jo'burg, on the other hand, has fewer designated areas around which to walk, although precincts such as Melrose Arch, Sandton and Maboneng do exist.

As always – stay alert, keep your head up, belongings secure, and avoid walking anywhere at night.



## Is it safe to drive myself in South Africa?

South Africa is a great country for road tripping, and many tourists will opt to hire a car and drive themselves. Again, as long as you take the right precautions, self-drive is a safe and fun option for getting around – allowing you greater flexibility in your itinerary.

It is extremely important always to be alert and aware of your directions. Keep the car doors locked and windows up when waiting at traffic lights or stop streets and avoid driving after dark if possible. Enquire at your accommodation or with a local travel professional before driving into an unknown area or suburb.

If you are planning a long road trip in South Africa, careful planning and ample time are required as the distances are vast and there are long stretches of isolated road. The good news is that road infrastructure is generally very good.

National roads are mostly tarred and well maintained. If venturing off main roads, you are likely to run into more pot-holed and poorly surfaced rural roads. A 4x4 may be required on some dirt roads. Drivers should always obey speed limits and respect road signs – which will always appear in English.

The Garden Route is a very popular self-drive excursion along the east coast that officially extends from Witsand in the Western Cape to the border of Tsitsikamma Storms River in the Eastern Cape (with some people driving from Cape Town all the way to Port Elizabeth). It is easy driving along good national roads the entire way, with numerous accommodation options and exciting highlights along the way. As long as the above road tips are followed, you should feel very safe heading out on this beautiful, iconic route.

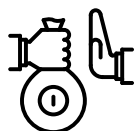
Enquire at your accommodation about safe parking and avoid leaving anything in your car. If you must leave an item, ensure that it is not visible, but is well-hidden in either the glove box, under a seat, or in the trunk of the car.

## Car guards in South Africa

If you are driving in South Africa, you will undoubtedly come across more than one car guard – whistling you into a spot, offering various amounts of parking assistance, and requesting money as you prepare to leave.

They claim to keep an eye on your car while you're away but remember that this is not a guarantee and you should still take the same precautions, leaving nothing in your car. Also, don't let a car guard see you put anything potentially valuable, such as a shopping bag or backpack, in the trunk of your car.

Use your discretion when interacting with car guards. If you wish to give them a tip as you leave, some spare coins will suffice.



## What do I do if a police officer tries to solicit a bribe?

The **Global Corruption Barometer** states that South Africans consider the South African Police Service (SAPS) to be the most corrupt institution in the country. However, this does not mean that all members of the SAPS are corrupt or that visitors to South Africa will be targeted by corrupt officials.

If you do get pulled over, first off, know that it is strictly illegal for a traffic official or police officer to ask you for cash. Legitimate fines should be paid at a police station or magistrate's court, where a receipt must be issued. If you have not broken the law, ask the officer to fine you. Remain respectful while refusing to pay the bribe.

You also have the right to ask a police officer to identify him or herself by showing their appointment card. If you feel you are being or have been harassed, you are entitled to report misconduct to the **SAPS Service Complaint Centre**.

Ensure that you have the correct contact number (for **SAPS: 0860 13 0860; traffic police: 0861 400 800**; and the **Independent Police Investigative Directorate: 012 399 0000**).

Take note of the badge number and name of the police officer in question, as well as license plate numbers and location of the roadblock, if applicable. Provide as much identifying information as you can in your report.



## Is South Africa politically stable?

South Africa's government and politics are stable. Having gone through a traumatic past of apartheid, civil and political unrest, and the incredible changes that created the current democratic system of governance under Nelson Mandela, South Africans are incredibly proud of their Rainbow Nation and democratic freedom.

So hardly fought-for, the constitution allows South Africans to stand up for their rights when they feel aggrieved. This occasionally surfaces as protests – the majority of which are peaceful demonstrations but can become disorderly. In either case, protests and surrounding areas are best avoided by tourists.

You can find out about any protests or disturbances from your agent or accommodation, and we recommend following the **SATSA** information site to stay up to date.





## Is there still a water crisis in South Africa?

Water is considered a scarce resource, and as such, is treated with respect in South Africa. After years of drought, there are areas where you will be requested to please use water sparingly. Even where it is plentiful, you may see signs reminding you to be cautious of your usage. It has become (for many South Africans) an environmental mindset.

Although there have been heavy restrictions on water consumption in Cape Town, the main city affected by water shortages, the hotel restrictions have lifted. However, this could change going forward, and you should check with your accommodation about the current status.

The dams feeding Cape Town have benefited from generous winter rainfall and are currently over 80% full. Those dams feeding the rest of the province are recovering more slowly but are still fuller than they were this time last year, at the end of the rainy season.

That said, however, we would encourage all visitors to be mindful of their water usage and to #savelikealocal so that we can manage those resources responsibly.

If you are concerned about the pressure your visit puts on Cape Town's water resources – know that as a percentage of the overall water usage of the province, the use of water by tourists is proportionately tiny.

Tourism is a key economic sector of the city and province and supports over 300,000 direct and indirect jobs alone. Your visit contributes to economic growth and job creation while having a very minimal effect on water usage.



## Does South Africa suffer from electricity shortages?

From time to time, there are some areas in the country that experience periodic, scheduled power outages.

That being said, hotels, restaurants, shopping malls and popular tourist attractions are well equipped with back-up generators to ensure that visitors have an uninterrupted and pleasant experience during their stay.



## Do I need to be worried about illness or disease in South Africa?

While there are no compulsory vaccinations for most visitors entering South Africa (note that a yellow fever vaccination certificate is required if arriving from some endemic regions), it is recommended for you to be covered against Tetanus and Diphtheria, Hepatitis A and Typhoid.

If you plan to travel to more rural areas or stay for an extended period, you may wish to consider vaccinations for Rabies and Hepatitis B. Find out if you are visiting a **malaria zone** – this includes areas of Limpopo and Mpumalanga where Kruger and many game reserves are located – and consider taking a malarial prophylaxis to minimise your risk.

There are currently no cases, or suspected cases, of Ebola in South Africa, and you can be assured that it is a situation monitored closely by the Department of Health, National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) and WHO.

