

South Africa - OVERVIEW

Updated: March 14, 2014



Country Name Long Form: Republic of South Africa

Government Type: Republic

Languages Spoken: IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Afrikaans, English, Sepedi, Setswana, Sesotho, Xitsonga, siSwati, Tshivenda, isiNdebele

National Flag



South Africa is a Tier II Country. Significant security measures are necessary.

	Overall Assessment	Political Violence	Crime	Terrorism	Travel Safety
South Africa					
Key: (L) Low – (M) Medium – (H) High – (C)Critical					

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Political Violence is rated at MEDUIM

Political conditions in South Africa are stable, through civil unrest may increase during election periods. Politically-motivated violence is not a widespread issue in South Africa, but remains a concern in KwaZulu-Natal province.

Protests and strikes stemming from social and political issues and labor disputes are common in South Africa. While the country's economy is one of the strongest in the region, issues such as widespread poverty, high unemployment and the government's ineffectiveness in addressing such concerns continue to sow unrest. Protest may turn violent or disrupt traffic, business and service delivery. Protests by the military, police, private security industry, truckers, and the minibus/taxi industry have the most potential for violence. Labor strikes also occur frequently and are often accompanied by demonstrations.

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Strikes and protests are common in Gauteng Province where Pretoria and Johannesburg are located. Violent demonstrations are rare, although strikes have turned violent. There were over 25 demonstrations in 2013 that ended up in front of City Hall in Durban. SAPS are usually called in to control traffic and demonstrators.

TERRORISM

Terrorism is assessed as LOW

The risk from terrorism is low in South Africa. The country has not closely aligned itself in the regional fight against terrorist groups and thus has not attracted the attention of international terrorist groups as yet. South Africa serves as an important transit and facilitation point for global extremists. Though there has been no indication that operational cells are present, a nexus for recruiting, funding, and safe haven for international terrorist does exist.

RULE OF LAW / CORRUPTION

The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2013 gave South Africa a score of 42, indicating that the country has medium level of corruption. The CPI rates countries by the perceived levels of corruption in their public sector, with the least corrupt country receiving a maximum score of 100.

CRIME

Crime is assessed as HIGH

Violent, confrontational crime – home invasion robberies, rape, burglaries, carjacking, street muggings, smash-and-grabs, organized attacks on commercial and retail centers (shopping malls and outlets), ATM bombings, and attacks on cash-in-transit vehicles/personnel (i.e., armored car/personnel) – is a major concern. Pickpocketing is common.

Home invasion robberies are a serious concern. These crimes are often violent in nature and can occur at any time. In many cases, criminals prefer to attack when the occupant is home or arriving/leaving because the residential alarm is off and the occupant can identify where valuables are kept.

Given the lack of training and resources of the South African police force and widespread economic difficulties in the country, numerous well-organized criminal gangs are active virtually everywhere. Armed groups have been known to target restaurants, shops, and other business premises, and there is often a risk of innocent bystanders getting caught in an attack. Large, well-organized criminal syndicates operate freely. Criminals also frequently bomb ATMs in attempts to obtain the cash. These bombings primarily occur overnight in isolated areas.

KIDNAPPING

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U.S. citizens are not targeted specifically for kidnapping. However there have been a few reported cases of U.S. citizens seeking business opportunities who were abducted by criminals misrepresenting themselves as legitimate businessmen. Scam artist who purported to be engaged in legitimate business enterprises have lured unsuspecting victims with promises of lucrative business deals. These abductions are motivated purely by greed. U.S. citizens have not been the target of kidnap for political gain.

SEXUAL ASSAULT

South Africa has the highest rape rate in the world – estimated at seven times higher than the rate in the U.S. While not specifically targeted, foreigners are victims. This crime occurs everywhere and against all age groups, including infants and grandmothers.

Due to South Africa's high HIV infection rate, the U.S. government advises all personnel and visitors **to seek immediate medical assistance in the event of a sexual assault, high risk sexual encounter, or blood-borne injury.**

NATURAL DISASTERS

Most of South Africa experiences its rainy season during the summer months, which generally runs from December to February; however, the Western Cape Province experiences its rainy season during winter, from June to August. During this time, flash flooding is possible, particularly in low-lying areas surrounding rivers and dams.

STANDING TRAVEL ADVICE

- **ATMS should only be used in secure indoor locations due to the risk of robbery and attack.**
- South Africa doesn't have a tourist police however; thieves have posed as tourist police officers in order to rob tourists traveling in buses or on foot.
- Smoking is prohibited in public buildings and on public transport.
- Stay in groups, travel in a caravan consisting of two or more vehicles, and stay on the main roads.
- Ensure that someone not traveling with you is aware of your itinerary.
- Avoid hotels that do not have adequate security.
- Intercity travel after dark anywhere in should be avoided.
- It is preferable to stay in the main tourist destinations.
- Pay close attention to your surroundings, especially when walking.
- Official taxis are a suitable means of travel in daylight hours in urban areas. It is highly recommended that taxis be arranged through your hotel, or program office. Negotiate the price in advance.
- Women should be especially careful when traveling alone and avoid staying out late without a trusted male escort.
- Make sensible security precautions to mitigate the risk of petty crime, particularly pick pocketing and bag snatching.
- Carry a photocopy of your passport when traveling to avoid losing it in a robbery.

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- Do not resist if you are being robbed and avoid eye contact and to not make any sudden movements. Victims have been killed when they resisted attack or refused to give up their money or other valuables.
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times and keep a low profile.
- Never leave your food, drinks or belongings unattended.
- Carry bags close to your body and make sure the fasteners are secure.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash or wearing expensive jewelry or valuables.
- Leave all important documents in a safe or safe deposit box at your hotel and only carry certified copies.
- Trust your instincts. If someone or something makes you uneasy, avoid the situation.

Important Contact Details

International Dialing Code: +27

International Dialing Prefix: 00

Victims of crime in should contact the following phone numbers for assistance

POLICE: The local equivalent to the “911” emergency line in is: 10111

FIRE DEPARTMENT: 10111

AMBULANCE: 10177

GENERAL EMERGENCY NUMBER: 112

Note: Police, ambulance or fire department response may be unreliable in some parts of the country.

TRAVEL & ROAD SAFETY

- South Africa has an extensive and well-developed road network. However, road accidents and fatalities are fairly high in number.
- Drunk driving, speeding and poorly maintained vehicles are the main contributing factors to the country’s poor and safety record.
- Criminal activity on public transportation and on South African roadways poses a significant concern.
- The crime rate on public transportation and around train and bus stations is particularly high. Trains between Johannesburg and Pretoria should be avoided whenever possible. If travel by rail is necessary, exercise extreme caution on suburban rail services countrywide.

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- Travel along isolated beaches, hiking trails and picnic spots should be avoided due to the risk from crime.

RECOMMENDED TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS

- Smoking is prohibited in public buildings and on public transport. Most restaurants provide enclosed or outdoor sections where smoking is permitted.
- No ATM use after dark and only in secure areas.
- No traveling alone after dark.
- No bathing or swimming in rivers.

HEALTH

South Africa's major cities, such as Cape Town, Pretoria and Durban, have numerous high-quality medical facilities that are well equipped to deal with medical emergencies. Smaller cities and larger towns have private and public clinics; however, rural areas may have inadequate resources and public clinics can provide only a basic level of medical care. English is widely spoken in the country and at most medical establishments.

- Although water in most urban areas is sterilized and safe to drink, tap water in the rural areas is generally unsafe; travelers are advised to consume only sterilized or bottled water. This applies to water used for brushing teeth, making ice or washing foods.
- Unpasteurized milk should be boiled before consumption or powdered or tinned milk should be used as an alternative.
- Fruit and vegetables should only be consumed if they have peeled or cooked.
- Undercooked meat and fish should not be consumed.
- Food from street vendors should be avoided as this carries a higher risk of causing infection.

The following vaccinations are recommended or required if traveling to South Africa:

- Hepatitis A (recommended)
- Hepatitis B (recommended)
- Rabies (recommended)
- Typhoid (recommended)
- Yellow Fever (required for travelers arriving from a country where yellow fever is present or arriving from Tanzania, Zambia, Somalia, Eritrea or Sao Tome and Principe specifically)

It is also important to ensure that routine vaccinations are up to date for diseases including influenza, chickenpox (or varicella), measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

SIGNIFICANT DISEASES –

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- **Malaria** – A life-threatening parasitic disease transmitted by mosquitoes. The malaria risk is particularly high in the KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces and in Kruger National Park in the Mpumalanga province.
- **Cholera** – An infection which is contracted through drinking water or eating food contaminated by the cholera bacterium. Outbreaks of the disease occur in the poorer communities, particularly in the Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces, and in the rural parts of northern KwaZulu-Natal.
- **Diarrhea** – Common issue among travelers to the country and can be caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites. One of the most common causes is a bacterium known as E. coli, which is transmitted by ingesting contaminated food and liquids.
- **Rift Valley Fever** – A viral disease that is transmitted to humans through contact with blood or tissue of infected animals or through mosquito bites. Cases of the disease have been reported in the Mpumalanga, North West, Limpopo and Gauteng provinces.
- **Tuberculosis** – An airborne disease which is a risk to travelers throughout South Africa.
- **Schistosomiasis** – A parasitic infection which is contracted through contact with infected fresh water. This is prevalent in Kruger National Park and other smaller game reserves. The parasites are also found in dams and rivers in the country, particularly in rural areas.
- **Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic Fever** – A widespread tick-borne viral disease of domestic and wild animals that may affect humans through tick bites or contact with infected blood or tissue. South Africa has a high risk of the disease and cases have been reported in Oudtshoorn in the Western Cape Province, the Karoo region, and farming areas in the Free State, Northern Cape and North West provinces.
- **Anthrax** – A bacterium which mostly affects animals and is transmitted to humans through contact with infected animals. There have been reports of anthrax cases in rural areas of the Northern Cape and North West provinces, mostly among farming communities.
- **Rabies** – A disease mainly carried by dogs and bats and can be spread to humans through animal bites. Fatal human cases of rabies have been recorded in the Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal provinces.
- **HIV/AIDS** – A life-threatening sexually transmitted disease. A large portion of the South Africa population is believed to be infected with either HIV or AIDS.

HOSPITALS –

City Park Hospital
181 Longmarket Street
Cape Town
Tel: +27 21 480 6111
Fax: +27 21 426 1451

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Southern Cross Hospital
Cnr. Main & Maynard Roads
Wynberg, Cape Town
Tel: +27 21 799 3000
Fax: +27 21 799 3111

US EMBASSY – CONSULATE LOCATIONS

UNITED STATES EMBASSY SOUTH AFRICA

877 Pretorius Street
Arcadia, Pretoria
Tel: +27 (0)12 431 4000
Fax: +27 (0)12 342 2299
Email: consularjohannesburg@state.gov
Website: <http://southafrica.usembassy.gov/>

USF INTERNATIONAL HOTLINE

USF 24/7 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE LINE: 813-317-5815

AXA Assistance 24/7 EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE LINE: 1-877-577-9504 / +1-203-399-5130 (Call collect from abroad)

ASSIST ID #: GLMN 04983932. <http://www.culturalinsurance.com/resources/>

* Information derived from CIA World Fact Book, US Department of State, OSAC, and Travel Guard. This travel overview summarizes some of the most important concerns; however, it does not negate the need for detailed trip planning.