PACK LIGHTLY

A CAPE TOWN ROAD TRIP AND A KRUGER SAFARI, MAPPED SEPARATELY

South Africa

Table Mountain, the Winelands, a coastal drive to Knysna, and a Big Five safari on the other side of the country, built as two trips that share one airport.

p.13 Self-drive or guided safari at Kruger: the real cost delta and who each one suits

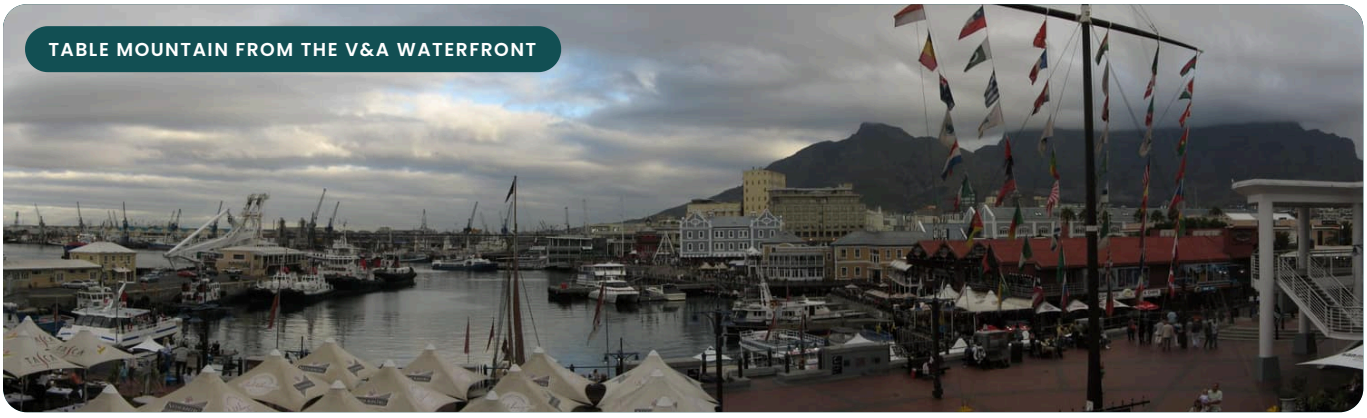
p.10 Stellenbosch, Franschhoek, and Cape Point as day trips from a single Cape Town base

p.31 What actually carries risk in South Africa, and the routes that avoid it entirely

37 PAGES ZAR PRICES VISA-FREE 90 DAYS, MOST PASSPORTS EDITION 2026.08

Start here

the shape of a South Africa trip, what it costs, what to sort first


TABLE MOUNTAIN FROM THE V&A WATERFRONT

South Africa does not fit into one loop. Cape Town, the Winelands, and the Garden Route sit in the southwest, a self-drive region where the roads are good and the scenery does the work. Kruger and the private reserves sit in the northeast, a nine hour drive or a one hour flight away, built around wildlife rather than towns. Most trips pick one or connect both with a domestic flight rather than driving the country in a straight line. Sixteen days covers a Cape Town and Garden Route loop plus four nights at Kruger. Ten days is enough for Cape Town, the Winelands, and the coastal drive to Knysna alone.

The shape of a trip

Cape Town first, for the city and the day trips. East along the Garden Route to Knysna and the coast. A flight or long drive to Kruger for the safari half. Johannesburg and Durban work best as arrival or connection points, not as the reason to come.

What a day costs

Budget travel runs close to 40 EUR a day: backpacker beds, self-catering or street food, minibus taxis or the odd Uber. Midrange sits near 100 EUR with a rental car, guesthouses, and one paid activity a day. The full receipt, a Pack Lightly estimate since South Africa is not yet in the live budget tool, is on page 26.

Sort before you fly

US, EU, and UK passport holders enter visa-free for up to 90 days on a tourist stamp. No unabridged birth certificate is required for minors, a rule scrapped in 2019. Cards work in cities and lodges; carry rand for townships and tipping. Page 7 covers the full picture.


BO-KAAP'S COLOURED HOUSES, CAPE TOWN


A LEOPARD ON A KRUGER DIRT ROAD AT DUSK

HOW THE LINKS WORK

Some booking links earn Pack Lightly a commission, at no extra cost to you. Full disclosure is on the last page.

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tap a line to jump straight there

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01

The country

The trip on one page, the scorecard, and what a 90 day visa-free stamp and a rand exchange rate actually change about the planning.

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Your trip on one page

16 days recommended · 40 to 320 EUR/day · best May to Oct

Two trips, not one. The southwest runs on self-drive: Cape Town, the Winelands as day trips, then east along the coast to Knysna and the Garden Route. The northeast runs on wildlife: Kruger and the private reserves bordering it, reached by a nine hour drive or a one hour flight from Cape Town via Johannesburg. Sixteen days covers both. Ten covers the Cape Town and Garden Route half alone, with Addo Elephant Park standing in for the safari closer to the coast.

THE ROUTE

Cape Town day 1-4

day trips

Stellenbosch, Hermanus day 3-4

4-5h drive

Knysna, Garden Route day 5-8

1h flight via JNB

Hazyview, Kruger day 9-14

1h flight

Johannesburg, fly out day 15-16

BUDGET PER DAY

Budget	40 EUR
Midrange	100 EUR
Luxury	320 EUR

BOOK FIRST

01	Flights, 8 to 10 weeks out	Aviasales
02	Kruger stay, lock in months ahead in peak season	Find Stays
03	eSIM, install before departure	Saily

BEST MONTHS

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

best: dry winter, thin bush, easiest game viewing

shoulder: warmer, greener, Cape Town beach season

peak summer rain in the north and east

South Africa at a glance

scores 0-100 · pack-lightly country-comparison data

SCORECARD

Tourist infrastructure	80
Safety	55
Budget friendly	70
Nature	95
Food and drinks	85
Culture	80

Budget travel	45 USD/day
Mid-range	120 USD/day
Luxury	350 USD/day

NATURE ADVENTURE ROADTRIP BEACH CITY

source: country-comparison tool, 2026-08

QUICK STATS

Capital	Pretoria, Cape Town, Bloemfontein
Languages	11 official, English in tourism
Currency	ZAR (South African rand)
Timezone	SAST, UTC+2, no DST
Best months	May to October
Days needed	16 recommended, 10-24 flexible
Driving	left side, Type M/N plugs, 230V
Tap water	safe in cities and lodges
Tipping	10-15% restaurants, cash for guides

Getting in: visa, rand, driving on the left

what changes the moment you land

US, EU, and UK passport holders enter South Africa visa-free for stays up to 90 days on a tourist stamp, no application or fee required in advance. The unabridged birth certificate rule for minors traveling with parents, once a common source of airport delays, was scrapped in 2019. Currency is the rand, ZAR, and cards work in cities, malls, and lodges without trouble. Cash still matters for townships, informal markets, and tipping guides, rangers, and porters, none of whom typically carry a card machine. Driving is on the left, the opposite of most of continental Europe and the US, and that single fact shapes every rental car decision in the chapters ahead.

The visa stamp

Free, on arrival, no pre-approval needed for most Western passports. Passports need two blank pages and 30 days of validity beyond the departure date, checked at check-in more strictly than at South African immigration itself.

Rand and cash

Card payment covers restaurants, fuel, and most accommodation. Carry rand in smaller notes for township tours, curio stalls, and tips: guides and rangers expect cash, usually 200 to 300 rand a day per group on safari.

Driving on the left

Rental cars are right hand drive, matching the left side rule of the road. Roundabouts run clockwise. Most rental confusion happens in the first hour, at intersections and multi-lane roundabouts leaving the airport.



ARRIVALS HALL, CAPE TOWN INTERNATIONAL

A LEFT HAND DRIVE RENTAL PICKUP, N2 HIGHWAY

GO DEEPER

Where South Africa sits and how the regions connect on the location and map page, phone and data options in the SIM card and eSIM write-up, and a passport-by-passport check on the Visa Checker tool. What carries real risk and what does not is covered in full on page 31.

02

Where to go

Cape Town and its day trips, the coastal drive east to the Garden Route, a straight answer on self-drive versus guided safari, and two cities that work best as connections.

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Cape Town and Bo-Kaap 09

Cape Peninsula and the Winelands 10

The Garden Route 11

Self-drive or guided safari 12

Kruger: the practical version 13

Johannesburg and Durban 14

Cape Town and Bo-Kaap

City Bowl · base for 3-4 nights minimum · year round



BO-KAAP'S COLOURED HOUSES AGAINST SIGNAL HILL

Table Mountain sits directly above the City Bowl, a cable car ride or a three to four hour hike from the base station, and it decides the skyline of everything below it. Bo-Kaap's brightly painted houses climb the lower slope of Signal Hill, a Cape Malay quarter with its own mosques and its own cooking tradition, still lived in rather than staged for photographs. The V&A Waterfront handles the harbor, shopping, and the ferry to Robben Island. Base here for the first three or four nights of any trip: every day trip in the next chapter starts from this point.

Skip: the Table Mountain cableway queue after 10am on a clear weekend. Book a timed slot online, or walk Platteklip Gorge and skip the line entirely.

Walk Bo-Kaap with a local guide rather than alone with a camera; it is a residential neighborhood, not an open air museum.

Table Mountain cableway

Rotating cable car to the top, five minutes each way, wind dependent and closed on the windiest days.

Bo-Kaap

Cape Malay quarter on Signal Hill, painted facades, working mosques, cooking classes run by residents.

Robben Island

The ferry from the Waterfront, a half day tour led in part by former political prisoners.

V&A Waterfront

Harbor, restaurants, and the departure point for the island ferry and most boat tours.

GO DEEPER

Every neighborhood and eighteen things worth doing in the Cape Town write-up, the cableway and the hike in the Table Mountain page, and the ferry and tour details on the Robben Island rundown.

Cape Peninsula and the Winelands

day trips · 45 min to 1h30 from Cape Town



CAPE DUTCH GABLES, FRANSCHHOEK MAIN ROAD

A Cape Town base reaches most of the region's best days without changing hotels. South along the peninsula: Boulders Beach for the penguin colony, Chapman's Peak Drive along the cliffs, and Cape Point where the coastline turns into a nature reserve. East into the Winelands: Stellenbosch for the Cape Dutch architecture and the widest spread of estates, Franschhoek for the same idea with a French accent and a wine tram between cellar doors. Hermanus, further along the coast, adds shore based whale watching from June to November. Each of the four is a return day trip: none needs an overnight stay unless the itinerary has room to spare.

Skip: trying Stellenbosch, Franschhoek, and Cape Point in a single day. Pick two regions per day and the tastings stop feeling rushed.

A designated driver or a private transfer solves the wine country problem: tastings and left side driving do not mix.

Cape Point and Boulders Beach

A nature reserve at the peninsula's tip, and a protected penguin colony you can walk among on a boardwalk.

Stellenbosch

Cape Dutch wine town, the largest concentration of estates within an hour of Cape Town.

Franschhoek

A narrower valley, a wine tram between cellars, and the country's strongest concentration of fine dining.

Hermanus whale season

Southern right whales visible from the cliff path June through November, no boat required.

KEEP READING Nine estates worth the drive in the Cape Winelands write-up, the wine tram and dining scene in the Franschhoek page, and the cliff path season by season on the Hermanus rundown.

The Garden Route

coastal drive · 4-5h from Cape Town · 3-5 nights


KNYSNA LAGOON AT THE HEADS

The N2 highway east from Cape Town threads forest, lagoon, and cliff for close to 300 kilometers, and Knysna sits roughly in the middle of it as the natural base. The lagoon opens to the ocean through a pair of sandstone cliffs called the Heads. Tsitsikamma, an hour further east, adds indigenous forest and the Storms River suspension bridge. Plettenberg Bay covers the beach half of the route. This is a drive-it-yourself stretch: the road itself, not any single stop, is most of the appeal.

Skip: driving the full stretch in one day. Split it over three to five, or the forest and lagoon blur together by the second stop.

Hermanus works as the first overnight stop on the drive east; from there, Knysna is roughly a three hour drive.

Knysna Heads

The sandstone cliffs where the lagoon meets the ocean, the route's most photographed viewpoint.

Tsitsikamma

Indigenous forest and the Storms River suspension bridge, roughly an hour east of Knysna.

Plettenberg Bay

The route's beach town, whale and dolphin watching in season alongside the sand.

Addo Elephant Park

Roughly three hours past Knysna, a malaria-free elephant park that doubles as a coastal alternative to Kruger.

THE FULL PICTURE

Sixteen stops mapped out in the Garden Route write-up, the lagoon town itself in the Knysna page, and elephants without the malaria question in the Addo Elephant Park rundown.

Self-drive or guided safari

Kruger public park vs a private reserve, the real cost delta

Kruger National Park is one of the only major safari destinations anywhere that lets a visitor drive their own rental car on tarred and gravel roads, park at a designated picnic site, and see the Big Five without a guide. That option does not exist in most of the private reserves bordering the park, Sabi Sands and Madikwe among them, where access runs through a lodge and every game drive comes with a ranger and a tracker. The choice is not guided versus unguided so much as it is self-paced versus curated, and the price gap between the two is the real decision.

Kruger self-drive

Park entry runs per person per day, plus a rest camp bed booked through South African National Parks. A rental car and fuel are the other real cost. Sightings depend on skill and luck rather than a ranger's radio network, and the park closes its gates at sunset.

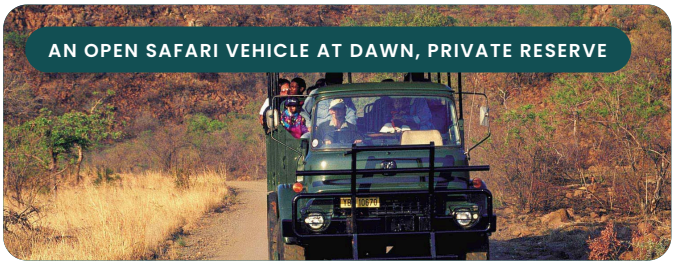
Private reserve, guided

An all-inclusive rate covers the lodge, meals, and two guided drives a day, at dawn and dusk, in an open vehicle with a ranger and tracker working radio contact with other vehicles. Off-road driving is permitted, which Kruger itself does not allow. Rates run several times the self-drive daily cost.

Who each one suits

Self-drive suits a longer stay, a tighter budget, and travelers comfortable navigating and spotting wildlife themselves. A guided private reserve suits a shorter window, a first safari, night drives, and off-road access to a sighting the trackers already know is there.

A SELF-DRIVE RENTAL AT A KRUGER PICNIC SITE



AN OPEN SAFARI VEHICLE AT DAWN, PRIVATE RESERVE

WORTH A READ

The park itself, gates, and camps in the Kruger National Park write-up, a private reserve profile in the Sabi Sands page, and every national park compared on the national parks rundown.

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Kruger: the practical version

Hazyview gate · 9h drive or 1h flight from Cape Town via JNB · 3-5 nights



ELEPHANTS CROSSING A KRUGER GRAVEL ROAD

Hazyview sits closest to the park's southern gates and works as the standard base whether the plan is self-drive or a private reserve transfer. A flight from Cape Town routes through Johannesburg to Kruger Mpumalanga International or Skukuza airport, roughly two hours in the air plus the connection. Malaria risk is real in the lowveld, higher in the wet summer months than in the dry winter season this guide leads with, and a doctor's advice on prophylaxis is worth getting before departure, not after arrival.

Book Kruger rest camps or a private reserve lodge months ahead for the June to September peak; last minute availability thins out fast.

Malaria prophylaxis, insect repellent, and long sleeves at dusk apply to the whole lowveld region, not just inside the park gates.

Getting there

Fly into Kruger Mpumalanga International or Skukuza, both a short transfer from Hazyview and most private reserves.

When it works best

May to October, the dry winter, thins the bush and pulls animals toward the remaining waterholes, the easiest sightings of the year.

Malaria

A real risk in the lowveld, not a formality; get prophylaxis advice from a travel clinic before the trip, especially in summer.

Nearby towns

Hazyview, Hoedspruit, and Graskop each work as a base, with Graskop closer to the Panorama Route waterfalls.

MORE ON THE SITE

Waterfalls and viewpoints on the way in via the Graskop write-up, vaccination and malaria advice in the vaccinations page, and domestic flight routing in the flying domestic rundown.

Johannesburg and Durban

connection points, not the reason to come

Neither city anchors the route in this guide, and that is deliberate rather than an oversight. Johannesburg is the country's main air hub, the connection point for Kruger flights and most international arrivals, and Sandton works as a safe, well-connected overnight base if a layover runs long. The Apartheid Museum and a Soweto tour are worth the extra day for anyone with time to spare in Johannesburg specifically. Durban, on the Indian Ocean coast, adds warm water surf and a strong Indian food scene, but sits far enough from both the Cape Town loop and Kruger that folding it in usually costs more driving than it returns in sightseeing.

Johannesburg as a hub

Most Kruger flights and international connections route through OR Tambo. Sandton is the standard overnight base for a layover.

If there is a spare day

The Apartheid Museum and a guided Soweto tour give Johannesburg specifically a reason to stay rather than just connect through it.

Durban, if the route allows

Warm Indian Ocean water, a strong surf scene, and Durban's Indian food culture, best added on a longer trip rather than squeezed into this loop.



SANDTON SKYLINE AT DUSK, JOHANNESBURG



DURBAN'S SOUTH BEACH PROMENADE

WORTH A READ Eleven things to do beyond the layover in the Johannesburg write-up, and beaches, markets, and food in the Durban rundown.

03

What to do

The dishes that place South African food on the map, and the fast facts that keep a first day in the country from starting with a surprise.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Food: braai, Cape Malay, and wine 16

Fast facts before you fly 17

Food: braai, Cape Malay, and wine

grilled meat, spiced stew, and a wine region that undercuts Europe on price

The braai, a wood or charcoal grill, is closer to a national ritual than a meal, built around boerewors sausage and whatever cut is on sale that week. Cape Malay cooking, brought to Cape Town by enslaved and exiled people from Southeast Asia in the 17th and 18th centuries, adds the spiced, slightly sweet layer that shows up in bobotie and the city's curries. Biltong, air-dried cured meat, is the road trip snack sold at every fuel station. Winelands tastings run a fraction of the price of a comparable flight in Bordeaux or Napa, which is most of the reason Stellenbosch and Franschhoek fill an entire day trip chapter of this guide.



Bobotie

USD 4-8 · sit-down

Spiced minced meat baked under an egg custard topping, the Cape Malay dish most closely tied to the region.



Biltong

USD 2-5 · fuel stations, markets

Air-dried cured meat, vinegar and spice cured, sold everywhere from farm stalls to petrol station counters.



Boerewors

USD 3-8 · braai default

A coiled, spiced sausage grilled whole on the braai, the meat every weekend gathering is built around.

WORSBROODJIE

Boerewors roll

USD 2-4 · street stalls

A grilled boerewors coil in a bread roll, the closest thing South Africa has to a hot dog stand.



Braai

USD 7-14 · full plate

The full grilled spread, meat, mielie pap, and a tomato and onion relish called chakalaka on the side.



Potjiekos

USD 6-15 · farm stalls, guesthouses

A slow-cooked stew in a three legged cast iron pot over open coals, meat and vegetables layered rather than stirred.

A Winelands tasting flight typically runs a small fraction of the entry fee alone at a comparable European estate.

Book a designated driver or a tasting tour for Stellenbosch and Franschhoek; drink-driving enforcement is strict.

ON THE WEBSITE

The full dish list with prices in the food and drinks rundown, and what a full day of eating and tasting costs in the budget breakdown.

Fast facts before you fly

eight things that trip up first time visitors

WORTH KNOWING BEFORE DAY ONE

- [ ] Driving is on the left; a rental car is right hand drive, and roundabouts run clockwise.
- [ ] US, EU, and UK passports enter visa-free for 90 days, no advance application needed.
- [ ] Pack layers for safari mornings: dawn game drives run near freezing in winter even when Cape Town stays mild.
- [ ] Malaria prophylaxis matters for the Kruger lowveld, not for Cape Town, the Winelands, or the Garden Route.
- [ ] Cards work in cities and lodges; carry rand cash for townships, markets, and guide and ranger tips.
- [ ] May through October, the dry winter, is when Kruger's game viewing is easiest and Cape Town's rain season starts to ease.
- [ ] South Africa runs Type M and N plugs at 230V; most non-UK travelers need an adapter.
- [ ] Reef-safe or not, sunscreen still matters at altitude on the Cape Peninsula and in the thin winter Highveld air around Johannesburg.

source: pack-lightly South Africa tips dataset, captured 2026-08

04

Routes and itineraries

The loop drawn as a map, the ten day version built around Cape Town and the Garden Route, and the sixteen to eighteen day version that adds Kruger.

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10 days: Cape Town and the Garden Route	20
16-18 days: the full loop with Kruger	21
Tours worth booking	22

The loop, mapped

Cape Town out and back, with a Kruger flight in the middle

Two loops connected by one flight, not one continuous drive. Start and end in Cape Town for the coastal half: day trips into the Winelands and the peninsula, then east along the N2 to Knysna and back. Fly from Cape Town via Johannesburg to Kruger for the safari half, then return through Johannesburg to fly home. Trying to drive the whole country in one line burns days on the road that add nothing to either half of the trip.



THE LEGS

- [ ] Cape Town to Stellenbosch: 45 min drive
- [ ] Cape Town to Hermanus: 1h30 drive
- [ ] Cape Town to Knysna: 4-5h drive along the N2
- [ ] Cape Town to Hazyview (Kruger): 1h flight via Johannesburg, plus connection time
- [ ] Hazyview to Johannesburg, fly out: 1h flight

10 days: Cape Town and the Garden Route

the coastal half alone, no Kruger flight needed

The tightest version that still covers the city, the Winelands, and a proper drive of the Garden Route. Addo Elephant Park near Port Elizabeth stands in for a safari day without adding a flight. Book Winelands tastings and the Robben Island ferry a few days ahead in high season; the coastal drive itself needs no advance booking.

1	**Cape Town** day 1-3	Table Mountain, Bo-Kaap, the Waterfront, and a half day at Robben Island.
2	**Winelands and the peninsula** day 4	Stellenbosch or Franschhoek in the morning, Cape Point and Boulders Beach if the day allows both.
3	**Hermanus** day 5	Drive east, whale watching from the cliff path in season, overnight before continuing to the Garden Route.
4	**Knysna and Tsitsikamma** day 6-8	The Knysna Heads, Plettenberg Bay, and the Storms River suspension bridge at Tsitsikamma.
5	**Addo Elephant Park** day 9	A malaria-free safari day near Port Elizabeth, then fly home from there or drive back to Cape Town.

WORTH A READ

A shorter seven day version built around Cape Town, the Garden Route, and Addo in the 7 day itinerary. The sixteen to eighteen day version that adds Kruger follows on the next page.

16-18 days: the full loop with Kruger

Cape Town, the Garden Route, and a Kruger flight

The complete version, for anyone with sixteen days or more. It keeps the coastal half largely intact and adds a proper Kruger stay, self-drive or private reserve, connected by one internal flight through Johannesburg rather than a long overland drive across the country.

1	**Cape Town** day 1-4	Table Mountain, Bo-Kaap, Robben Island, and a full Winelands day trip.
2	**Cape Peninsula and Hermanus** day 5-6	Cape Point and Boulders Beach, then the drive east to Hermanus for whale season.
3	**Garden Route** day 7-10	Knysna as a base, Tsitsikamma, Plettenberg Bay, at a pace that avoids a single long driving day.
4	**Fly to Kruger** day 11	Return to Cape Town, fly via Johannesburg into Kruger Mpumalanga International or Skukuza.
5	**Kruger or a private reserve** day 12-16	Self-drive game viewing or a guided stay near Hazyview, four to five nights minimum for a fair shot at the Big Five.
6	**Johannesburg, fly out** day 17-18	Fly to Johannesburg, an optional Apartheid Museum or Soweto day, then the international flight home.

KEEP READING

The Winelands and Kruger loop laid out day by day in the 14 day itinerary, an even longer version in the 28 day itinerary, and the full hub for every region covered in this loop at pack-lightly.com/south-africa.

Tours worth booking

by area, matched to the route on the previous pages

These are the categories worth booking ahead rather than deciding on the ground: a cableway slot, a wine tram seat, a guided game drive. Each card opens a GetYourGuide search filtered to the area, since availability and pricing shift week to week. Match a card to the base on the route pages, and book the ones that need a permit or a guide before the trip rather than after landing.

Table Mountain cableway and hike

Cape Town

Search GetYourGuide

Cape Peninsula full-day tour

Cape Town

Search GetYourGuide

Stellenbosch wine tasting

Stellenbosch

Search GetYourGuide

Hermanus whale watching

Hermanus

Search GetYourGuide

Knysna lagoon and Featherbed tour

Knysna

Search GetYourGuide

Kruger day safari from Hazyview

Hazyview

Search GetYourGuide

Franschhoek wine tram

Franschhoek

Search GetYourGuide

Cape Point and Boulders Beach penguins

Cape Peninsula

Search GetYourGuide

Guided Soweto tour

Johannesburg

Search GetYourGuide

Tsitsikamma canopy and gorge walk

Garden Route

Search GetYourGuide

Live GetYourGuide search results, filtered by area. Tap a card to see current availability and pricing. Some links earn Pack Lightly a commission at no extra cost.

05

When to go

Southern hemisphere seasons run opposite to Europe and the US, and the safari calendar does not match the beach calendar.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Weather, dry season, and safari timing 24

Weather, dry season, and safari timing

May to October leads · a researched estimate, not yet live in the travel-time tool

South Africa runs southern hemisphere seasons, opposite to Europe and North America, and the calendar splits by region rather than moving together. May through October is the dry winter across the Kruger lowveld: thin bush and dwindling waterholes push animals into the open, the easiest game viewing of the year. The same months bring Cape Town's cooler, wetter season, since the Cape has a Mediterranean climate that runs opposite to the rest of the country. November through April is warm and green almost everywhere, better for Cape Town beach days and Winelands lunches on a terrace, harder for safari sightings as the bush thickens. This guide leads with May to October because Kruger sets the tighter constraint of the two; a Cape Town-only trip works well in either half of the year.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

■ best: May–Oct, dry lowveld winter, easiest game viewing ■ shoulder: Nov–Apr, warm and green, better for Cape Town and the coast

source: pack-lightly research estimate, South Africa not yet in the live best-travel-time dataset, captured 2026-08

Best for safari: May–Oct

Dry winter thins the bush and concentrates wildlife at waterholes; the sharpest game viewing window of the year.

Best for Cape Town: Nov–Apr

Warm, dry summer on the Cape while the rest of the country is greener; beach days and Winelands lunches work best here.

Whale season

Southern right whales visible from Hermanus roughly June through November, overlapping the safari dry season.



DRY WINTER BUSH, KRUGER NATIONAL PARK



SUMMER HAZE OVER TABLE MOUNTAIN

06

Practical

What a day costs, what to pack for a trip that swings from safari mornings to city dinners, and where to sleep across seven bases.

IN THIS CHAPTER

What a day really costs 26

Packing checklist 27

Where to stay I: Cape Town, Winelands, Garden Route 28

Where to stay II: Kruger area, Johannesburg, Durban 29

What a day really costs

a Pack Lightly estimate, South Africa not yet in the live budget-calculator dataset

South Africa is not yet part of the live Trip Budget Calculator dataset, so the two receipts below are a Pack Lightly research estimate rather than tool-sourced figures. They will update to the live tool once South Africa is added. Cape Town and the coastal half run close to Southeast European prices; a private reserve safari can push a single day well past either receipt.

A DAY IN SOUTH AFRICA

* budget *

bed, dorm or backpacker	10-15
food, self-catering and casual	10-15
local transport	5-8
one activity	8-15
drink	2-4
TOTAL / DAY	**~40 EUR**

Pack Lightly estimate, not tool-sourced, August 2026

A DAY IN SOUTH AFRICA

* midrange *

bed, guesthouse room	35-50
food, sit-down and wine tastings	25-35
rental car and fuel	15-20
one activity or park entry	15-25
drink	5-8
TOTAL / DAY	**~100 EUR**

Pack Lightly estimate, not tool-sourced, August 2026



A private reserve safari, all-inclusive lodge and guided drives, can push a single day well past 320 EUR.



Rental car pricing swings by season and demand: booking a month or more ahead beats an airport walk-up.

THE FULL BREAKDOWN

Category by category detail in the budget and saving write-up, or run the numbers for your own trip length on the Trip Budget Calculator.

Packing checklist

safari layers and city clothes, tuned to a big day-to-night swing

DOCUMENTS

- [ ] Passport with 2 blank pages and 30 days validity beyond departure
- [ ] Printed or digital rental car booking, international driving permit if required
- [ ] Travel insurance documents and a 24 hour contact
- [ ] Lodge and rest camp confirmations for the Kruger leg

CITY AND WINELANDS

- [ ] One smart casual outfit for Winelands lunches and Cape Town dinners
- [ ] A light rain jacket for Cape Town's winter shower days
- [ ] Comfortable walking shoes for Table Mountain and the City Bowl
- [ ] A swimsuit for the Cape Peninsula and Garden Route beaches

SAFARI LAYERS

- [ ] Neutral colored clothing, khaki or olive, for game drives
- [ ] A warm layer and a beanie for near-freezing dawn drives in winter
- [ ] A wide brim hat and sunglasses for midday sun
- [ ] Closed shoes for camp walks and dusk drives

HEALTH AND TECH

- [ ] Malaria prophylaxis for the Kruger lowveld, confirmed with a travel clinic beforehand
- [ ] Insect repellent, essential at dusk near Kruger
- [ ] Sunscreen and aloe vera gel, both regions run strong UV year round
- [ ] Type M/N power adapter, most non-UK travelers need one

EXTRAS

- [ ] Binoculars, shared or personal, for self-drive game viewing
- [ ] A dry bag for Garden Route boat trips and forest hikes
- [ ] Small rand notes for tips, township guides, and roadside stalls
- [ ] A portable battery for long driving days between towns

GO DEEPER The full 21 day packing list at the packing list page, and what to wear where in the dress code write-up.

Where to stay I: Cape Town, Winelands, Garden Route

getting around · a rental car covers the whole coastal half

A rental car is close to essential for anything past Cape Town's City Bowl and Waterfront. The Winelands, the peninsula, and the Garden Route all run on good tarred roads without the need for a 4x4. Book the car on arrival rather than after landing: airport counters run long queues in high season and prices climb by the day. Remember the left side of the road and clockwise roundabouts for the first hour out of the airport; that is where most rental confusion happens. Cape Town itself is walkable in the City Bowl and Waterfront, with rideshare covering the rest of the city comfortably.

Cape Town (City Bowl / Waterfront)

Base here for Table Mountain, Bo-Kaap, and walking distance to the Waterfront ferry pier. Check what a room costs around the City Bowl before you commit; the dorm crowd sleeps cheap through Hostelworld.

Stellenbosch (Winelands)

An overnight base if the Winelands need more than a day trip, walking distance to a run of Cape Dutch estates. See what Stellenbosch is charging tonight, or browse Hostelworld for the dorm scene.

Hermanus

The whale watching stop and a natural overnight break on the drive east toward the Garden Route. Live prices along the cliff path and Hostelworld fill the gaps.

Knysna (Garden Route)

The natural midpoint base for Tsitsikamma, Plettenberg Bay, and the lagoon itself. See what a room costs by the lagoon or check Hostelworld.

Guesthouses and hotels across the coastal half, with free cancellation while plans are still moving.

Find Stays

Where to stay II: Kruger area, Johannesburg, Durban

the safari half and the two connection cities

Hazyview or a private reserve lodge is the standard base for the Kruger leg, reached by a flight through Johannesburg rather than by road from Cape Town. Book Kruger rest camps directly through South African National Parks for self-drive, or through the lodge itself for a private reserve stay; both fill up months ahead in the June to September peak. Johannesburg and Durban work as overnight bases rather than multi-night stops, unless the itinerary has room to give either city its own dedicated days.

Hazyview (Kruger gate)

The standard base for both self-drive and private reserve transfers into Kruger's southern gates. Live prices around Hazyview, or the dorm scene on Hostelworld.

Johannesburg (Sandton)

The safe, well-connected overnight base near OR Tambo, close to Kruger flight connections. Check live prices or Hostelworld.

Durban

Only worth a dedicated stay if the itinerary has room for it separately from the Cape Town and Kruger loop. See what a room costs or browse Hostelworld.

BOOK A LOCAL GUIDE

Game drives, transfers, and city tours across all three bases list on GetYourGuide for Hazyview, Johannesburg, and Durban.

07

Safe and smart

A sharp split between tourist infrastructure and street crime. The routes in this guide are built to route around the second, not to pretend it does not exist.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Staying safe 31

Do and do not 32

Staying safe

the risk is real, concentrated, and mostly avoidable by route

South Africa scores 55 out of 100 on Pack Lightly's safety axis, and that number reflects a genuinely sharp split rather than a country that is uniformly risky. Guided safari, the Garden Route drive, and the Winelands day trips in this guide are routine: guesthouses, lodges, and tour operators run these routes every week without incident. The real risk concentrates in specific, nameable places: central Johannesburg outside guided contexts, and parts of Cape Town after dark, particularly the CBD at night and townships visited without a local guide. The routes in this guide are built to avoid those specific pockets, not to pretend the country has no risk profile at all.

Central Johannesburg

The inner CBD carries real risk outside a guided tour. Sandton and the northern suburbs, where this guide bases a layover, run to a different standard.

Cape Town after dark

The City Bowl and Waterfront are well used and well lit at night; avoid walking alone through the CBD or unfamiliar streets after dark, and use a rideshare instead.

Townships

Bo-Kaap and Soweto are worth visiting, and both work well with a local guide who knows the streets. Skip an unguided drive-through; it adds risk and returns nothing a guided visit does not already give.

Everywhere else in this guide

The Winelands, the Garden Route, Kruger, and the private reserves run at tourist-infrastructure standard: guesthouses, lodges, and daylight driving carry ordinary travel risk, not elevated risk.



A GUIDED SOWETO WALKING TOUR

EVENING RIDESHARE PICKUP, CAPE TOWN WATERFRONT

CHECK BEFORE YOU GO

Area by area conditions on the Travel Safety Map tool, and the full risk and scam breakdown in the is South Africa safe write-up.

Do and do not

five to follow, five to avoid

DO

Rent a car on arrival

Queues get long in high season and prices climb by the day once a flight lands.

DO NOT

Walk central Johannesburg alone

See it on a guided tour instead; the CBD carries real risk outside that context.

DO

Book Kruger months ahead in winter

Rest camps and private reserve lodges fill fast for the June to September dry season peak.

DO NOT

Drive a township unguided

Bo-Kaap and Soweto reward a local guide; an unguided drive-through adds risk for nothing gained.

DO

Get malaria advice before Kruger

Real risk in the lowveld, higher in summer; a travel clinic sorts prophylaxis before departure.

DO NOT

Pack only summer clothes for a winter safari

Dawn game drives run near freezing May through August even while Cape Town stays mild.

DO

Carry small rand notes

Guides, rangers, and township stalls run on cash tips; cards do not reach every hand here.

DO NOT

Skip the Winelands designated driver plan

Drink-driving enforcement is strict; book a driver or a tasting tour instead.

DO

Use rideshare after dark in the cities

The straightforward fix for both Cape Town and Johannesburg evenings; skip the late walk between neighborhoods.

DO NOT

Assume Kruger self-drive means off-road access

Public roads and picnic sites only; off-road driving is a private reserve privilege, not a park rule.

08

Tools and reference

The live tools this guide draws from, the questions readers ask most, and where every number in this edition comes from.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Take the live tools with you 34

Frequently asked questions 35

A note on the links in this guide 37

Take the live tools with you

scan to open · data updates after this PDF was printed

This guide is a snapshot; the tools behind it keep updating. Scan a code or type the short URL, each one preloaded with the same South Africa data this guide was built from.

Trip Budget Calculator

South Africa: around 40 EUR/day budget, 100 midrange, 320 luxury.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/budget-calculator/

Packing List Generator

A custom list for a safari, city, and coastal trip in one loop.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/packing-list-generator/

Best Time to Travel

Best for safari: May to October. Month by month weather for 140+ countries.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/

Travel Safety Map

Current conditions by neighborhood, before a late walk in Cape Town or Johannesburg.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/travel-safety-map/

Frequently asked questions

the eight questions that come up most

The short answers to what readers ask before booking. Longer detail on each sits in the matching chapter.

Do I need a visa?

No, for most US, EU, and UK passports: 90 days visa-free on a tourist stamp. Passports need 2 blank pages and 30 days validity past the departure date.

Should I self-drive Kruger or book a guided safari?

Self-drive suits a longer stay and a tighter budget. A guided private reserve suits a shorter window, night drives, and off-road access. Full comparison on page 12.

Is South Africa safe?

Safari, the Winelands, and the Garden Route are routine. Central Johannesburg and Cape Town after dark carry real, specific risk. Full breakdown on page 31.

Do I need a car?

Yes, for the coastal half: Winelands, peninsula, and Garden Route all assume a rental. Cape Town's City Bowl itself is walkable with rideshare covering the rest.

Do I need malaria tablets?

For the Kruger lowveld, yes, confirmed with a travel clinic beforehand. Cape Town, the Winelands, and the Garden Route carry no malaria risk.

Can I combine Cape Town and Kruger in one trip?

Yes, by flying between them via Johannesburg rather than driving. Budget at least 16 days for both halves without rushing either.

What is the best time to visit?

May to October for safari, the dry lowveld winter. Cape Town and the coast work well in either half of the year, with November to April warmer and greener.

What is South Africa not in yet?

The live budget-calculator and best-travel-time tools. Costs and months in this guide are Pack Lightly research estimates, flagged as such throughout.

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16. **Potjiekos over coals**. EKK Events, CC BY-SA 4.0, CC BY-SA 4.0.
17. **Sandton skyline**. Wikiguy1101, CC BY-SA 4.0, CC BY-SA 4.0.
18. **Table Mountain**. Daniel Nussbaum, CC BY-SA 3.0, CC BY-SA 3.0.
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Tour data and prices: Viator Partner API, captured July 2026. Author portrait and brand marks: Pack Lightly.

A note on the links in this guide

disclosure and sources · why this guide is free



WRITTEN BY

Wouter van Kemenade

Founder of Pack Lightly. Performance marketing background, data led travel research. Every number in this guide is verified against a source listed below; if a price moves more than 15 percent, the next edition flags it.

This guide is free because some of the booking links inside it are affiliate links. When a reader books a stay, a rental car, or an eSIM through one of those links, the merchant pays Pack Lightly. The reader pays the same price either way.

The pick comes before the partner. A stay area or an activity is chosen for the trip it makes, and where a partner link exists for it that link is used; where none does, the plain link still points there. The commission funds the guide, it does not choose for it.

Questions, corrections, or a place you tested that belongs in the next edition: write to hello@pack-lightly.com.

Partners linked in this edition: **Aviasales** · **Stay22** · **Saily** · **Hostelworld** · **GetYourGuide** · via **Travelpayouts**

SOURCES USED IN THIS EDITION

1. Budget figures: Pack Lightly research estimate, South Africa not yet in the live budget-calculator dataset, captured August 2026.
2. Country scores, vacation type tags, and comparison cost bands: pack-lightly country-comparison tool, captured 2026-08.
3. Seasonal timing: Pack Lightly research estimate, South Africa not yet in the live best-travel-time dataset, captured 2026-08.
4. Food prices: pack-lightly local food and drinks dataset for South Africa, captured 2026-08.
5. Visa terms: South African Department of Home Affairs, dha.gov.za, researched 2026-05-15.
6. Pack Lightly South Africa cluster pages, retrieved 2026-08: the hub · budget · food · safety.

What changed in edition 2026.08: first release on the v2 design standard for South Africa. Not covered here: overland trips into neighboring countries, cruise stopovers, group tours.