

SOUTH AFRICA

Between the Oceans

The Republic of South Africa is situated in the southern part of the African continent, between the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the Indian Ocean to the east. The center of the country is occupied by an ancient plateau with an average altitude of 1.200 meters. The **Drakensberg Mountain** (the Dragon Mountains) in the east are the highest mountain range in South Africa. The **main rivers** are the Limpopo, which empties into the Indian Ocean, and the Orange with its tributary, the Vall, which empties into the Atlantic Ocean. South Africa is rich in **reserves** for wild animals and parks, of which the biggest is Kruger Park, almost as big as Switzerland. South Africa has different **climatic zones**: extreme desert climate in the north-west, subtropical in the east and temperate in the south-west.

The Rainbow Nation

South Africa, also called “the Rainbow Nation”, is a multiethnic and multicultural country, with about 50 million people and a wide variety of cultures, languages and religious beliefs. The majority of people are black Africans, followed by white people, people of mixed ancestry, and people of Asian descent. There are **11** official languages, of which the most spoken are Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, Sepedi, English and Setswana. Most South Africans are multilingual, able to speak more than one language. A large number of South Africans speak English, which is very important in official and commercial public life. The country’s other lingua franca is Zulu. The most widespread **religion** is Christianity, followed by Islam, Hinduism, African traditional belief and Judaism. The national **flag** has 6 colours with a central horizontal Y, representing the unity of the different ethnic groups in South Africa. The **National Anthem** of South Africa is a hybrid song consisting of five stanzas, each written in a different language: Chosa, Zulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans and English. The currency is the Rand.

Capitals and cities

South Africa has **three capitals**:

Pretoria, the administrative capital, home of the Government

Cape Town, the legislative capital, home of the Parliament

Bloemfontein, the judicial capital, home to the Supreme Court of Appeal.

The largest and most important city is Johannesburg, the economic center of the country. Other important center are Port Elizabeth and Durban.

Political System

South Africa is a constitutional parliamentary republic. The parliament is bicameral: the National Council of Provinces (The Upper House) has 90 members, while the National Assembly (the Lower House) has 400 members. Elections for both chambers are held every five years. The government is formed in the Lower House. The leader of the majority party in the National Assembly becomes the head of government and the head of state.