

South Africa



KEY FACTS

Joined Commonwealth:	1931 (Statute of Westminster; left in 1961, rejoined in 1994)
Population:	50,110,000 (2009)
GDP p.c. growth:	1.2% p.a. 1990–2009
UN HDI 2010:	world ranking 110
Official languages:	11 most widely spoken
Time:	GMT plus 2hr
Currency:	rand (R)

Geography

Area:	1,221,038 sq km
Coastline:	2,800km
Capital:	Tshwane (formerly Pretoria)

The Republic of South Africa has land borders with: Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Swaziland. Its sea borders are with the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Lesotho is enclosed within its land area. The country comprises nine provinces: Northern Province, North-West, Mpumalanga, Gauteng (Tshwane–Witwatersrand–Vereeniging), Northern Cape, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Free State and KwaZulu-Natal.

Main towns: Tshwane (administrative capital, Gauteng, pop. 1.68m in 2009), Cape Town (legislative capital, Western Cape, 3.57m), Durban (KwaZulu-Natal, 3.41m), Johannesburg (Gauteng, 2.02m), Soweto (Gauteng, 1.76m), Nelson Mandela Metropole (Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape, 1.15m), Pietermaritzburg (KwaZulu-Natal, 891,600), Benoni (Gauteng, 654,500), Welkom (Free State, 584,700), Bloemfontein (judicial capital, Free State, 583,300), Tembisa (Gauteng, 573,000), Vereeniging (Gauteng, 474,000), Boksburg (Gauteng, 473,100), Sihlangu (KwaZulu-Natal, 463,700), East London (Eastern Cape, 453,200), Krugersdorp (Gauteng, 408,100), Botshabelo (Free State, 400,100), Brakpan (Gauteng, 346,700), Richards Bay (KwaZulu-Natal, 319,100) and Emalaheni (Mpumalanga, 307,900).

Topography: The southern part of the ancient African plateau forms the centre of South Africa, falling through rolling hills and coastal plains to the coastal belt. The Great Escarpment, containing the Drakensberg and Cape mountain ranges, marks the high edge of the plateau. The plateau lies at an altitude of about 1,500m in the south and east, dipping towards the north and west. On the plateau, land is flat or undulating and dotted with round hills or

did you know?

Of the many internationally acclaimed South African writers, two – Nadine Gordimer (in 1991) and John Maxwell Coetzee (in 2003) – have Nobel Prizes; and Coetzee (2000) and Manu Herbstein (Best First Book in 2002) have been overall winners in the Commonwealth Writers' Prize.

Scholarships and fellowships are awarded by South Africa to citizens of other Commonwealth countries under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan.

South Africa hosts the secretariat of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management, and its president, Zandile Kunene, is a South African citizen.

'koppies'. The Limpopo and Orange are the major river systems, although Natal and parts of the Cape are traversed by fast-flowing, seasonal rivers with coastal lagoons. Surface water is in short supply.

Climate: Climate varies with altitude and continental position: Mediterranean climate in the Western Cape; humid subtropical climate on the northern KwaZulu-Natal coast; continental climate of the highveld; and arid Karoo and Kalahari fringes, with a great temperature range, giving very hot summer days and cold dry nights. The south-east trade winds, blowing first over KwaZulu-Natal, are the principal source of precipitation, falling in summer. Winter rains reach the Western Cape.

Environment: The most significant environmental issues are soil erosion, desertification, air pollution and resulting acid rain, and pollution of rivers from agricultural run-off and urban discharges. In a country with relatively few major rivers and lakes, extensive water conservation and control measures are necessary to keep pace with rapid growth in water usage.

Vegetation: Varies with climate, including temperate hardwood forest, dense coastal bush, Mediterranean scrub (including many varieties of aloes and proteas), vast grasslands of the veld dotted with flat-topped thorn trees, and bushveld scrub. South Africa's native flora have been developed as garden flowers all over the world. Forest covers 8% of the land area, with no significant loss of forest cover during 1990–2007. Arable land comprises 12% and permanent cropland less than 1% of the total land area.

Wildlife: South Africa's wildlife, among which are the large mammals characteristic of the African grassland, includes species, such as the white rhino, that are endangered elsewhere. The game reserves such as the Kruger and Hluhluwe are considered among the world's best. The wide range of bird-species includes many migrants from the northern hemisphere. South Africa was a founder member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

Transport: There are 364,130km of roads (17% paved) and 24,490km of railway (about half electrified). This substantial rail network serves not only South Africa with its mining and heavy industries, but also neighbouring countries.

Ports also serve South Africa and its landlocked neighbours: Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The main commercial ports are at Durban, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and East London. Durban is the leading port, with capacity for deep-sea ro-ro vessels and a principal terminal of the 3,100km underground oil pipeline.

International airports are at Bloemfontein, Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth, while East London, Kimberley and Tshwane (Pretoria) are important domestic airports. There are also some 210 licensed aerodromes and 40 heliports.

Society

KEY FACTS 2009

Population per sq km:	41
Life expectancy:	52 years
Net primary enrolment:	87%

Population: 50,110,000 (2009); 61% lives in urban areas and 33% in urban agglomerations of more than 1 million people; growth 1.4% p.a. 1990–2009; birth rate 22 per 1,000 people (38 in 1970); life expectancy 52 years (53 in 1970 and 61 in 1990).

People of African origin constitute 79.0% of the population (2001 census), European origin 9.6%, mixed descent 8.9% ('coloureds') and Asian origin 2.5%. The African linguistic groups comprise Zulu (23.8% of the total population), Xhosa (17.6%), Pedi (9.4%), Tswana (8.2%), Sotho (7.9%), Tsonga (4.4%), Swati (2.7%), Venda (2.3%) and several smaller groups. The 'coloureds' include descendants of slaves brought from Malaya, Indonesia and Madagascar, and the Khoi-Khoi people of the Cape. There is also a substantial flow of inward migration of people seeking employment, most from neighbouring countries such as Lesotho, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Language: Official languages are Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Sesotho sa Leboa (Northern Sotho), Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu.

Religion: Christians 80% (2001 census), with a wide range of denominations; and minorities of Muslims, Hindus and Jews. Traditional and Christian forms of worship are often blended.

Media: Among the many dailies in English are *Business Day*, *Cape Argus*, *Cape Times*, *The Citizen* and *The Star* (Johannesburg). Leading Afrikaans-language dailies are *Beeld* (Johannesburg) and *Die Burger* (Cape Town). The most influential national weeklies are *Financial Mail*, *Mail & Guardian*, *The Sunday Independent* and *Sunday Times*.

State-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) provides a comprehensive range of national and regional radio stations covering 11 languages and an external service for a pan-African audience, Channel Africa. There are very many private radio stations. SABC also operates three national TV networks and two pay-TV services. Many private TV channels are available nationally; and private TV network M-Net targets a pan-African audience.

Some 59% of households have TV sets (2006). There are 83 personal computers (2005) and 88 internet users (2009) per 1,000 people.

Education: Public spending on education was 5.4% of GDP in 2009. There are nine years of compulsory education starting at age seven. The school year starts in January.

In January 2009, the Council on Higher Education recognised 23 public universities, including 2 concentrating on distance education and 6 universities of technology. It recognised 79 private higher education institutions and a further 15 were provisionally registered. Literacy among people aged 15–24 is 97% (2008).

The Department of Education is running a mass adult-literacy campaign during 2008–12. The first part of the campaign was intended to reach 4.7 million people who have not had any formal education, and to train some 80,000 tutors.

South Africa hosted the 16th Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers (16CCEM), in Cape Town in December 2006. The conference was attended by delegations from 36 member countries and had the theme 'Access to Quality Education: for the Good of All'. Commonwealth education ministers meet every three years to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest.

Health: Durban Academic Hospital in KwaZulu-Natal, four new hospitals in Northern Province and many new health centres were built in the late 1990s. 91% of the population uses an improved drinking water source and 77% have access to adequate sanitation facilities (2009). Infant mortality was 43 per 1,000 live births in 2009 (89 in 1960).

AIDS is a dire problem. In 2009, 17.8% of people aged 15–49 were HIV positive. For many years the government appeared unable to accept the severity of the looming problem and failed to take measures to contain it. By 2000, when it became involved in controversy over its claim that AIDS was not caused by HIV, there were – by some international estimates – more HIV-positive cases in South Africa than any other country. By April 2002, however, the government had committed itself to lead the battle against HIV/AIDS, making antiretroviral drugs available through the health service.

Communications: Country code 27; internet domain '.za'. Mobile phone coverage extends to most of the country. Internet cafes are located in most parts of the country.

There are 86 main telephone lines and 927 mobile phone subscriptions per 1,000 people (2009).

Public holidays: New Year's Day, Human Rights Day (21 March), Freedom Day (27 April), Workers' Day (1 May), Youth Day (16 June), National Women's Day (9 August), Heritage Day (24 September), Day of Reconciliation (16 December), Christmas Day and Day of Goodwill (26 December).

Religious festivals whose dates vary from year to year include Good Friday and Family Day/Easter Monday.

Economy

KEY FACTS 2009

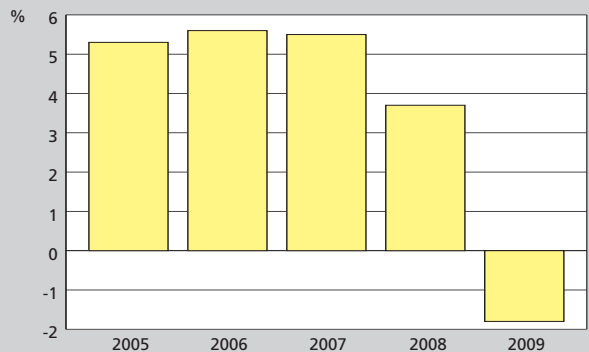
GNI:	US\$284.3bn
GNI p.c.:	US\$5,760
GDP growth:	3.6% p.a. 2005–09
Inflation:	7.3% p.a. 2005–09

Overview: Apartheid left South Africa with unequal distributions of income, distorted patterns of population settlement, imbalances in skills, low productivity and a large and inefficient bureaucracy. Furthermore, in the last decade of the old regime, prolonged recession (from low gold and other commodity prices, high expenditure on security forces, economic sanctions and disinvestment) led to weakening of the economic fabric. GDP grew by 1.0% p.a. 1980–90.

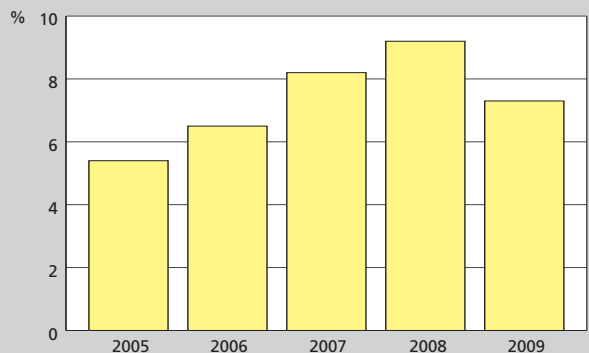
In August 2000, the government announced a programme of privatisation in telecoms, energy and transport, accounting for a substantial part of the state industrial sector. The large state companies would first be restructured and then privatised. But since this programme was opposed by many government supporters progress was slow.

From the mid-1990s the economy picked up, led by manufacturing, tourism and financial services. It slowed in 1998, then continued to grow steadily from 1999. The government has promoted a programme of black economic empowerment, notably through the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act (2003), which gives previously marginalised groups opportunities

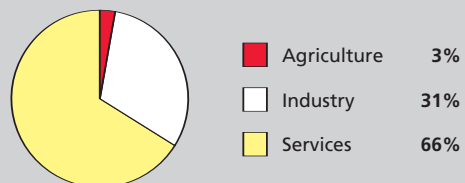
Real Growth in GDP



Inflation



GDP by Sector (2009)



that were not available to them in the apartheid era. Strong domestic demand, as a result of rising disposable income and wealth, has driven the good steady growth during the 2000s, averaging 4.7% p.a. during 2004–08, with relatively low inflation. This long period of good growth was interrupted in the world economic downturn of 2008–09. GDP expanded by 3.7% in 2008 and contracted by 1.8% in 2009, but recovered in 2010 when the annual rate was about 3%.

Trade: Exports of goods and services account for 35% of GDP (2008). Principal exports are gold, metals, metal products, diamonds, food, drinks, tobacco, machinery and transport equipment.

Mining: The country has the world's largest reserves of gold, manganese, platinum, chromium, andalusite, vanadium and alumino-silicates. It has substantial amounts of antimony, asbestos, coal, copper, diamonds, iron ore, lead, oil and gas, titanium, uranium, vermiculite, zinc and zirconium. Mining accounts for 10% of GDP (2009) and, with minerals processing, more than half of export revenues.

Offshore oil production from fields south-west of the Cape started in 1997, and substantial reserves of natural gas were discovered off the west coast in 2001.

Constitution

Status: Republic with executive president
Legislature: Parliament

The constitution came into effect in February 1997. It provides *inter alia* for the supremacy of the constitution, a federal state, a bill of rights, universal adult suffrage, regular multiparty elections, recognition of traditional leaders, 11 official languages, and democracy-buttressing institutions such as the Public Protector, and Commissions for Human Rights and Gender Equality. It also includes a Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities.

The bicameral legislature comprises the 400-seat National Assembly – elected every five years by universal adult suffrage under proportional representation – and the 90-seat National Council of

Provinces with direct representation of members of provincial governments. The president is elected by the National Assembly and can serve a maximum of two five-year terms. The deputy president and cabinet are appointed by the president.

Politics

Last elections: April 2009
Next elections: 2014
Head of state: President Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma
Head of government: the president
Ruling party: African National Congress

South Africa's first non-racial and democratic elections were held in April 1994, with Commonwealth, UN and other teams of observers present. The observers concluded that despite technical problems during the elections, the results were an overwhelming expression of the will of the people. The elections gave the African National Congress (ANC) an overall majority with 252 seats, and 63% of the votes. The National Party (NP) obtained 20% and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) 11%.



History

Stone-age Khoisan hunter-gatherers inhabited the region for about 8,000 years. At some period before AD 300 iron-age communities of pastoralists (almost certainly people of the Bantu groups) were living in the interior. The San people (Bushmen) were pushed towards the hostile desert areas; the Khoi-Khoi (Hottentots) added pastoralism to their economy, possibly learned from the more advanced and powerful Bantu, and inhabited the South-West Cape.

People of the Bantu groups, constituting South Africa's majority, are related to the peoples of other east and southern African countries, and come from four main linguistic groups: the Nguni, Sotho-Tswana, Venda and Tsonga. The Nguni (including Zulu, Xhosa and Swazi peoples) are by far the largest.

The first European settlers – Dutch farmers sent to re-provision ships of the Dutch East India Company – arrived at the Cape in 1652. They were joined in 1688 by Huguenots (French Protestant refugees), followed by groups from Belgium, Britain, France and Germany, and augmented by often highly skilled slaves from Indonesia and Malaya.

Control of the Cape passed from the Dutch to the French and, after 1814, to the British. The European and racially mixed groups developed the language of Afrikaans, a sense of folk identity as Afrikaners, or Boers (farmers), and a religious identity as strict Calvinists. They developed a ranching-centred style of agriculture suitable to the terrain (and similar to that of the Bantu peoples) and, as their numbers grew and the distant administrative authority became more irksome and foreign, migrated towards the interior.

Continuing friction on the Eastern Cape frontier and the abolition of slavery by Britain triggered a significant migration, the Great Trek, which from 1836–38 onwards brought them into direct conflict with the African peoples. While the black societies welcomed the traders and missionaries, between them and the Boers was direct competition for land.

The Africans were themselves in upheaval in the 19th century. In Natal, a military genius, Shaka, had moulded the formerly insignificant Zulus into a powerful fighting force and developed an economy of war. The Xhosas had been weakened by 100 years of battle with the white settlers along the Eastern Cape frontier. The Boers trekked inland, defeating first the Ndebele and then other tribes, and establishing the Boer Republics of the Transvaal (South African Republic) and Orange Free State.

Meanwhile, Britain was also expanding, taking Natal in 1843 and then following the Boers inland. The first Indians came in 1860 to work as indentured labourers in the Natal sugar fields and, in 1867, diamonds were discovered, triggering adventurer immigrants from many countries. Gold was discovered in 1871 – in a Boer Republic. Britain went to war with the Boers and, with difficulty, defeated them. Having also finally defeated the Zulus, Britain gained control of all South Africa. The four provinces were united in 1910 into the dominion of the Union of South Africa, and the country's independence was formally recognised under the Statute of Westminster in 1931.

The country had come to independence with a constitution which effectively denied black rights. Most areas excluded black, coloured and Indian people from the vote. Resistance to racial discrimination was begun by Mahatma Gandhi, who arrived in South Africa as a young lawyer in 1893. He led the first passive resistance to the pass laws in 1906. In 1912, the African National Congress (ANC) was founded, to fight for full constitutional rights for blacks.

However, South Africa steadily reduced black rights. In 1913, land acts severely limited the rights of blacks to own land or live in certain areas. In 1936, black voters were removed from the common voters' roll in the Cape.

The apartheid years: In 1948, the National Party (NP) came to power on an electoral platform of apartheid, and moved rapidly in enacting a policy of racial segregation into law. The ANC, in



Nelson Mandela, president of the ANC, was elected president of South Africa at the first sitting of the National Assembly in May 1994. Although the ANC had an overall majority, in the interests of achieving consensus, a Government of National Unity (GNU) was formed, with a cabinet comprising 18 ANC, six NP, three IFP MPs and one independent MP. Mandela appointed Thabo Mbeki (ANC) and F W de Klerk (NP) as deputy presidents. The then ANC Secretary-General Cyril Ramaphosa was elected Chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly. In June 1994 South Africa rejoined the Commonwealth and reclaimed its seat at the UN.

The NP withdrew from the GNU in 1996 to form the parliamentary opposition, but the IFP remained in the national government, although this collaboration was not reflected in the provincial government of KwaZulu-Natal. In October 1996 a new constitution was approved by the National Assembly and came into force in February 1997.

At the 50th national conference of the ANC in December 1997, Mandela stood down as party president, making way for Thabo Mbeki.

In the second democratic general election in June 1999, the ANC received 66% of the votes, the Democratic Party (DP) 9%, the IFP just under 9%, the (renamed) New National Party (NNP) 7% and the newly formed United Democratic Movement (UDM) 4%. With 266 out of the National Assembly's 400 seats, the ANC was able to command a two-thirds majority (necessary for changes to the constitution) with the support of the Minority Front, which had one seat. The DP replaced the NNP as the official opposition.

Mbeki succeeded Mandela as president and IFP leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi was reappointed as home affairs minister, while the 22-member cabinet was partially reshuffled with Jacob Zuma becoming deputy president.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established with Archbishop Desmond Tutu as its chair in 1996 to provide a public forum for the personal accounts of human rights abuses during the apartheid years. It was attended by some 7,000 individuals (including ANC leaders, but not Buthelezi or de Klerk) and delivered its final report in October 1998. People attended

► collaboration with the Indian Congress, Coloured People's Congress and Congress of Democrats (mainly white communists and anti-racists), launched the Freedom Charter and, in 1952, the Defiance Campaign in response. More apartheid laws, separating education and public amenities, followed. Then, in 1960, the police at Sharpeville shot and killed 69 peaceful demonstrators. The ANC, Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and other anti-apartheid movements were banned and went under ground or into exile. The ANC adopted a policy of armed struggle and Nelson Mandela, as head of its new military wing, launched a sabotage campaign. In 1963 Mandela, Walter Sisulu and other ANC leaders were sentenced to life imprisonment.

After the Sharpeville massacre the world woke up to apartheid. South Africa became a pariah nation, forced out of the Commonwealth and increasingly isolated internationally. The UN declared apartheid to be a danger to world peace in 1961 and a crime against humanity in 1966.

During the 1970s some 3 million people were forcibly resettled in 'homelands'. Further shockwaves ran through the international media when, in 1976, schoolchildren in Soweto protesting against school classes in the Afrikaans language were shot by police and this sparked a violent uprising throughout the country in which some 600 mainly young people were killed. Popular activist Steve Biko (a young leader of the Black Consciousness Movement) was beaten to death while in police custody in 1977, and his name became a rallying cry of resistance.

In 1983, the government introduced a new tricameral parliament, which gave representation (in separate chambers) to white, coloured and Indian people, but excluded blacks. Intended as an act of appeasement, this aroused new united opposition, led by a new umbrella body, the United Democratic Front, with strong representation from the churches and trade unions as well as political parties. In 1985, the Congress of South African Trade

Unions was founded. Despite the powerful police and military apparatus, black resistance intensified.

From the mid-1980s, the Commonwealth, USA and EU introduced political, sporting, cultural and economic sanctions. The Commonwealth was consistently among the leaders in international action against apartheid, for example with its Gleneagles Agreement against sporting contacts with South Africa (1977). The Commonwealth also led the peaceful dismantling of apartheid, starting in 1985 with establishment of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group (led by Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser).

Within South Africa, political protest grew, and began to take an increasingly violent form, influenced by *Umkhonto we Sizwe* ('Spear of the Nation', the military wing of the ANC). The country was becoming ungovernable, and its economy disastrously weakened.

The ending of apartheid: In 1989, F W de Klerk succeeded P W Botha as president, and immediately began negotiations to unscramble apartheid. Within months Walter Sisulu and seven other imprisoned leaders were released and the bans on the ANC, PAC and SACP were lifted. In February 1990, Mandela was released. Apartheid laws were repealed. In August 1990, the ANC suspended the armed struggle, and began negotiations with the government.

Political violence intensified within South Africa, with fierce competition between the ANC and the Zulu traditionalist Inkatha Freedom Party. Nonetheless, all-party negotiations – the Convention for a Democratic South Africa – began in December 1991. An all-white referendum showed that the whites were in favour of abolishing apartheid and agreement was reached in June 1993. A multiparty transitional executive council was formed to partner the government until the elections for a new parliament could be held. As the reform process gathered momentum from 1989, international sanctions were lifted.

hearings on a voluntary basis and were then entitled to apply to the TRC for amnesty from prosecution.

In June 2000, the DP and the NNP merged to become the Democratic Alliance under the leadership of Tony Leon.

In the April 2004 elections the ANC won a decisive mandate, taking 70% of the votes, while the Democratic Alliance took 12% and the IFP 7%. The ANC achieved a majority in seven of the nine provinces and gained the two-thirds majority needed to change the constitution, though they had not promised any changes in their manifesto.

Following a High Court trial in which Deputy President Jacob Zuma was implicated in corruption, in June 2005 Mbeki announced his dismissal from the government. He was subsequently charged with corruption and rape, and was suspended from his ANC role. In May 2006 Zuma was acquitted of rape and in September 2006 of corruption. He resumed his duties as deputy ANC leader after the earlier acquittal.

Leon retired as leader of the opposition Democratic Alliance in May 2007 and was succeeded by Helen Zille, Mayor of Cape Town.

In December 2007, Jacob Zuma defeated Mbeki in the ANC leadership elections, paving the way for his candidacy in the 2009 presidential elections. Shortly after this the corruption charge against Zuma was renewed.

In May 2008, violent attacks on immigrants from neighbouring countries occurred throughout the country but mainly in Gauteng province; with reports of several dozen deaths and displacement of thousands of immigrant Africans.

Zuma's path to presidency appeared clear in September 2008, when a judge ruled that the corruption case against him could not proceed on the grounds that there could have been political meddling in his prosecution. In the same month, the ANC National Executive Committee 'recalled' Mbeki from the presidency, he resigned, and parliament elected ANC deputy leader Kgalema Motlanthe to succeed him.

A new political party, the Congress of the People (COPE), was launched in December 2008 under the leadership of Mosiuoa Lekota, former chairman of the ANC and a close ally of Mbeki. In January 2009, following an appeal by the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), the Supreme Court of Appeal overturned the September 2008 judgment, effectively reinstating the corruption charge against Zuma. A few weeks before the elections were due, however, the NPA dropped the charge, citing evidence of political manipulation of the case.

Facing the challenge of COPE and the Democratic Alliance, the ANC nevertheless won 66% of votes in the parliamentary elections in April 2009, albeit just short of the two-thirds majority that it required to be able to change the constitution. The Democratic Alliance, led by Zille, received 17% of votes and COPE 7%. At the first sitting of the National Assembly in May 2009, Zuma was formally elected as president; and he then appointed Motlanthe deputy president. COPE's candidate in the presidential contest was Bishop Mvume Dandala rather than its leader, Lekota.

International relations

South Africa is a member of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, African Union, Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, Non-Aligned Movement, Southern African Customs Union, Southern African Development Community, United Nations and World Trade Organization.

Traveller information

Local laws and conventions: All drug-related offences carry severe penalties.

South Africa is one of the most multicultural countries in the world, and social etiquette and culture vary between the different ethnic groups. Handshaking is the most common greeting.

Dress is generally casual, though usually formal for business meetings. Appointments are necessary and punctuality is expected. Business cards are commonly exchanged. Mid-December to mid-January is the holiday period and is not a good time for scheduling business meetings. Office hours are Mon–Fri 0830–1630.

Immigration and customs: Passports must be valid for at least 30 days from the intended length of stay. Visitors from the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia and most European Union countries do not require visas. All other nationals should contact their local embassy for visa requirements. Passports must have at least one page left blank, or two pages if a visa is required.

Plant and plant materials – including margarine, honey and other vegetable oils – are restricted imports. Narcotics, flick knives, ammunition, explosives, meat, processed cheese and other dairy products, and obscene literature are all prohibited imports.

A yellow fever vaccination certificate will be required by those arriving from an infected area.

Travel within the country: Traffic drives on the left and visitors can drive on a national driving licence if it is in English. International car hire companies are available in most city centres and airports. The road network is well maintained and mostly tarred except for the very rural areas and some of the game parks.

The national roads are tolled but provide good facilities; visitors should note that credit cards cannot be used to buy petrol. Speed limits are 60kph in urban areas and 120kph on the main roads and are strictly enforced with steep fines. Seatbelts are obligatory and no additional petrol is allowed to be carried other than in the fuel tank.

A reliable national bus network connects much of the country and runs air-conditioned coaches which provide good facilities for passengers. The country is well served with domestic airlines that link the main towns, and intercity rail services, though slow, are a reliable way of travelling across the country. There are also luxury trains that run between Cape Town and Tshwane (Pretoria).

All towns have a good bus network. Taxis are widely available in the major cities, and fares are charged by distance and travel time; for longer routes fares should be negotiated.

Travel health: Medical facilities are good in towns and cities but limited in rural areas. Doctors and hospitals require cash payment, and treatment can be expensive. Visitors should ensure they have comprehensive health insurance.

Malaria is present in the eastern half of the country, and visitors should ensure they take insect repellent and suitable clothing to avoid mosquito bites. Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, tetanus, rabies and typhoid are also present. Visitors should avoid swimming or paddling in fresh water due to the risk of bilharzia.

Tap water is safe to drink and bottled water is available everywhere.

Money: Money can be changed at banks, bureaux de change and some hotels. Credit cards are widely accepted, though Visa and Mastercard are preferred. ATMs are located in all towns and cities. Travellers cheques are accepted at banks, restaurants, hotels and some shops, and should be taken in US dollars or pounds sterling to avoid additional exchange rate charges. Banking hours are Mon–Fri 0900–1530 and Sat 0830–1100.

There were 7,012,000 tourist arrivals in 2009.

Further information

South African Government Portal: www.gov.za

South African Government Information (public information source): www.info.gov.za

Commonwealth Secretariat: www.thecommonwealth.org

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