

# Orientation and general information about South Africa

**Hello Travelers,**

This is an updated letter from my 2023 group. I've made some changes and edits. Not much has changed since a year ago. I spoke to my Cape Town guide (Claudia) this morning. She's originally from North Carolina, but has lived in Cape Town now for 36 years. She knows the country well, and her accent that isn't hard to decipher.

Please read through this letter and let me know if you've got any questions or concerns. I'm still fine-tuning the itinerary, which will be posted separately in a few days.

I think you'll find the customs and practices in these countries to be a bit different than places you might have visited in Europe or Asia. I try to be complete, but might have missed a topic or two. If you have additional questions, please send me an email. I'll compile any new information, then send a supplemental letter out. Much of my communication going forward will be via whatsapp.

## **Arrival**

If you're coming in to Cape Town to meet the scheduled transportation from the airport to the hotel you're covered. If you plan to come early or stay late, I strongly suggest Uber as a good alternative to taxis or pre-arranged hotel transportation. I noticed that the hotel I've booked prior to the group arrival has offered transportation from the airport at about \$55. Uber is roughly ½ that. If you're not familiar with the app, download it now. You must add a credit card for payment in advance or it won't work. Uber allows the charges to go to your card without worrying about exchange rates, tipping or whether your driver is ripping you off. Lyft does not seem to be an option in Cape Town.

The detailed itinerary, released soon, will have specific times to meet at Cape Town Airport.

## **Weather**

I'm looking forward to another summer in the southern hemisphere. Temperatures run warm to hot for late January and February. Humidity is relatively low. Plenty of daylight with sunrise about 6AM. Sun set about 8:00 PM.

<b>City</b>	<b>average high</b>	<b>average low</b>	<b>Inches of rain/month</b>
Cape Town	85	63	0.5
Port Elizabeth	83	61	1.4

### **Dress**

We're casual the entire tour. No need for dress apparel. Comfort is the key-Layer up in the morning, remove layers as needed. Comfortable walking shoes are a must, as is a light-weight rain jacket. Consider a sun hat.

It's important to bring the appropriate gear for safari. Comfortable shoes, jacket for the morning and evening, sun hat, bug spray. Not advisable to wear shorts in the bush. Long pants are a better idea. I recently purchased convertible, light weight hiking pants at Columbia Sportswear. The legs zip off, making them ideal for cool morning temps, warming in the afternoon.

### **Passports and Visa**

There is currently no visa required for South Africa for Americans traveling to the country for less than 90 days.

Americans traveling to South Africa should have a minimum of 30 days validity remaining on their passport.

Take a photo of your passport with your phone. It's also a good idea to photocopy the data page and zip it into a suitcase pocket. Leave a copy with a friend or relative that is able to fax or email that copy should you need it. It's much easier to replace a lost or stolen passport if you have a facsimile to present.

Rick Steves and people that have used them, swear by a money belt. I've always found them to be somewhat uncomfortable, but you may want to give it a try. Please! No wallets in back pockets! Purses and backpacks should always be zipped closed and held in front of you in crowded situations. See the section on RFID protection under Banking.

## **Vaccines and Health**

The CDC has a long list of suggested vaccinations for travel to South Africa. The list is too long to print here, but suggested are hepatitis A&B, and some others. Here is a link to the CDC recommendations for each country. We are NOT traveling to or from any area with Yellow Fever, nor will we be traveling to a malarial zone.

[South Africa](#)

Keep in mind that the CDC also recommends that travelers to the USA are vaccinated against Hepatitis A&B and Meningitis as well. You may want to check with your physician on this. Honestly, I think the CDC goes a little overboard with their vaccine parameters.

There are currently no Covid vaccine or quarantine restrictions in place for South Africa.

## **Politics, Safety, and security**

South Africa continues to be on the state department warning list for violence and crime against tourists. These stats are largely from large cities in the north of the country. Johannesburg and Praetoria are not friendly places, which is precisely why they were not included in this tour itinerary. Cape Town depends greatly on tourism and the authorities have taken measures to combat crime. That said, it's still not a good idea to wander on your own after dark.

The Western Cape is the only South African province not under the control of the African Nation Congress, which has had a history of corruption. The Western Cape gives more priority to keeping the infrastructure intact, with an eye to keeping tourists coming.

Common sense applies. Be alert and aware of your surroundings. You need to be extra alert just about the time your guard is down. Searching for an item in your purse, making a phone call, checking a bag, taking a photo. These are all times when you're distracted, flashing a green light to the people who want what you've got.

There is safety in numbers. Don't flash signs of wealth. Leave your jewelry at home. Be especially alert at the ATM and go with a friend. The number to phone police in South Africa is 10111.

**For those people coming early or staying late in South Africa, there are certain precautions to know if you are renting a car.** It's not always easy to follow the advice of staying on main highways and main roads. It's suggested that you take the time in advance to map out your route in advance. It's not always a given that Google Maps won't route you through a bad part of town. Some of the Townships close to the airport are places that you should steer clear of.

Downtown Cape Town has its share of crime in the wee hours. If you go out late in the evening, buddy up. We're staying in the pier area, which is statistically safer than central Cape Town.

### **Suggested Gratuities**

It is customary to tip any local guide \$4-\$6 for their services. Coach drivers are generally tipped \$3- \$4 per person, per day. Tip the equivalent in local currency, not in dollars. It may be impossible for that person to convert dollars.

I will pass an envelope for the driver and guide who will be with us for extended periods. For daily guides and your safari guide, feel free to tip individually based on your experience.

### **Punctuality**

I just returned from a group tour of Costa Rica and was perplexed by a few of the participants who were consistently late for the scheduled coach departure. We are on a tight schedule on some of our tour days. Our appointments are generally times and we're expected at a certain time. I want to be on time for appointments. Please be ready to travel at the appointed departure time.

### **Currency**

South Africa uses the Rand (ZAR). Right now, \$1 is equal to approximately 18 rand. This exchange has been fluctuating wildly over the past few years and the value of the dollar to the rand is higher now than at any point in the past 10 months. To convert prices from Rand to USD, multiply the Rand amount by .055 for the US equivalent. 500 Rand x .055= \$27.50.

## **Spending overseas**

The ATM or Bancomat is the best way to go. Plan on a trip to the ATM every 2-3 days to withdraw that day's cash. You get the best exchange rate and won't have to worry about whether a place will take a credit card.

Credit cards give you about the best exchange rate you will find. Many bank cards charge 1-2% for purchases made in foreign currency, which offsets the beneficial rate somewhat. Chase Bank and a few others offer cards that do not charge the foreign exchange fee.

Credit cards offer a very good exchange on your purchase. Make sure you keep your receipts. I have found that Visa cards seem to have the widest acceptance, followed by Mastercard. It is sometimes difficult to get a vendor to accept American Express, perhaps because of their fee structure. There are still some vendors overseas who shy away from credit cards, likely due to the roughly 4% processing fees.

I have updated this information over the years. In its last iteration, I spent much time discussing the slow acceptance of US banks to issue "chip and pin" or "chip and sign" cards.

A vendor may wait for you to enter your pin to finalize a credit transaction. Simply say you have no pin.

Bringing US Currency and hoping to exchange banknotes is a mistake. Banks keep shorter hours. Some don't do foreign exchange, and many others won't like the condition of the bills you want to change.

These are all problems I have encountered that can burn an entire afternoon. You should be able to order some dirhams or rands from your bank if you want to arrive there with some (though it's not necessary). There is usually a fee and you have to allow time for your bank to secure the currency. It's easiest just to hit the ATM at the airport or the nearest one to your destination. At each ATM Stop, get enough cash to last you for a couple days.

It used to be that my bank wanted to know the details of my international itinerary. They were able to compare my odd overseas expenditures against the country list I provided.

Now, they don't want to be bothered. It's easier for them to deny a charge first, then have you, either by text or email, explain that the charges are valid. Be prepared for this. Despite my spending habits and the algorithms the banks use, it's generally a problem.

There are many ATMs in Dubai and South Africa. Get enough cash to last 2-3 days. Most shops and restaurants will take Visa or Mastercard. American Express is accepted in far fewer establishments.

Select an ATM that is connected to a bank. The stand-alone machines charge a higher rate and fees.

Another Note: I have a wallet that is RFID protected. Some credit and debit cards can be read remotely using a reader. Add a level of protection by purchasing RFID sleeves for your cards. You can also find wallets online.

### **Electrical Issues**

You will need a current convertor for South Africa.

For South Africa there are four associated plug types, types C, D, M and N. Plug type C is the plug which has two round pins, plug type D is the plug which has three round pins in a triangular pattern and plug types M and N both have three round pins. South Africa operates on a 230V supply voltage and 50Hz. These are, in order, C, D, M, N. The last (N) is now the most commonly found outlet in SA.



Keep in mind that your computer, phone charger, and most other electronics have convertors built into the cords. Exceptions to other items you'd plug in are hair dryers, curling irons, etc. Buy an adapter on Amazon or your nearest Target.

### **Travel Insurance**

Though not mandated, it's worth considering. Travel insurance programs likely won't provide coverage if the world shuts down again, but it will reimburse you for your tour costs if you have to cancel at the last minute. Many policies now provide compensation if you're forced to pay out of pocket to isolate. There are two companies that have done a better job than most at paying and being responsive to claims...

<https://www.allianztravelinsurance.com/>

<https://www.generalitravelinsurance.com/>

Roughly ½ of my clients purchase a policy. I had a last-minute cancellation for a Costa Rica tour in early December, caused by a traffic accident on the way to the airport. Her auto insurance (or the guy who hit her) may reimburse for some of the missed trip. If she'd had a policy in place, she would have been compensated.

### **Airport Check in**

Please check in for your flight at least 2 hours prior to flight time. Some of the airlines advocate for 3 hours, but I find that I generally have a lot of time to spare after check in.

I always recommend an early check in for a trip like this. You'll need to have your passport and confirmation/ticket number for your flight. While masks currently are not mandated, you may want to bring a few with you in case the rules change.

### **Baggage ID**

Be certain to attach a name tag with to each of your bags.

### **Packing your bags**

Please try to limit your bags to one large bag and one small, carryon bag. Anything more than this will not be on our plane when we fly to the Safari site! There are laundry opportunities in most hotels. Our coach will have limited baggage capacity while we're on the road.

Most international carriers will allow 23kg (about 50lbs) for checked bags. Our flight to Cape Town limits your bag to 20kg (44 lbs). Again, hotel laundry is quick and relatively affordable.

There are a few excellent websites dedicated to the art of packing for a trip. I have reproduced some of that information here, but you may want to visit some of these sites yourself.

The links are [www.oratory.com/travel](http://www.oratory.com/travel), and <https://www.ricksteves.com/travel-tips/packing-light/ricks-packing-list>. Please do what you can to reduce the size of your bag. Make sure you have a bag with wheels.

### **Telephones**

Call your provider to see what they recommend for phone coverage overseas. I've typically found that plans that cover calls in Europe are very pricey and sometimes require the purchase of a new device. This has changed somewhat in the past year or so. Call your service provider in advance of the trip to see what they can set up for you.

I currently use T-Mobile which has an international plan with unlimited text and data. It costs me .25 per minute to call, but calls on Whatsapp to other Whatsapp users are free.

**If you're not using it already, Whatsapp is a great way to message and talk while you're overseas. <https://about.facebook.com/technologies/whatsapp/>. I set up a group for my past five or six tours.**

**It's an excellent group communication tool. I have mobile contact details for some of you. If you think I may not, please do the following. Download the app. It's free. Text your name and number to me (from the app) at 425 417 3322 to be added to this group.**

The app allows you to text for free to others using the app. Voice calls are free to, though the VOIP isn't always the best vocal quality.

It's important to note that this app will only work if you have an international call/data plan or if you happen to be connected via wi-fi. Please contact your



mobile phone provider to see about short term international calling plans. They're more affordable than they used to be.

### **Document photocopies**

On my last trip to Italy, two of my guests lost their passports to a thief in the Venice train station. You can't always prevent these things from happening, and I have rarely had to deal with the issue. One thing that eased the pain of the experience was that these clients had printed copies of all their documents and pictures on their mobile phone. We were able to get documents reissued in 24 hours, but it cost a whole day of travel back and forth to Florence.

### **Getting around**

We've got a 32-passenger coach chartered for our time in South Africa. Plenty of room to distance on board if you like. We don't have any long travel days on the coach. I despise mandatory masking, but would ask that you voluntarily wear one if you have any sort of respiratory issue or head cold.

### **Your Safari Primer:**

Included in our two full days in the bush...

- Safari drive twice daily
- All meals and selected beverages
- Complimentary mini-bar
- River cruises and [guided bush walks](#)
- Luxury suite with king-size bed (twin or double)
- Private plunge pool and viewing deck
- En-suite bathroom
- In-side shower and generous bath
- Hair dryer
- Air-conditioning
- Tea and coffee facilities
- WiFi/Internet connectivity (in lodge and suites)
- Safe
- Telephone

## What to pack for our time in the Bush

### What clothes should I bring?

During **summer** and spring months we recommend cool clothes as well as some warm clothes including perhaps a spring coat and/or raincoat as evenings can be quite cool. Remember to also pack comfortable walking shoes if you would like to enjoy our bush walks. Formal wear is not necessary for dinner.

### What else should I pack?

Sun screen, mosquito repellent, a hat/cap and if you have your own binoculars you might like to bring those, although we do have a number of binoculars for guests to use.

### Are there hair dryers?

Yes, all chalets, suites and luxury tented suites have hair dryers.

### Is there a shop at Kariega?

The Main Lodge Curio shop serves Main Lodge, Ukhozi Lodge and The Homestead. River Lodge and Settlers Drift have their own Curio shops. All Curio shops stock safari memorabilia as well as basic necessity items ranging from clothing and jackets to basic toiletry items as well as insect repellent, sunblock and batteries. Please note that our Curio shops only accept South African currency.

## Facilities and Accommodation

### Is there Wi-Fi on the game reserve?

Yes, Wi-Fi is available in all lodge main areas and at reception. Wi-Fi is not available in the chalets and suites.

### What is the electricity supply and do we need to bring adaptors?

The South African electricity supply is 220/230 volts AC 50HZ. Our suites and chalets have 110-volt outlets for electric shavers and appliances. Some US-made appliances may need a transformer. The South African plugs are 15 amp 3-prong or 5 amp 2-prong, with round pins. Reception can also provide adaptors.

### What does 'selected beverages' mean?

Nonalcoholic beverages, local beers, wine and spirits.

### Do you cater for Haalal, Kosher or Vegan diets?

Kariega Game Reserve caters Halaal dishes but unfortunately not Kosher. Vegan options can be arranged with prior notice. If you have any other specific dietary requirements, please let us know, and we will try our best to accommodate you. (Brad will let the camp know)

### Are there laundry facilities at Kariega?

Yes, Kariega offers laundry facilities at all our lodges at an additional fee.

### Does Kariega offer room service?

Due to the nature and design of the lodges, we do not offer room service at Kariega.

## Game Drives

Do you offer private game drive vehicles?

We do not offer private game drive vehicles. Guests enjoy two game drives per day (morning and afternoon) with their ranger in a 4x4 open safari vehicle together with other guests that are assigned to the same ranger.

How many guests per game drive vehicle?

**Settlers Drift safari vehicles take up to max six guests per vehicle.**

Are game drive vehicles covered?

Our game drive vehicles are not covered however we do have ponchos for when it rains and blankets for when it is cold.

**That's it for now. I will have a name list to distribute on the tour. Please email me with any additional questions you may have. [brad@nwtravel.com](mailto:brad@nwtravel.com)**

**Updates will come via email and whatsapp as we get closer to departure.**