Country profile of

South Africa

and

Etiquette and Customs

September 2009
Delegation for relations with South Africa

Sources:
Country profile: Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Costums and Etiquette: Kwintessential

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Etiquette and Customs in South Africa
Delegation for relations with South Africa

Area: 1,228,376 sq km  
Population: 48.7 million (est mid-2008)  
Capital city: Pretoria/Tshwane (1.25 million)  
People: African/Black, white, coloured, Indian/Asian  
Languages: South Africa has eleven officially recognised languages: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Sepedi, Sesotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu.  
Religion(s): All principal religions are represented in South Africa, but the majority is Christian (nearly 85% at the 1996 census).  
Currency: (ZAR) Rand (100 cents = 1 Rand)  

Major political parties:  
- African National Congress (ANC)  
- Democratic Alliance (DA)  
- The Congress of the People (COPE)  
- Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP)  
- United Democratic Movement (UDM)  
- Independent Democrats (ID)  
- South African Communist Party (SACP)  

Government: ANC Alliance - ANC/SACP/Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)  
Head of State: President Mr Jacob Zuma  
Foreign Minister: Maite Nkoana-Mashabane  
Membership of international groupings/organisations: United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Commonwealth, Non Aligned Movement (NAM), Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Economic Information  
Annual growth: 3.1% (2008 estimate).  
Inflation: Annually 8.6% (February 2009)  
Major industries: mining (world's largest producer of platinum, gold, chromium), automobile assembly, machinery, textile, iron & steel, chemicals, fertiliser, foodstuffs; financial services; manufacturing; wholesale & retail trade; transport, storage & communication; mining; other  
Major trading partners: US, UK, Germany, Japan  
Exchange rate: (March 2009 average) ZAR US$ – 9.33

In part, South Africa has a sophisticated economy based on manufacturing, mining and financial services, in which macro-economic indicators like interest rates and the strength of the Rand are critical. But it also has an economy consisting of the very poor who eke out a living through near-subsistence agriculture or the informal sector, for whom economic statistics mean little. Relatively small improvements in living standards can make a huge difference to their lives. Unemployment levels are officially 23.5% (March 2009) but some commentators quote figures as high as 40%.

Government has viewed economic restructuring through privatisation as important for growth and employment generation in the long run, despite short-term transitional costs. There have been political difficulties in pushing privatisation forward. The left-leaning and union elements within the ANC governing alliance are strongly opposed to privatisation which, they argue, involves handing control of state assets to a white and 'black elite' dominated business sector. The Government has recently shifted its focus from pursuing wholesale privatisation to developing profit oriented public sector enterprises. Strike action in 2006 demonstrated strong union resistance to restructuring in the state-owned transport parastatal, Transnet, that aimed to
sell off non-core operations. Since 1994 the South African Government has followed prudent economic policies which are beginning to be reflected in increased rates of growth.

**Black Economic Empowerment**

Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) is the main thrust of attempts to correct the imbalance in ownership of the economy and distribution of wealth. Its intention is to redress the exclusion of the majority of South Africans from the mainstream economy by supporting and favouring the economic empowerment of previously disadvantaged people in the private sector.

A Black Economic Empowerment Commission chaired by Cyril Ramaphosa reported to Government in 2001 and in March 2003 the Government released a strategy document entitled: *South Africa's Economic Transformation, A Strategy for Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment*. It provides a clear definition and guidelines for businesses to follow. In 2004, the Government published the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act and Codes of Good Practice to increase the pace of BEE and to broaden it beyond pure business ownership to include management, employment, skills development and corporate social investment.

**Health**

South Africa's health system consists of a large public sector and a smaller but fast-growing private sector. Health care varies from the most basic primary health care, offered free by the state, to highly specialised hi-tech health services available in the private sector for those who can afford it.

The public sector is under-resourced and over-used, while the mushrooming private sector, run largely on commercial lines, caters to middle- and high-income earners who tend to be members of medical schemes (18% of the population), and to foreigners looking for top-quality surgical procedures at relatively affordable prices. The private sector also attracts most of the country's health professionals.

Although the state contributes about 40% of all expenditure on health, the public health sector is under pressure to deliver services to about 80% of the population. Despite this, most resources are concentrated in the private health sector, which sees to the health needs of the remaining 20% of the population.

Drug expenditure per person varies widely between the sectors. In 2000 about R8.25-billion was spent on drugs in South Africa, with the state spending only 24% of this. Thus, R59.36 was spent on drugs per person in the state sector as opposed to R800.29 on drugs per person in the private sector. Of all the country's pharmacists, 40% work in Gauteng in the private sector.

The number of private hospitals and clinics continues to grow. Four years ago there were 161 private hospitals, with 142 of these in urban areas. Now there are 200. The mining industry also provides its own hospitals, and has 60 hospitals and clinics around the country.

Most health professionals, except nurses, work in private hospitals. With the public sector's shift in emphasis from acute to primary health care in recent years, private hospitals have begun to take over many tertiary and specialist health services.
Public health consumes around 11% of the government's total budget, which is allocated and spent by the nine provinces. How these resources are allocated, and the standard of health care delivered, varies from province to province. With less resources and more poor people, cash-strapped provinces like the Eastern Cape face greater health challenges than wealthier provinces like Gauteng and the Western Cape.

Source: http://www.southafrica.info/about/health/health.htm

History
The British - already rulers in Cape Colony and Natal - took control of the Boer Republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State (OFS) in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. On 31 May 1910 Transvaal, the OFS, Cape Colony, and Natal joined together as the Union of South Africa and were formally declared a Dominion under the British Crown. In 1913, the Land Act was introduced to prevent blacks buying land outside the Native Reserves; the 1923 Native (Urban Areas) Act established segregation in the cities. The National Party (NP) electoral victory in 1948 heralded an intensification of segregation under their policy of apartheid ('separateness'). Over the next decade a series of legislative measures sought to restructure South African society to conform to apartheid doctrine.

The South African Native National Congress, later renamed the African National Congress (ANC) was formed in 1912 to protest the impending Land Act. Repressive NP policies in the 1950s led the ANC to turn to mass civil disobedience; also the breakaway Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) formed in 1959. After protests following the police killing of 67 peaceful demonstrators at a PAC gathering at Sharpeville in 1960, the ANC and the PAC were banned. The following year, the ANC formed a military wing - Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK - 'Spear of the Nation') - which was led by Nelson Mandela and included white members of the South African Communist Party (SACP). In the same year, South Africa was declared a Republic and left the Commonwealth. Mandela was detained in 1962 and sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of sabotage in 1964. The 1960s were also marked by large-scale forcible resettlement of more than 1.5 million South Africans.

Attempts to introduce Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools led to widespread protests that erupted into violent unrest after police fired on schoolchildren in Soweto in June 1976. P.W. Botha took over as Prime Minister in 1978; he increased the role of the military in the state. In November 1983 white voters approved his constitutional plan in a referendum for a tricameral parliament comprising separate houses for whites, coloureds and Indians. The United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed to oppose the plan, on the grounds that it excluded the black majority. In 1984 elections were held and P.W.Botha became South Africa's first executive president. The black townships erupted in violence, supported by strikes in the mining industry. On 12 June 1986 the existing State of Emergency was extended to the whole country. As many as 24,000 people, mainly young, were detained without trial and soldiers replaced police in the townships. Such measures brought the unrest under control during 1987.

P.W.Botha suffered a stroke in early 1989 and later relinquished the NP leadership to F.W.de Klerk. The latter was confirmed as State President at elections in September 1989. In 1990 he released Mandela after 27 years in prison and rescinded the ban on the ANC, PAC, SACP and 33 other organisations, including the UDF. The repeal of all apartheid legislation was announced in
February 1991 and completed by mid-year. Multiparty talks resulted in agreement on an interim constitution that was approved by the tricameral parliament in December that year.

**Geography**

South Africa's land area is 1,228,376 sq km (larger than the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy & Germany combined). It borders Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe to the north, and entirely surrounds Lesotho (a total land border of 4,750 km). It has a coastline of 2,954 km, with few natural harbours.

The coastal strip is below 1,500 feet fringed by steep mountain ranges, with a high plateau in the interior ranging up to 6,000 feet above sea level. On the west coast, the cold Atlantic current creates arid scrubland terrain. Higher levels of rainfall on the central plateau produce grassland. A continuous mountain range runs down the east coast warmed by the Indian Ocean giving a sub-tropical climate. The north of the country has savannah-type vegetation, whilst the southern tip has a Mediterranean-type climate.

**Politics**

The ANC won South Africa's first non-racial general elections in April 1994. Mandela became President and a Government of National Unity was formed; Commonwealth membership was restored and the remaining international sanctions against South Africa lifted. South Africa took up her seat in the UN after a 20-year absence. Parliament approved a new South African Constitution on 8 May 1996. Mandela handed over leadership of the ANC to Thabo Mbeki in December 1997, who succeeded him as State President following the general elections of 1999. In 2007 Jacob Zuma took over from Mbeki as leader of the ANC.

On 22 April 2009, South Africa held its fourth General Election since the end of apartheid. ANC President Jacob Zuma was elected President for a five-year term. The ANC won 65.9% of the national vote (down from 69.7% in 2004). The opposition Democratic Alliance, (DA) won the Province of the Western Cape from the ANC and increased its national share to 16.7%. New party Coalition of the People (COPE - formed from former ANC members) achieved 7.4%, emerging as the official opposition in five of South Africa's Provinces. COPE is the third largest party (in terms of representation) in South Africa. The combined share of the smaller parties halved from 2004 to 4.72%.

**Human Rights**

South Africa has a strong commitment to upholding human rights. It has a Human Rights Commission, set up in 1995. A justifiable Bill of Rights is enshrined in the 1996 Constitution enforceable through South Africa's Constitutional Court. It is a signatory to the principal UN Human Rights Instruments.

**International relations**

South Africa rapidly reintegrated into the international community after the isolation of the apartheid years. It was readmitted to the Commonwealth in 1994 and hosted the annual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Durban in November 1999. South Africa was Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) from August 1998 to March 2003. It hosted the inaugural meeting of the African Union (AU) in July 2002 and was the first Chair. It is a key member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). South Africa joined other
Delegation for relations with South Africa


South Africa's foreign policy is focussed on conflict resolution in Africa, and developing partnerships with other like-minded nations to present the South's case in multinational fora. It has backed its political activities by providing troops for peace support operations in Burundi, Darfur and the Democratic Republic of Congo and mediated on behalf of the AU in the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire. The outcome was a peace agreement signed in Pretoria on 6 April 2005; South Africa remains involved in international efforts to resolve the situation.

South Africa has been reluctant to speak out on Zimbabwe, largely because of historic loyalties. In early 2007, South Africa's president Mbeki was charged by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) with mediating in Zimbabwean politics, in preparation for the 2008 elections. Following the MDC’s withdrawal from the second round of the elections due to ZANU(PF)-perpetrated violence against their supporters, SADC continued to negotiate a power-sharing agreement. Under pressure from South Africa, Tsvangirai agreed to sign the agreement in February 2009. SADC remains responsible for ensuring the agreement is implemented fairly, and for providing initial financial support to the new government. The African Union (AU) has endorsed SADC’s lead on Zimbabwe. The South Africans in particular are keen to see the power-sharing agreement work. Not only did President Mbeki act as the broker between Mugabe and Tsvangirai, but there are up to three million Zimbabwean refugees still living in South Africa.

Global Terrorism: South Africa responded quickly to the attacks on 11 September 2001. The Government condemned terrorism without equivocation, offering the US humanitarian support and the full co-operation of its security agencies. It opened a Financial Intelligence Centre in November 2003, which considerably strengthened its anti-money laundering capacity. In 2003, South Africa joined the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an inter-governmental body that sets the global standards in combating money laundering and terrorist financing. South Africa is also a member of the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG), the only FATF-style regional body in Africa.

*Southern Africa Development Community - SADC* [http://www.sadc.int/index.php](http://www.sadc.int/index.php)

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has been in existence since 1980, when it was formed as a loose alliance of nine majority-ruled States in Southern Africa known as the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), with the main aim of coordinating development projects in order to lessen economic dependence on the then apartheid South Africa. The founding Member States are: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

SADCC was formed in Lusaka, Zambia on April 1, 1980, following the adoption of the Lusaka Declaration - Southern Africa: Towards Economic Liberation.
The transformation of the organization from a Coordinating Conference into a Development Community (SADC) took place on August 17, 1992 in Windhoek, Namibia when the Declaration and Treaty was signed at the Summit of Heads of State and Government thereby giving the organization a legal character.

SADC was established under Article 2 of the SADC treaty by SADC Member States represented by their respective Heads of State and Government or duly authorised representatives to spearhead economic integration of Southern Africa.


The advent of the African Union (AU) can be described as an event of great magnitude in the institutional evolution of the continent. On 9.9.1999, the Heads of State and Government of the Organisation of African Unity issued a Declaration (the Sirte Declaration) calling for the establishment of an African Union, with a view, inter alia, to accelerating the process of integration in the continent to enable it play its rightful role in the global economy while addressing multifaceted social, economic and political problems compounded as they are by certain negative aspects of globalisation.

The main objectives of the OAU were, inter alia, to rid the continent of the remaining vestiges of colonization and apartheid; to promote unity and solidarity among African States; to coordinate and intensify cooperation for development; to safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States and to promote international cooperation within the framework of the United Nations.

Indeed, as a continental organization the OAU provided an effective forum that enabled all Member States to adopt coordinated positions on matters of common concern to the continent in international fora and defend the interests of Africa effectively.

Through the OAU Coordinating Committee for the Liberation of Africa, the Continent worked and spoke as one with undivided determination in forging an international consensus in support of the liberation struggle and the fight against apartheid.

**New Partnership for Africa's Development (NePAD)**

See the key theme area on this website: [NePAD: New Partnership for Africa's Development](http://www.africa-union.org/).
### Holidays

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*Note*

Holidays falling on a Sunday are observed the following Monday.
Etiquette & Customs in South Africa

Meeting Etiquette
- There are several greeting styles in South Africa depending upon the ethnic heritage of the person you are meeting.
- When dealing with foreigners, most South Africans shake hands while maintaining eye contact and smiling.
- Some women do not shake hands and merely nod their head, so it is best to wait for a woman to extend her hand.
- Men may kiss a woman they know well on the cheek in place of a handshake.
- Greetings are leisurely and include time for social discussion and exchanging pleasantries.

Gift Giving Etiquette
- In general, South Africans give gifts for birthdays and Christmas.
- Two birthdays - 21 and 40 - are often celebrated with a large party in which a lavish gift is given. It is common for several friends to contribute to this gift to help defray the cost.
- If you are invited to a South African's home, bring flowers, good quality chocolates, or a bottle of good South African wine to the hostess.
- Wrapping a gift nicely shows extra effort.
- Gifts are opened when received.

Dining Etiquette
If you are invited to a South African's house
- Arrive on time if invited to dinner.
- Contact the hostess ahead of time to see if she would like you to bring a dish.
- Wear casual clothes. This may include jeans or pressed shorts. It is a good idea to check with the hosts in advance.
- In Johannesburg, casual is dressier than in other parts of the country. Do not wear jeans or shorts unless you have spoken to the hosts.
- Offer to help the hostess with the preparation or clearing up after a meal is served.

Business Etiquette and Protocol

Relationships & Communication
- South Africans are transactional and do not need to establish long-standing personal relationships before conducting business.
- If your company is not known in South Africa, a more formal introduction may help you gain access to decision-makers and not be shunted off to gatekeepers.
- Networking and relationship building are crucial for long-term business success.
- Relationships are built in the office.
- Most businessmen are looking for long-term business relationships.
- Although the country leans towards egalitarianism, businesspeople respect senior executives and those who have attained their position through hard work and perseverance.
- There are major differences in communication styles depending upon the individual's cultural heritage.
- For the most part, South Africans want to maintain harmonious working relationships, so they avoid confrontations.
- They often use metaphors and sports analogies to demonstrate a point.
- Most South Africans, regardless of ethnicity, prefer face-to-face meetings to more impersonal communication mediums such as email, letter, or telephone.

**Business Meeting Etiquette**
- Appointments are necessary and should be made as far in advance as possible.
- It may be difficult to arrange meetings with senior level managers on short notice, although you may be able to do so with lower-level managers.
- It is often difficult to schedule meetings from mid December to mid January or the two weeks surrounding Easter, as these are prime vacation times.
- Personal relationships are important. The initial meeting is often used to establish a personal rapport and to determine if you are trustworthy.
- After a meeting, send a letter summarizing what was decided and the next steps.

**Business Negotiations**
- It is imperative to develop mutual trust before negotiating.
- Women have yet to attain senior level positions. If you send a woman, she must expect to encounter some condescending behaviour and to be tested in ways that a male colleague would not.
- Do not interrupt a South African while they are speaking.
- South Africans strive for consensus and win-win situations.
- Include delivery dates in contracts. Deadlines are often viewed as fluid rather than firm commitments.
- Start negotiating with a realistic figure. South Africans do not like haggling over price.
- Decision-making may be concentrated at the top of the company and decisions are often made after consultation with subordinates, so the process can be slow and protracted.

**Dress Etiquette**
- Business attire is becoming more informal in many companies. However, for the first meeting, it is best to dress more conservatively.
- Men should wear dark coloured conservative business suits.
- Women should wear elegant business suits or dresses.