GENERAL INFORMATION

Position, size and provinces
The Republic of South Africa is situated at the tip of the African continent. It covers an area of 1,219,090 km²—approximately one-eighth the size of the United States of America and nearly five times the size of the United Kingdom.

South Africa is divided into nine provinces, namely: Gauteng, Northern Cape, North West, Mpumulanga, Free State, Kwazulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Western Cape.

Major Cities and Towns
Johannesburg is the financial, industrial and cultural centre of South Africa. Cape Town and Durban are widely considered the entertainment capitals of South Africa—they are often referred to as “Hollywood playground.” Pretoria/Letshwane, Grahamstown, Graaff Reinet, Port Elizabeth, Knysna and Stellenbosch are particularly noteworthy from a historical and cultural point of view.

Climate
In general, a pleasantly sunny climate makes it a pleasure to visit South Africa all year round. Midwinter occurs in June and July and midsummer in December and January. The climate ranges from Mediterranean in the Cape Peninsula to tropical on the Kwazulu-Natal coast and in the North-Eastern Transvaal, while temperate conditions prevail inland. In Kwazulu-Natal average daytime temperature in July is 23 degrees and you can swim in the seas all year round.

Population and Languages
The population numbers some 4,700,000. South Africa has 11 official languages. English, however, is generally spoken throughout the country. French, Italian and German are spoken by staff in some of the larger hotels, restaurants and stores.

Access
The national carrier, South African Airways, together with many international air and charter lines link South Africa with the rest of the world.

International Airports
South Africa has three international airports: Johannesburg International Airport, Durban International Airport and Cape Town International Airport.

Facilities for the Disabled
South African Airways provides passenger assistance at all major airports and at many hotels offer facilities for the disabled. Wheelchairs and other aids can be hired in most cities.

Communication Services
A direct dialling service connects all centres. Communication in remote rural areas, however, is not as reliable. The International Telephone Service links South Africa with countries around the world. Three GSM cellular networks cater for the widespread use of cellular phones, which are available for hire on arrival at major airports.

Medical Services
South Africa does not have a national health service. The patient is individually responsible for settling accounts for medical treatment and hospitalisation. Should an accident or illness occur during your stay, it is strongly recommended that you take out adequate insurance.

Electricty
Duty power systems are 220/230 volts AC. Refrigerators and hair dryers are available locally.

Radio and Television
The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) broadcasts 22 radio programmes services in 11 languages, and three television services in seven languages (including English). Programmes include news, culture, children's and music events. The M Net cable and Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) network broadcast mainly in English and focus on entertainment, international news, and sport.

Newspapers and Magazines
Hundreds of periodicals and journals are published in South Africa. Daily newspapers are published in all major cities.

Currency
The South African currency unit is the Rand, denoted by the symbol R.
1 Rand = 100 cents. Most businesses, fashionable shops and hotels accept international credit cards, including Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Diners Club cards. Travelling cheques in all major currencies can be exchanged in all banks. Many shops, stores, restaurants, etc., accept travellers' cheques.

VAT (Value Added Tax)
Value Added Tax, currently at 16%, is included in the displayed price of most goods and services.

Tourist Including VAT on and water which they take out of South Africa. Information relating to VAT refund procedures are available from VAT Refund Administration offices at Johannesburg International Airport, Durban International Airport and Cape Town International Airport.

Tourist Services
A 10% surcharge usually applies, depending on the standard of service provided. Restaurants do not include the tip in the bill. The suggested tip for services is between $2.00 and $2.00 per head. The currency exchange rate is 1 Rand approximately 1 US Dollar.

Time Differences
Throughout the year, Standard Time in South Africa is two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time; one hour ahead of Central European Winter Time; and two hours ahead of Eastern Standard Winter Time, USA.

What to pack
Due to generally cooler temperatures, particularly at holiday resorts and game reserves. Beachwear, however, is not acceptable in restaurants. During winter, warm clothing is necessary, although daytime temperatures are generally mild. Don't forget to pack your camera and binoculars for game viewing.

Drinking Water
The water is purified and safe to drink.

Entry and Accessibility Requirements
As for all international travel, visitors to South Africa must be in possession of a valid passport. Visitors from certain countries also require visas.