**Driving in South Africa**

Useful website: [www.arrivealive.co.za](http://www.arrivealive.co.za)

**General Safety advice when travelling from A to B:**

Take the usual sensible precautions and follow some basic safety rules. Know where you're going before you set off, particularly at night, watch your possessions, don't walk alone in dodgy areas, lock your doors at night. And, like anywhere else, there are some areas of the major cities that are known to be more risky than others. It is easy to avoid these and still have a good time. If you cannot avoid such areas, then don't wear visible jewellery or carry cameras and bags over your shoulder. Keep mobile phones and wallets tucked away where no one can see them.

Check beforehand that the areas you plan to visit are safe by asking locals. Other sensible advice is not to hitchhike, or don't accept or carry items for strangers.

**Vehicle safety**

When driving a private vehicle, either borrowed or hired, take some simple precautions to avoid car hijackings or "smash-and-grabs" (somebody smashes the car window and steals something out of the car). As a driver, be on the alert when coming to a halt at traffic lights or stop streets, as well as when arriving at or leaving any premises. Car doors should always be locked, and valuables are better kept in the boot or under the seats. Plan your route beforehand. Make sure the map you consult is a current one. When parking at night, choose well-lit or security-patrolled parking areas. Street security guards will usually ask whether they can watch over your car, and in return should be paid a small fee.

**Driving in South Africa**

South Africa has excellent road infrastructure, large vehicle hire fleets run by international and local rental companies, great weather and plenty of stunning scenery – which combines to make self-driving a viable and enjoyable option. However, South Africa has also got an extremely high number of road accidents and fatalities due to road accidents are particularly high when compared to other countries.

**Driver's licences**

Any valid driver's licence is accepted in South Africa, provided it bears the photograph and signature of the holder and is printed or authenticated in English. However, vehicle hire companies may also require an international driver's licence. This holds for additional drivers as well, who must be identified when you hire your vehicle. Remember to carry all your documentation with you when you travel as traffic officers will expect to see it if they stop you for any reason.

**Keep left, belt up, think kilometres**

Keep left, pass right. South Africans drive on the left-hand side of the road, and all cars are therefore right-hand drive vehicles, the gear shift being operated with the left hand. All distances, speed limits (and speedometers) are marked in kilometres. Wearing of seat belts is compulsory. Using hand-held phones while driving is against the law.

Drinking and driving is prohibited. The legal limit is a breath alcohol content of 0.24mg per 1 000ml, or a blood alcohol limit of 0.05g per 100ml.

**Speed limit**

The general speed limit on South Africa's national highways, urban freeways and other major routes is 120km/h. On secondary (rural) roads it is 100km/h. In built-up areas it is usually 60km/h, unless otherwise indicated. Check the road signs.

If you're in a hire car and get a speeding fine, the car rental company will pay the fine, and will charge that amount plus an admin fee to your credit card.

**Filling up**

Various types of petrol (gas) are available in South Africa: unleaded, 97-, 95- or 93- octane ("super" or "premium"). Diesel is available with 0.05% sulphur content and 0.005% sulphur content. Hire cars are more likely to require unleaded petrol, but check before you set off. Fuel is sold per litre.

South African petrol stations are not self-help: an attendant will fill the car, ask if you'd like your oil and water and tyre pressure checked, and offer to clean your windscreen – a service for which they are generally tipped around R5.

Fuel stations – or garages, as South Africans call them – are found on both the main and country roads, most of them open 24 hours a day, although some keep shorter hours. However, distances between towns (and therefore between petrol stations) are considerable in some parts of the country, so remember to check the fuel gauge before passing up the opportunity to fill up.

When it comes to paying for fuel, you can pay cash or use your credit card. Historically, filling stations used to be cash-only operations so some smaller stations may still not accept cards. Check with the attendant what payment method they accept before filling up. Many filling stations have on-site ATM machines.

**Driving around the country**

The road infrastructure is excellent, so driving between cities and towns is a viable option – and, given the stunning scenery in many parts of the country, a highly enjoyable one.

However, South Africa is a huge country not easily traversed in a day, so plan your journeys carefully. If you're not used to driving long distances, rather break the journey, as fatigue is a major contributing factor in motor vehicle accidents.

While most national roads are tarred and in good condition, the more rural the road, the more likely it is to be pot-holed and poorly surfaced.

**Road info, maps**

Current information on the conditions of roads can be obtained through the Automobile Association of South Africa. The AA also provides invaluable guides for road users in the form of strip maps tailored for specific destinations and information for tourists on accommodation en route.

* Read more: http://www.southafrica.info/about/geography/maps.htm
* See http://www.aa.co.za/travel/route-planner/ for maps, road reports and an online route planner

**Toll roads and e-tolls**

Before you set off, check your route. Many of the national roads between the major centres are toll roads. Check the fees before you leave, and make sure that you have either a credit card or cash to pay. Toll fares for a light passenger vehicle vary from under R10 to around R200, depending on the toll plaza – and you may pass through three or four of these before you reach your destination. Electronic toll collection (or e-tolls) is in place in Gauteng. Your car has to be identified electronically, via an e-tag for example, and a toll is deducted from a toll account. Visitors to Gauteng can register for an e-toll account, or buy day passes. Visit [SA National Road Agency's e-toll website](http://www.sanral.co.za/e-toll/index.php) for more info.

**Safety**

South Africa has a high rate of traffic accidents so drive defensively and exercise caution when on the roads – especially at night – and keep a wary eye out for pedestrians and cyclists. Drivers of minibuses and taxis can behave erratically, and often turn a blind eye to rules and road safety considerations. In many of South Africa's rural areas, the roads are not fenced, so watch out for dogs, chickens, sheep and even horses or cows on the road. These can be particularly hazardous at night. Large antelope crossing the road can also pose a danger in certain areas – if you see road signs depicting a leaping antelope, take it slowly, especially towards evening. Never stop to feed wild animals – it is dangerous and you can incur a hefty fine if you do so. In general, be aware and keep your wits about you. It's a good idea to drive with your doors locked and windows up, especially in cities and at traffic lights.

Don't ever stop to pick up hitchhikers. If you are worried about someone on the side of the road, report it to the police station in the next town.

Ensure your car is locked when you park it and do not leave anything in sight. Lock things away in the trunk – known as the boot – or the glove compartment (cubbyhole).

Emergency numbers to save into your phone:

* From your mobile: (082) 112
* Rescue: 10177
* Police: 10111

**Insurance Information**

The South African vehicle hijackings and road crash statistics provide more than enough evidence to the importance of vehicle insurance. According to the South African Insurance Association (SAIA), about 65 percent of South African motorists are not insured. This has far-reaching implications for all road users, whether or not they are insured.

If you are an uninsured driver, you alone are responsible for covering the costs of repairing your car or even buying a new one if it is seriously damaged. You will also bear the legal costs of trying to claim damages from another uninsured driver without the assistance of an insurer.

**Types of Car Insurance**

The vehicle owner needs to be aware of the variety of vehicle cover options. Some of these descriptions are:

* **Comprehensive Cover:** covers your vehicle for accidental damage, theft and hijack, as well as injury to other people or damage to their vehicle in an accident
* **Third Party, Fire and Theft Insurance**- provides you with cover for damage to the other party's vehicle in the event of an accident, and for your vehicle in the event of loss by theft, or fire.
* **Third party** is the most limited form of cover. It does not cover you for damage to, or the loss of, your own vehicle, but it covers the costs of damage to the other car in an accident you cause