

Diversity Awareness & Understanding

SOUTH AFRICA

Macomb County Defining Business + Life

Many Cultures, One Home

Map of South Africa



Geography

South Africa is the southernmost country in Africa. With a land area of 470,693 sq mi (Compared to Macomb County 482 sq mi) South Africa encompasses a diverse landscape that includes tall mountain ranges, fertile coastal plains, and desert plateaus. Divided into nine provinces South Africa has three capitals: Cape Town is the legislative capital; Pretoria is the executive capital; and Bloemfontein is the judicial capital.

Introduction

Once plagued by rampant divisiveness, inequality, and racism South Africa was a nation torn by its apartheid social structure. Today on the heels of governmental, social, and economic reforms, which began in the 1990s, South Africa has positioned itself as a nation of profound influence on the continent of Africa and throughout the world. Recognizing the deep impact of its physical, social, political, and economic diversity South Africa has begun to utilize its multicultural and multiethnic population to invigorate and coordinate a once separated nation and economy. Today boasting one of the most technologically advanced mining industries in the world and a growing manufacturing sector South Africa has experienced substantial economic growth and attracted many foreign investors. Even though the apartheid system has left an imprint on society and business, South Africa continues to learn from it's past and looks forward to a more prosperous future for all South Africans

Macomb County Profile: Persons of South African Descent

Total population 28

*Note: Detailed U.S. Census Bureau figures for Persons of South African Descent were unavailable due to the population threshold, 100 persons, established by the United States Census Bureau



South Africa's Flag

Languages

Until apartheid ended in 1994 only Afrikaans and English were official languages. The 1994 constitution added nine African languages to the list of recognized official languages: Zulu, Xhosa, Sesotho sa Leboa, Tswana, Sesotho, Tsonga, Venda, Ndebele, and siSwati. In modern day South African life English has retained a dominant position being the main medium of instruction in schools and most universities.

Society, Culture & Religion

By virtue of its leadership, its democratic government, and its military superiority, South Africa has positioned itself as one of the leading states in sub-Saharan Africa. As a nation South African has endured many highly publicized and scrutinized domestic hardships on its ascent to the ranks of the elite nations in Africa. One of the most noted and historically significant hardships faced by South Africa was the racially segregated apartheid social structure that ruled all aspects of South African life for decades. Even though abolished in 1994 the roots of the apartheid system still can be seen in South Africa today. Racial tension and inequality between whites, "coloureds", Asians, and blacks still exist today in South Africa, with vast differences in standards of living and socioeconomic status. The apartheid legacy may take decades to erase, however South Africa counties to embrace reform and acceptance. South Africa is one of the most beautiful countries on Earth, and its inhabitants take full advantage of their environs. Outdoor activities are common, and work does not intrude leisure time. Religious freedom and acceptance is widely practiced throughout South Africa. About 92 percent of South Africans are Christian, 2 percent are Hindus, and 2 percent Muslims. Many South Africans also practice African traditionalists beliefs based on cultural rituals according to certain ethnic groups.

Etiquette & Customs

- Each of the many cultures of South Africa has its own traditions and customs. Whites, "coloures", Asians, and blacks belong to numerous ethnic and cultural groups, so when interacting with South Africans be aware and understand the uniqueness of each group/situation.
- Traditionally, only family members and close friends address each other by their first names. It is important to use professional titles.
- The years of foreign boycott due to the apartheid system made South Africans quite sensitive about foreigners interfering in their affairs. Avoid discussing South African politics. If pressed for your opinion, be sure you can offer a knowledgeable evaluation.
- Hospitality is considered a virtue in most South African cultures.
- Always bring something when invited to a house. Wine, candy, or flowers are the traditional choices.
- In social settings good topics of conversation are sports, outdoor recreation, travel, food, and music.
- South Africa remains a male-dominated society. Women may be referred to as "girls" and individually as "my dear girl". This can happen to any woman, regardless of age or job title.

General Business Practices

- White South Africans usually begin talking about business after a brief exchange of small talk. South Africans of other races may spend more time chatting. African tradition requires long inquires about your health and your family.
- Cutthroat businesses practices and gloating over crushing the competition is not appreciated in most South African business relationships.
- High pressure and strong emotions have little place in dealing with most South African businesspeople.
- In general, foreign businesspeople find South Africans of English heritage to be somewhat more open than Afrikaners.
- Punctuality is important for all business engagements.
- Successful South African businesspeople tend to be moderately open to information and are generally more analytical than associative.
- In general, businessmen in South Africa are expected to wear a coat and a tie. Businesswomen may wear anything from business suits to light-colored long-sleeves blouses and skirts. Depending on the formality of the situation follow the lead of your South African colleagues.



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Sources:

1. Encarta – http://encarta.msn.com/text_761557321_0/South_Africa.html
2. Morrison, T. and Conaway, W.A. (2006). Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands (2nd ed). Adams Media: Avon, Massachusetts
3. United States Census Bureau 2000 Census – Demographic Profile Summary File 2, Summary File 3, Summary File 4 – www.factfinder.census.gov