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SAFETY & SECURITY TRAVEL ADVISORY

TOURISTS VISITING SOUTH AFRICA



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INTRODUCTION

South Africa has an extremely **high crime rate** which includes carjacking, house robberies, rape, and murder amongst others. The risk of violent crime to visitors travelling to the main tourist destinations is generally low but a general increase in the crime rate overall means that all visitors should remain vigilant. Most violent crimes tend to occur in townships (usually underdeveloped urban areas) and isolated areas. However, armed robberies and violent crime occasionally do take place in popular tourist attractions. Crime can also take place in and around transport hubs, including airports. Crime increases in areas where large crowds gather, so be particularly vigilant if you’re attending sporting or other events that attract large numbers.

The South African Tourism Police prioritise protecting tourists and are deployed in several towns and cities. However, **always remain vigilant**, as police resourcing can be limited. Also, be wary of criminals posing as officials. If in doubt, ask to see their Official Proof of Identity and move into a safe, public, and open space. All police officers must carry their Appointment Certificate on them.

1. USE OF MOBILE DEVICES

Prior to travelling, ensure to have a reliable mobile phone with sufficient **airtime/data and a quality power bank** to charge the battery in case of emergencies or power failures. Mobile phone reception is generally good in major towns and cities but can be intermittent in more remote spots. For your own safety, consider and take note of the following:

- To prevent theft of mobile phones, use a cordless earpiece with Bluetooth connection instead of handling the phone itself whilst on a call. **Keep mobile devices and tablets out of sight!**
- Loadshedding/planned power interruptions are common occurrences in South Africa – be prepared by downloading the Eskom app “EskomSePush” on your phone (<https://sepush.co.za/>).
- Wi-Fi is not readily available in most areas, ensure that you have a data package on your phone or portable Wi-Fi device for internet access, especially Google Maps if required.
- If you need assistance, **call the police on 10111, emergency services on 112** or use an app of a reliable Security company/Reaction force.
- Have your documents saved onto a cloud storage facility with password protection accessible via internet. If your device is lost or stolen, the documents can then easily be retrieved from the cloud.
- Switch on location settings on your device on and have an app installed such as Find My Device allowing you to block the device if lost or stolen from a computer or Internet Café.

2. AIRPORTS

There have been incidents involving people being followed from OR Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg and from various other Airports to their destinations and then robbed, often at gunpoint. There have also been incidents of crime in and around the airport itself. Opportunistic thefts, including that of baggage and valuables, can occur at airports in South Africa.

Consider the following safety measures:

- If you are unfamiliar with the airport, arrange to be met on arrival, for example by the hotel or a tour operator who has been cleared prior to arrival. Ask for a photo and identification of the person prior to arrival to ensure you are in fact meeting the same person at the airport.
- Vacuum-wrap luggage where local regulations permit to prevent theft and make use of proper locks or cable ties to secure luggage. Mark your luggage properly for instant identification.
- Keep all valuables in your carry-on luggage and look after it. **Don't be distracted** by people trying to draw your attention by causing a scene with the intention to take your belongings – be alert and hold onto bags/items.
- If in transit, proceed quickly to the connecting flight.

- Once outside the baggage hall, pass through public areas rapidly, avoiding isolated areas and strangers wanting to assist, especially in car park areas which might be during so-called loadshedding.
- Be vigilant in and around the airport and when driving away.
- Be wary of unregulated drivers posing as Uber/Taxi drivers. If ordering an Uber, go to the designated area and vehicle as displayed in the app. Verify that is a registered Uber/Taxi and take note of the vehicle registration. In South Africa Uber sends a PIN to your phone which you give to the driver upon arrival. The driver will put the PIN into his phone to confirm the trip.

3. ROAD TRAVEL & SAFETY

3.1. Uber/Taxi Drivers

There are ongoing tensions between Uber, metered Taxi drivers as well as regular Minibus Taxis, which at times escalate into armed violence. Tensions have been particularly strong at taxi ranks outside some Gautrain stations and airports. Uber passengers have reported being on the receiving end of harassment from metered drivers. The Uber app generally reports where the trouble spots are, but exercise caution when using either service, and take the following precautions:

- Ensure to check the registration of the vehicle, and the identity of the driver, before embarking on your journey.
- It is safest to avoid waiting in the street for the Uber if you can.

3.2. General Driving

The standard of driving in South Africa varies. Road accidents resulting in death are common, particularly around major public holidays. Take note of the following general guidelines:

- On highways, overtaking or undertaking can occur in any lane including the hard shoulder.
- On single-lane roads the hard shoulder is also sometimes used by trucks and slower vehicles to allow faster vehicles to overtake. Be **careful of rocks or stones** on the side of the road's surface – these are sometimes placed there on purpose to possibly ambush travellers who may be trying to avoid a collision with a vehicle from behind.
- At most intersections, including 4-way stops and where traffic lights are out of service, the first vehicle to arrive generally has priority. Be sure to manage this properly to avoid accidents.
- On roundabouts, you should give way to the right, although this rule is often ignored

3.3. Tourist Attractions

At tourist attractions, when stopping on the roadside to view or purchase souvenirs, take care not to show all your cash (regardless of currency). Try to distribute cash and not have all your cash in your wallet as this could easily attract criminals.

3.4. Road Conditions

Road standards are mostly very good, but some roads in some of the provinces and remote areas are less well maintained and may have **potholes**. The following are recommended:

- If travelling to a lodge in a remote area, **check the condition of the roads** with the lodge management as a car with good ground clearance may be required.
- If renting a car, familiarise yourself with the **vehicle's capacity and limitations** on the road and be sure that the vehicle is equipped with a spare tyre and that you would be able to change the tyre.
- Save contact details of **road-side assistance companies** to your phone in case of emergencies.
Useful contacts:
 - The Automobile Association of South Africa (AA), Emergency Tel: 0861 000 234 (<https://aa.co.za/roadside-assistance/>)
 - South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL), Tel: +27 (0)12 844 8000 (<https://www.i-traffic.co.za/>)
- Drive cautiously, obey speed limits and **avoid unfamiliar rural areas** at night.

4. VEHICLE CRIME

Incidents of vehicle **hijacking and robbery are common**, particularly after dark. Vulnerable areas include, but are not limited to traffic lights, junctions, petrol stations and when approaching or pulling out from driveways.

Criminals have been known to employ various methods to force a vehicle to stop. Common tactics include throwing spikes (these may have been hidden in plastic bags), stones or glass in front of the vehicle to rob or murder the occupants. These types of attacks usually occur on the highways between cities. Always take care, be aware of your surroundings and adhere to the following precautions:

- Plan routes properly beforehand.
- Keep to main roads and park in well-lit areas.
- Try to avoid being stationary in a vehicle for prolonged periods of time, (e.g., by paying inside the shop rather than waiting in the car when you stop for fuel).
- There are frequent incidents of car windows being broken and valuables taken while cars are waiting at junctions - keep vehicle **windows closed** and valuables such as laptop bags, cameras, and mobile phones out of sight or in vehicle's boot/trunk.
- Protect yourself further by asking the hire car company for a vehicle with '**smash and grab**' film installed on the windows and on-board GPS mapping.

- Should your vehicle be targeted then drive as far as safely possible before you stop.
- Don't pick up strangers or stop to help apparently distressed motorists, as this is a technique sometimes used by hijackers. It is better to continue and report any incident to the police.
- If you are involved in a hi-jacking, remain calm and surrender your valuables, and your vehicle if asked. Do not try to resist.
- Always double check that car doors are locked before walking away from your car - remote jamming is used by criminals to disable a vehicle's central locking system.

5. VIOLENT CRIME

Central business districts (CBDs) of major cities have a greater threat of crime (including armed robbery) than suburban areas, and the threat increases after dark. Fewer people in city centres post-Covid has increased the threat of crime. If visiting the CBD of any major city, follow this basic security advice:

- Remain alert, do not leave valuables on show, or wear expensive accessories such as jewelry, watches, and sunglasses. Keep mobile phones and cameras protected and use them with caution.
- Take **safe and reliable transport** to and from your destination.
- Be wary of people who approach you, and do not walk around after dark. If jogging, do so in a safe area or alternatively use a gym facility at the Hotel/place of accommodation.
- Try to **travel with a friend** or ensure that a friend or responsible person is aware of your itinerary.

The most violent crimes tend to occur in underdeveloped urban areas on the outskirts of major cities and isolated areas, but violent crime is not limited to these areas. If choosing to visit these areas, use a responsible and reliable tour guide, and **don't travel alone**.

6. FRAUD AND SCAMS

There is a high incidence of **credit card fraud, fraud involving ATMs and 'card skimming'**. There are organised crime gangs operating in South Africa, who may target visitors and charities. Scams come in many forms including romance and friendship, business ventures and work or employment opportunities.

Be wary of criminals posing as officials for financial or personal gain and follow these precautions:

- Hide your PIN when withdrawing money from an ATM or making a transaction in a shop.
- Be aware of potential fraudsters, e.g., strangers offering "help" when your card doesn't work; or who try to lure you to an ATM by saying that you need a permit to walk in public areas.
- Do not change large sums of money in busy public areas.

- Only withdraw cash if necessary – purchases can be made using bank cards instead. If withdrawing cash, use ATMs in banks or **secure shopping malls** and be discreet when making withdrawals.
- Protect any documents containing details of credit cards or bank accounts and do not give personal or financial account information details to anyone.
- Sophisticated scam artists may use social media and dating platforms to engage with victims. Be wary and do not meet up with a person if you have any doubt about the person.
- Do not send money to somebody you do not know.

7. HIKING

There have been violent attacks on hikers and tourists within National Parks. Residents use social media (Meet up, Facebook) to coordinate hikes in larger groups. The South African National Parks advise as follow:

- Hike in groups of four or more and stick to popular designated trails on popular days (e.g., weekends).
- Plan your route, be **prepared for bad weather** and inform someone of when you expect to return. Be sure to have **enough water and food** supplies and extra in case of emergencies.
- Take care in quieter areas of the park, especially early mornings or just before the park closes.
- If taking photos, make use of a camera/mobile phone bag which can attach to your body or place devices in a proper watertight backpack.
- Take a **charged power bank** along for the hike to ensure you will have a means of communication in case your mobile device may run out of battery power.

8. BEACH AND WATER SAFETY

Beach conditions and local safety provisions vary and every year significant numbers of people drown due to the **strong sea currents**.

Safety measures to consider:

- Most unprotected beaches do not have warning signs, flags, or life-saving equipment. In the absence of warning signs, speak to local people familiar with the conditions. If in doubt, do not enter the water.
- On busy tourist beaches, follow **instructions from lifeguards** and warnings that may be displayed.
- Some local beaches are also closed from time to time due to flooding and waste, monitor the **local press for information** in this regard.

- Across South Africa, **avoid isolated beaches** and picnic spots. **Don't walk alone** in remote areas or on beaches after dark or when beachgoers have left.
- Always check to see that you have all your belongings and have not left anything behind.

9. RAIL TRAVEL

Both the Metrorail suburban railway in the larger cities of South Africa and the long-distance train services operated by the Passenger Rail Authority of South Africa (PRASA) are unreliable at this stage and have high crime levels including theft of infrastructure and criminal activity on trains. These should be avoided until improved services are available.

The 'Gautrain' high speed commuter train service which runs between Johannesburg, Pretoria and the Oliver Tambo International Airport is secure and reliable. Walking to and from Gautrain Stations after dark is not advisable, rather make use of use a reliable transport company.

10. KIDNAPPING

There is an increasing threat of Kidnapping throughout South Africa. Kidnapping is generally for financial gain or motivated by criminality. In recent years, several foreign nationals, have been kidnapped. Tourists can be perceived as being wealthier than locals and may be at particular risk of kidnapping for financial gain.

Whilst the risk for tourists of being kidnapped is relatively low, it is advisable to ensure that you don't display cash or jewellery that might make you a target.

11. PROTESTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS

There are regular protest marches and strike-related demonstrations, and periodic incidents of public disorder across South Africa, which can turn violent. Such protests, marches and demonstrations can occur anywhere in South Africa, sometimes at short notice.

Take note of these preventative measures:

- **Monitor local and social media for updates**, including local radio.
- Avoid areas where protests, demonstrations, or marches are taking place, especially in city centers and townships.
- Don't attempt to cross protester roadblocks as this could provoke a violent reaction.