South Africa

Location

The Republic of South Africa is located in the southern-most part of the African continent. It is found latitudinally from 22 degrees to 35 degrees south and longitudinally from 17 degrees to 33 degrees east. The total land area of the country is roughly 219,090Km². To the northeast, South Africa borders the Republics of Mozambique and the Kingdom of Swaziland with common boundaries to the Republics of Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. To the southeast the Kingdom of Lesotho is completely enclosed by the South African territory. The Atlantic and Southern Indian Oceans border to the southwest and eastern region.

Geography

The land features of South Africa can be divided into two major physiographic features; the coastal areas and the interior plateau. This interior plateau makes up most of the inner areas of the country, characterized by wide plains that average a height of 1200m above sea level. The landscape of these plains are dry with little vegetation except for subtropical grass. The coastal areas, although made up of sufficiently more plant life, still remain dry and warm.

Climate

South Africa is considered a subtropical area with warm temperature conditions. Since the country lies within the belt of subtropical high pressure, rainfall is considerably low (464 mm per year) giving the region an abundance of sunshine. The ocean shows no major influence to the climate except for the extreme coastal regions which are frequently hit with gail force winds.

Important Dates

The important dates of South African cultures include: New Years Day/January 1st, Human Rights Day/March 21st, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Family Day/Day after Easter
Sunday, Freedom Day/April 27th, Workers Day/May 1st, Youth Day/June 16th, Day of Reconciliation/December 16th, Christmas Day/December 25th, and The Day of Goodwill/December 26th. It should be noted that if any of these holidays fall on a Sunday, the following Monday becomes the official day for celebration.

**Population**

The population of South Africa, according to the latest census, was 40.58 million people. 76.7 percent classified themselves as African; 10.9 percent as white; 8.9 percent as colored; and the remaining percentage as Indian/Asian. The census also showed that 21 million women make up the current population of the country.

**Currency**

The finance monetary unit of South Africa is the rand. According the latest exchange rate, the rand equals 6.03 for $1 U.S. The rand is a universal currency accepted in all provinces throughout the entire Republic.

**Education**

South Africa has a single national education system based on nine provincial sub-systems. The educational policy is based on the South African School Act of 1996 which gives the right to all children ages 7-15 a compulsory education. This act also generates funding for public schools with a definition of categories as public and independent school systems.

Finances for education was an allocated budget of R43.7 billion in the 1998-99 school year. This budget also included funding for universities and technikons.

Currently, the South African education system provides schooling for more than 12.5 million pupils. The levels of learning consists of pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher education. Recently, there has been a sizable growth in the college and higher learning areas showing a reflection to funding from a strengthening economy.
**Languages**

The official language of South Africa can be grouped into eleven different sects. Namely Afrikaans, English, Isindebele, Sepebi, Sesotho, Siswati, Xitsonga, Setswana, Tshivenda, Isixhosa, and Isizulu. Due to the diverse cultural make up of the country, the constitution recently allocated all of these eleven languages the official languages of the country.

**Trade**

South Africa's economy is based greatly on trade with a ratio to exports (good and nonfactor services) to the GDP and from imports (good and nonfactor services) ratios to the gross domestic expenditures. Merchandise makes up 83 percent of the total exports from South Africa with gold being responsible for a major part of the foreign exchange earnings. Imports into the country are made up of consumer commodities, semi-manufactured goods, raw materials and capital goods. South African trade relations remain formal with numerous countries around the world. Memberships with international institutions, treaties, and trade agreements maintain this formal compliance and help to institute a good foreign policy.

**Food**

Maize remains a stable food for the South African people. A large percentage of the population consumes corn as their main supplement. Although many other foods, such as cereals, livestock, and fish make up the diet of the native people, maize remains the most highly available food. A large variety of cultural foods can be found in all areas of the country as well. A person visiting South Africa can find themselves dining on anything from exotic tribal meals to an American hamburger.

**Agriculture**

The largest part of agriculture for South Africa is dedicated to the growing of maize. Over 1,500 farmers rely on corn as their main source of horticulture production. Wheat is
produced only in the winter rainfall areas of the Western cape and the free states. Sorghum and sugar cane can also be found growing on many farms, and the production of sunflowers are grown on a small scale.

Livestock can be found in almost all areas of South Africa with an emphasis on cattle, sheep, and hogs. Recent numbers show a slight rise in the amount of animals raised with cattle reaching over 13.7 million, sheep 29.2 million, and hogs 1.6 million. Poultry is also increasing in numbers and South Africa produces 80 percent of the world's ostrich product sales.

**Landmarks**

Some of the most visited landmarks in South Africa include: Victoria and Alfred Waterfront and Cape town, Cape Point, Table Mountains, the Garden Route, and the ostrich farms in Oudtshoorn. Each of these places provide a unique experience into the many varieties of culture that make up South Africa. Other special landmarks include the Gold Reef City, Robbes Islands, and the Cango Caves. These wonderful areas bring an abundance of tourism into South Africa every year. With tourism playing a strong role in the part of the countries economy these land marks remain a vital resource to the native people.