

## SAFETY IN SOUTH AFRICA

### Introduction to South Africa and safety

It is important to follow just a few guidelines to ensure your safety in South Africa.

Although South Africa is in many respects a developed country, much of its population, particularly in rural areas, lives in poverty. There are adequate facilities in all South African urban centers, game parks and areas most commonly visited by tourists.

Medical facilities are excellent in all urban areas of South Africa and in the vicinity of game parks and beaches, but may be limited elsewhere.

There is continuing and significant street crime such as muggings, pick pocketing, and random street violence, which affects foreigners as well as local residents, especially in the center of major cities such as Johannesburg.

Road conditions are generally good but there is a very high incidence of highway casualties, especially over holiday weekends.

When you travel to South Africa the odds are in your favor that you will have a safe and incident-free holiday. However, crime and violence, as well as unexpected difficulties, do happen.

In the hope of helping you avoid serious difficulties during your visit to South Africa, we have prepared the following travel tips.

## Before you go to South Africa

### **1. What to bring**

Safety begins when you pack. To avoid being a target, dress conservatively. Don't wear expensive looking jewelry. A flashy wardrobe can mark you as a tourist. As much as possible, avoid the appearance of affluence. Never leave your luggage unattended at any time.

Put your name, address and telephone numbers inside and outside of each piece of luggage. Use covered luggage tags to avoid casual observation of your identity or nationality. If possible, lock your luggage. Leave a copy of your itinerary with family or friends at home in case they need to contact you in an emergency.

Carry the minimum amount of valuables necessary for your trip and plan a place to conceal them. Your passport, cash and credit cards are most secure when locked in a hotel safe. When you have to carry them on your person, you may wish to conceal them in several places rather than putting them all in one wallet or pouch. Avoid handbags, fanny packs and outside pockets that are easy targets for thieves. Inside pockets and a sturdy shoulder bag with the strap worn across your chest are somewhat safer. One of the safest places to carry valuables is in a pouch or money belt worn under your clothing.

If you wear glasses, pack an extra pair. Bring them and any medicines you need in your carry-on luggage.

To avoid problems when passing through customs, keep medicines in their original, labeled containers. Bring copies of your prescriptions and the generic names for the drugs. If a medication is unusual or contains narcotics, carry a letter from your doctor attesting to your need to take the drug. If you have any doubt about the legality of carrying a certain drug into a country, consult the embassy or consulate of that country first.

Bring travelers checks and one or two major credit cards instead of cash. Pack an extra set of passport photos along with a photocopy of your passport information page to make replacement of your passport easier in the event it is lost or stolen.

### **2. What to leave behind**

Don't bring anything you would hate to lose. Leave at home:

- Valuable or expensive-looking jewelry,
- Irreplaceable family objects,
- All unnecessary credit cards,
- Social Security card, library cards, and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet.

## Safety precautions to take while travelling in South Africa

### **1. Safety on the street**

Use the same common sense traveling in South Africa that you would at home. Be especially cautious in or avoid areas where you are likely to be victimized. These include crowded subways, train stations, elevators, tourist sites, market places, festivals and marginal areas of cities. Don't use short cuts, narrow alleys or poorly-lit streets. Try not to travel alone at night. Avoid public demonstrations and other civil disturbances.

Keep a low profile and avoid loud conversations or arguments. Do not discuss travel plans or other personal matters with strangers. Beware of strangers who approach you, offering bargains or to be your guide.

Wear the shoulder strap of your bag across your chest and walk with the bag away from the curb to avoid drive-by purse-snatchers. Try to seem purposeful when you move about. Even if you are lost, act as if you know where you are going. When possible, ask directions only from individuals in authority or owners of stores.

If you are confronted, don't fight back. Give up your valuables. Your money and passport can be replaced, but you cannot.

### **2. Safety in your hotel**

Keep your hotel door locked at all times. Meet visitors in the lobby. Do not leave money and other valuables in your hotel room while you are out. Use the hotel safe. Let someone know when you expect to return if you are out late at night. If you are alone, do not get on an elevator if there is a suspicious-looking person inside. Read the fire safety instructions in your hotel room. Know how to report a fire. Be sure you know where the nearest exit and alternate exits are located. Count the doors between your room and the nearest exit. This could be a life saver if you have to crawl through a smoke-filled corridor.

### **3. Safety in South Africa when you drive**

When you rent a car, don't go for the luxury ones; choose a type commonly available locally. Keep car doors locked at all times. Wear seat belts. As much as possible, avoid driving at night. Don't leave valuables in the car. If you must carry things with you, keep them out of sight locked in the trunk. Don't park your car on the street overnight. If the hotel or municipality does not have a parking garage or other secure area, select a well-lit area. Never pick up hitchhikers.

#### **4. How to handle money safely**

To avoid carrying large amounts of cash, change your travelers' checks only as you need currency. Countersign travelers' checks only in front of the person who will cash them. Do not flash large amounts of money when paying a bill. Make sure your credit card is returned to you after each transaction. Deal only with authorized agents when you exchange money, buy airline tickets or purchase souvenirs. Do not change money on the black market.

If your possessions are lost or stolen, report the loss immediately to the local police. Keep a copy of the police report for insurance claims and as an explanation of your plight. After reporting missing items to the police, report the loss or theft of:

- Travelers' checks to the nearest agent of the issuing company,
- Credit cards to the issuing company,
- Airline tickets to the airline or travel agent,
- Passport to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate.

Thank you for taking the time to become an informed traveler. We wish you a safe and wonderful journey in South Africa.

Made with the support of our partner in South Africa

