

Hitting the road safely: Guide to a self-drive in South Africa

South Africa offers an incredible opportunity for an unforgettable road trip adventure. Driving yourself allows you to explore the country's diverse landscapes and attractions at your own pace. Fortunately, South Africa's national road network is in very good condition overall, with plenty of interesting sights, convenient rest stops, and ample cell phone coverage along most routes. As you venture into the more rural areas, road conditions remain fair for the most part, although there are areas where you're more likely to encounter potholes or animals crossing. While cell coverage may be a bit spottier off the beaten path, you'll be rewarded with spectacular, unspoiled views and landscapes that showcase South Africa's rugged natural beauty. With proper planning and awareness, a self-drive trip through South Africa's cities, small towns, and wilderness areas is a fantastic way to experience the country's rich culture, history, wildlife, and stunning scenery.

Q: How can I ensure my safety while driving in South Africa?

A: To maximise your safety while driving in South Africa, always maintain a high level of situational awareness. Plan routes carefully, steering clear of high-crime locations. Share your itinerary with a trusted contact. Provide your accommodation with your phone number and ETA and obtain their contact info as well.

Q: Is it safe to drive at night in South Africa?

A: It's recommended to avoid driving at night, especially during winter months when darkness falls early (around 5 pm). Some roads lack proper lighting, and wildlife activity increases at dusk. If nighttime driving is unavoidable, let someone know your route and estimated arrival time.

Q: What are some things to watch out for while driving?

A: Staying alert is essential! Here's what to keep in mind:

- **Road signs:** South Africa follows left-hand traffic. Be extra vigilant for stop signs, which can be placed in unexpected locations, especially at rural intersections.
- **Road conditions:** Potholes can be hazardous, so watch out for uneven surfaces. Reduce speed and navigate these obstacles with caution.
- **Pedestrians:** Be aware of pedestrians who may wander onto the road, especially in rural areas.
- **Livestock:** Also be mindful of livestock that could wander onto the road, especially in rural areas.
- **Traffic lights:** Traffic lights are nicknamed 'robots'. If a light malfunctions, treat the intersection as a four-way stop which works on a first in, first out basis. Should we mention that loadshedding could impact traffic lights and you might need additional time to get to your destination if you are traveling in urban areas like towards the airport?
- **Seat belts:** Wearing seat belts is mandatory for all occupants.
- **Mobile phones:** Using a mobile phone while driving is illegal unless hands-free.

Q: What vehicle safety tips should I follow?

A: Park in well-lit areas or secure parking lots, and never leave valuables in plain sight. Consider using additional security measures like steering locks or vehicle tracking systems. Make sure your vehicle has the required equipment to change a tire if you should need it i.e. vehicle jack, wheel spanner and spare tyre.

Q: How should I plan my route?

A: Research and plan your routes using reputable sources and consult with local accommodations for the safest paths. Inform someone of your itinerary and expected arrival times. Check with your host regarding WiFi signals and known dead spots along your route to prepare accordingly. It's always a good plan to have an old-fashioned hard copy map for those areas where Apps do not have signal.

Q: What are some risks I should be aware of?

A: Taking a proactive approach to safety is essential. Here are some tips:

- Driving safety tips: Keep your car doors and trunk locked and the windows up, especially when stopping at traffic lights. Keep bags off seats and out of view to prevent 'smash and grab' opportunists.
- Parking safety tips: Always choose well-lit areas for parking, as they deter potential thieves. Avoid leaving any items inside your car, regardless of their perceived value. Even if you hide them, criminals may still target your vehicle. Before leaving, always confirm that all doors are securely locked, as there have been instances where criminals use devices to unlock vehicles remotely.

Emergencies and roadblocks**Q: What should I do in case of a breakdown or emergency?**

A: Being prepared is key. Here are some steps to take:

- Emergency supplies: Pack a well-stocked emergency kit with water, non-perishable snacks, a flashlight, a first-aid kit, and a car charger for your phone.
- Important documents: Keep a copy of your passport readily available (consider secure online storage). It is also advised to have a list of emergency contacts programmed into your phone. Memorise at least three of the most important contact numbers.
- Breakdown or accident: If your car breaks down, stay calm and pull over to a safe location away from traffic. If possible, turn on your hazard lights. Call for roadside assistance using your local SIM card (see below) or a local bystander's phone. In case of an accident, immediately call emergency services by dialling 10177 for an ambulance or 10111 for the police.
- Protest action: If you come across a protest and see crowds and smoke ahead, turn around. Do not try to drive through the protest action.

Q: What should I do if I get pulled over by the police?

A: If you are in an area that is safe and public, safely pull over to the roadside and activate your hazard lights. This signals your acknowledgement of the officer's presence and intention to

stop. Remain cooperative. If the vehicle pulling you over is unmarked and you feel unsure, proceed cautiously with your hazards to the nearest well-lit police station. It is also quite normal to come across a police roadblock where an officer will flag you down to check the vehicle licence is up to date and to check your licence. Simply pull over and follow their instructions. In general, all drivers must have a valid driving licence from their country of residence. If the licence is not printed in English, you will need to obtain an International Drivers' Licence.

Q: Can I pay a traffic fine directly to the officer?

A: No, you should never pay the officer a traffic fine in cash. Legitimate fines are only processed at a police station or Magistrate's Court. When you pay at these official locations, you'll receive a receipt as proof of payment. If you are driving a rental vehicle, the fine payment will be deducted from the credit card used to hire the vehicle.

Q: What should I do if an officer asks for a bribe?

A: If an officer requests a bribe, refuse politely but firmly. Here's what you can do to protect yourself:

- Gather evidence: Note the officer's name, badge number (if visible), location, time of the stop, and vehicle registration number.
- Call the emergency contact information below and speak slowly and clearly. Explain you're reporting a bribery attempt and give your exact location with any nearby landmarks. If there are injuries or suspects, describe them. Identify yourself by name and ask for the name of the person you're speaking with. Finally, get help on the way by requesting an estimated arrival time and following up to confirm assistance is coming. You can also file a formal complaint later at a police station.

Q: Is there a way to report an incident as a tourist?

A: Yes! South Africa offers a dedicated support system for tourists. For tourist emergencies and reporting an incident, call or send a text or WhatsApp message to the Tourism Hotline at **+27 83 318 2475**.

Q: Is there such a thing as tourism permit or road tax that needs to be paid?

A: Take care when asked to pay tourism permit or "road tax". You may be asked by unscrupulous people to leave your car and withdraw money to pay the "road tax". Never leave your vehicle and do not be coerced into paying tourism permit or road tax. Rental vehicles will cover toll road payments using a tag which is fitted on the vehicle and this will be deducted from the credit card you used to hire the vehicle. Take care of such scams as fake detours, ATM scammers and signal jammers.

Essential tips for a smooth self-drive

Q: Should I get a local SIM card?

A: Having a local SIM card, or setting up an eSim on your device is highly recommended. It allows for calls and data usage within South Africa, which is helpful for navigation using online maps or ride-hailing apps in case of emergencies.

Q: What is the SECURA Traveller app, and where can I find detailed information on how it operates?

A: The SECURA Traveller app is an essential companion for safety and support throughout a tourist's travels in South Africa, offering direct access to the largest network of emergency response and tourism support services. By leveraging advanced GPS technology, the app ensures swift dispatch of emergency units directly to their location at the push of a button. SECURA Traveller can also be activated in a breakdown to have a "stand-by-me" service dispatched. For a comprehensive understanding of the app's functionality and benefits, visit the SECURA Traveller website: <https://securatraveller.co.za/>

Q: Are there offline navigation options?

A: Yes! Downloading offline maps on your phone or using a GPS device is a wise precaution, especially in remote areas where cellular signals might be unreliable. Many navigation apps offer offline functionality when downloaded in advance. The South African Tourism Board (www.southafrica.net/index.html) website offers excellent trip-planning tools and downloadable maps, too. Avoid relying on Google Maps, as it may guide you through potentially dangerous areas.

Q: What about wildlife?

A: South Africa boasts incredible wildlife viewing opportunities! If driving through a safari park, strictly follow the park's rules and regulations. Stay inside your vehicle at all times and admire the animals from a safe distance. Never attempt to feed or approach wild animals.

Q: Anything else to keep in mind?

A: South Africa has lower speed limits than many visitors might expect. Always adhere to the posted speed limits to ensure your safety and avoid fines. Note that the speed limit could be 60 or 80km/h on roads that look like highways. Additionally, parking regulations can vary, so pay attention to signage to avoid getting towed.

Finally, if you do encounter a challenging situation, stay calm and cooperate. Do not try to escape or fight back.

Remember: South Africans drive on the left-hand side of the road. While most rental cars will be automatic, if you're accustomed to driving a manual transmission, clarify beforehand to ensure you get the right vehicle.

Emergency contacts:

E2 National Monitoring Control Centre Tourism SOS 083 318 2475

Police / Any emergency 10111

From a cell phone 112 with South African Sim

Medical 10177

ER24 084 124 (private healthcare)

Netcare 082 911 (private healthcare)

Sanral Road Assistance **0800 487 233**

Automobile Association 0861 000 234