

BCD Travel Recommends: Johannesburg

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The City of Gold



Johannesburg is the great big heart of South Africa and sometimes referred to as the "City of Gold" due to its rich gold-mining heritage. It is a dynamic cosmopolitan city teeming with towering skyscrapers, huge shopping complexes, great places to eat and interesting sites to visit. The city is recognized as the financial capital of South Africa and home to many big businesses.

South Africa has a total of 11 official languages, all of which are spoken in Johannesburg. The most widely used languages are English and Afrikaans.

In recent years Johannesburg has made a determined effort to crack down on crime and shake off its stereotype as a city with spiraling gun crime and poverty. Today, the city's scars are healing through urban renewal and social regeneration.

Improved security gives less reason for apprehension about visiting Johannesburg. As with numerous other cities, you should take common sense precautions to enjoy a trouble-free stay, such as keeping your valuables hidden and avoid carrying large amounts of cash.

Getting around Johannesburg

Getting to and from Johannesburg is fairly straightforward with good international and local air and bus connections. Getting around Johannesburg, however, poses more of a problem and highways are best avoided during rush hour, when traffic is very heavy.

Story highlights:

- Learn about South Africa's fascinating and heart-wrenching history
- Take a leisurely Sunday afternoon stroll through the colorful African Rooftop Market
- Cast yourself back in time at The Cradle of Humankind
- Grab a meat feast at some of the best steakhouses in town
- Take a walk on the wild side at Pilanesberg National Park

Public transportation in Johannesburg is provided by **city buses** and informal **minibus taxis**. Large blue city buses run up and down the main roads and stop at clearly designated bus stops. Minibus taxis can be flagged down on the side of the street, but they are not recommended. They are driven quite aggressively and recklessly, and there is a problem with theft at the minibus "stands" where they start and finish their journeys.

Modern, **metered taxis** are available throughout the city, but they cannot be flagged down. Taxi ranks exist at the airport, bus and train stations, and outside the larger hotels. Order a taxi by phone—any hotel or restaurant can do this on your behalf—and one will appear pretty much instantly.

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Several **long-distance trains** cross the country linking the major cities and most pass through Johannesburg. The train station is at the Park City Transit Centre (where the bus station is also located) on Rissik Street, Braamfontein, CBD.

Don't miss...

The Apartheid Museum

The Apartheid Museum is located near Gold Reef City and details South Africa's history of black oppression. Here you can discover relics of the Apartheid system, which banned non-whites from certain areas and from receiving an education, as well as a bench marked for "Whites Only." A visit to this museum is fundamental for those wanting to gain an understanding of the real history of South Africa's struggles, as well as its triumphs.



Carlton Center

The Carlton Center is located in downtown Johannesburg and is the highest building in Africa, standing at 223 meters (730 ft). The building houses numerous offices and is adjacent to the Carlton Shopping Center with over 180 shops and restaurants. Visit the viewing deck, The Top of Africa, located on the fiftieth floor for a superb bird's eye view of Johannesburg.

Cradle of Humankind/Sterkfontein Caves

The Cradle of Humankind is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is located just an hour's drive away from Johannesburg. The area contains an array of limestone caves, including the Sterkfontein Caves. These caves are well-known for their fossil finds, including the famous "Mrs. Ples" and more recently, "Little Foot," a 4.17 million-year-old almost complete ape-man skeleton. These discoveries are showcased in the scientific exhibition center, which focuses on the development of humans, our ancestors and evolution over the past few million years.

Pilanesberg National Park

Pilanesberg National Park is approximately an 1.5 hour drive from Johannesburg. Situated inside the eroded crater of an extinct volcano, Pilanesberg is one of the largest volcanic complexes of its kind in the world. Its rare rock types and structure make it a unique geological feature. The park is smaller in scale in comparison to Kruger, but has a real wilderness feel to it. There are plenty of animals to see, including the "Big Five," which are the lion, elephant, rhino, buffalo and leopard.

Where to eat

Eating out in Johannesburg can be a great experience. Most restaurants offer a variety of dishes and you are bound to find something to suit your taste. Here are a few recommendations:

The Firehouse

Shop 7 Piazza Level, Illovo Square, 3 Rivonia Road, Illovo, Johannesburg

Tel: +27 11 268 6254

The Firehouse is a meat-lover's delight specializing in grills and focusing on fresh, homemade ingredients. The interior is welcoming with warm wood and leather throughout, and a glass facade keeps the atmosphere light and relaxing. Enjoy the Peri-Peri Mozambique Memoirs Chicken or Teriyaki basted Grilled Scottish Salmon with vegetable julienne. Desserts are another revelation with the delectable Apple Pie with ice cream or Hillary's Baked Cheesecake with berry coulis.

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Moyo's at Zoo Lake

Zoo Lake Park, 1 Prince of Wales Drive, Parkview, Johannesburg

Tel: +27 11 646 0058

<http://www.moyo.co.za> This branch of Moyo's is located in the leafy surroundings of Zoo Lake, offering a sophisticated and diverse mix of African culture and food. Popular dishes include fragrant slow cooked North African stews, mixed with various spices and served with couscous; the South African venison bobotie (a mild, sweetish curry); and the grilled ostrich, prepared with aromatic Ethiopian spices. If you prefer something light, try the Zanzibar fish burger, served on sweet-potato-and-pumpkin bread.

Wombles Steakhouse

17 Third Avenue, Parktown North Johannesburg

Tel: +27 11 880 2470

www.wombles.co.za As the name indicates this restaurant specializes in beef steaks, ranging from a fillet of 250g to a real man-sized 1kg rump! Wombles Steakhouse has white linen and candlelit décor, giving it a relaxed and romantic, colonial-style atmosphere. Originally from Zimbabwe, owners Duncan and Yvette Barker have had several restaurants prior to settling in Johannesburg. During their time in Australia they received the Gold Plate Restaurant Award - a testimony to their success. For those not keen on meat, there are numerous other delicious food choices available.

Shopping

From modern shopping malls to local markets, Johannesburg offers a varied shopping experience, with plenty of unique buys to be found.

Cresta is one of the Johannesburg's largest shopping complexes, with a diverse range of stores from supermarkets and clothing to cozy coffee shops and movie theatres.

With over 360 stores, the **Oriental Plaza** is known for bargain shoes and its exotic variety of fabrics sold at discount prices. There are no fixed prices and bargaining is part of the experience.



Dine and browse to your heart's content through supermarkets, boutiques, chain stores, shoe shops and cinemas located at **Fourways Mall**, which also has a miniature golf course.

Shopping at **Melrose Arch** suits those looking for exclusive shopping, with a variety of coffee shops and restaurants. A favorite is Cocoa Diva, a gift shop specializing in imported chocolates.

The **African Rooftop Market** was established in 1993 and is located at the Mall of Rosebank. On Sundays, the grey parking area is transformed with over 600 stalls offering quality clothing, ceramics, arts and crafts, handcrafted items from all over Africa, as well as an International Food Court and Deli section – bringing you a colorful experience like no other.

Also in Rosebank, visit this double-storey **Craft Market** which has craftwork from all over Africa including pieces from Zimbabwe, Namibia and the Congo.

If you like organic produce then visit **Bryanston Organic & Natural Market** in Bryanston, which has over 120 stalls selling 100 percent natural, handmade clothing, gifts, jewelry, deli food and fresh produce.

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