

Exploring South Africa by road: Tips to improve your safety

Embark on an unforgettable road trip adventure in South Africa, where you can explore diverse landscapes and attractions at your own pace. The country's national road network is in good condition, offering interesting sights, rest stops, and cell phone coverage. While rural areas may have occasional potholes or animals crossing, you will be rewarded with spectacular, unspoiled views. With proper planning, a self-drive trip through South Africa's cities, towns, and wilderness is a fantastic way to experience its rich culture, history, wildlife, and stunning scenery. Here are some tips to ensure that you travel safely.

10 tips to ensure personal safety on the road

- Avoid driving at night, especially in areas that are not well lit.
- Inform your holiday residence of your route and estimated arrival time, and keep them updated as you progress.
- 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 remote jamming is a world-wide phenomenon.
- Stay alert and awake. If you feel sleepy while driving, its best to stop at a well-lit roadside petrol station or coffee shop, or swap drivers.
- 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 or an e-Sim (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.

10 things to watch out for while driving

- 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: Remain mindful of livestock that could wander onto the road, especially in rural areas and especially at night when visibility is low.
- Traffic lights: Traffic lights are nicknamed 'robots' in South Africa. If a traffic light malfunctions, treat the intersection as a four-way stop which works on a first in, first out basis.
- Seat belts: Wearing seat belts is mandatory for all occupants.
- Mobile phones: Using a mobile phone while driving is illegal unless hands-free.
- Wildlife: 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.
- Speed limits: 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.
- Navigation: 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.

10 tips to handle emergencies and roadblocks

- 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 five of the most important contact numbers.
- Adhere to the rules of the road, including speed limits, driving on the left side of the road and following road signs.
- Do not stop in a deserted area to talk on your cell phone or even relieve yourself.
- If stopped by police or Metro police at a roadblock along with other vehicles, pull over safely to the roadside and activate your hazards. Remain co-operative.
- Remember that the vast majority of our police are there to keep you safe. Look for signs that these are legitimate safety officers. These officers will always be in uniform, wearing a name badge clearly and will be driving marked cars. You should never pay a traffic fine directly in cash. Rather, the officer will issue you with a fine if you have done something wrong, which must be paid at a police station or Magistrate's Court.
- If you are stopped at a police roadblock, pull over and follow instructions. Drivers must have a valid licence from their country of residence. If not in English, an International Driver's Licence is required.
- If the vehicle pulling you over is unmarked or you feel unsafe, proceed cautiously with your hazards to the nearest well-lit police station, shopping complex or busy area.
- If an officer asks you for a bribe, note the officer's name, badge number (if visible), location, time of the stop, and vehicle registration number politely, call the emergency contact information below and speak slowly and clearly. Explain you are reporting a bribery attempt and give your exact location with any nearby landmarks. You can also file a formal complaint later at a police station.
- If anyone tries to force you out of the road, do not panic but just constantly hoot to draw attention.

Numbers to call for help

- Police or any emergency: 10111
- From a cell/mobile phone: 112
- Medical Assistance: 10177
- Tourist Emergency WhatsApp line: A dedicated support system for tourists: +27 (0) 82 321 6018
- E2 National Monitoring Control Centre Hotline: +27 (0) 83 318 2475
- Roadside assistance on N4 route 0800 87 22 64
- SECURA Traveller App: Download this app to access trained emergency response support