



STAYING SAFE

in South Africa

**Essential safety advice
for international visitors**

**Compiled by AfriForum
Community Safety**



AfriForum



WELCOME TO SOUTH AFRICA!

South Africa is a country of breathtaking beauty, diverse cultures and world-class attractions – from the savannas of Kruger to the vibrant streets of Cape Town. However, visitors should be aware that the country also faces high levels of crime, including violent and opportunistic offences. With awareness and preparation, your trip can be both safe and unforgettable.

UNDERSTANDING THE RISK ENVIRONMENT

Crime in South Africa is often unpredictable and violent. Common threats include armed robbery, carjacking, burglary, theft from vehicles and scams that target tourists. Foreigners are not deliberately targeted, but they are more vulnerable if they appear unfamiliar with local conditions or look distracted. Rural and township areas, as well as certain inner-city districts can be unsafe without a local guide. Police presence is inconsistent, while emergency response times vary between regions.



1. GENERAL SAFETY AWARENESS

- Stay alert in public spaces, especially at airports, in shopping centres, at ATMs and on busy streets.
- Avoid displaying wealth – keep your jewellery, cameras and mobile phones discreet.
- Plan your routes in advance and use reputable GPS or map apps.
- Avoid isolated or poorly lit areas at night.
- Trust your instincts: if something feels wrong, leave immediately.





2. VEHICLE AND ROAD SAFETY

South Africa has a high rate of vehicle-related crime, including hijackings and smash-and-grab incidents.

- Keep your vehicle's doors locked and windows closed at all times.
- Avoid stopping in remote areas or on the roadside unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Leave space between vehicles at traffic lights in case you need an escape route.
- Be cautious near airport routes, off-ramps and informal settlements.
- Be aware of vehicle spiking, where criminals use improvised puncturing devices that they place on road surfaces to damage vehicle tyres and bring vehicles to a stop before robbing the occupants.
- Use secure parking and never leave any valuables visible from the outside.
- Check your surroundings before exiting your vehicle.
- Be aware of vehicle remote jamming. Always physically ensure your car doors are locked before you leave your vehicle.

3. ACCOMMODATION SAFETY

- Choose reputable accommodation with good security ratings.
- Lock your windows and doors, even when inside.
- Use safes for passports, cash and electronics.
- Do not leave valuables in your hotel room unless it is locked in a safe.
- Do not discuss your travel plans with strangers. They include drivers, hotel staff, servers, etc.
- Verify all visitors through reception before you open the doors.

4. FINANCIAL SAFETY

- Use ATMs that are located inside banks or malls, and be aware of your surroundings.
- Do not carry large amounts of cash; use cards or mobile payments.
- Beware of skimming devices that are placed on ATMs and always cover your PIN.
- Do not let cashiers or servers handle your bank cards; always keep your card in your own hands.
- Keep emergency cash, backup cards and backup communication (like a spare mobile phone) in separate places.



5. PERSONAL MOVEMENT AND PUBLIC SPACES

- Do not walk alone after dark, especially in city centres.
- Use licensed taxis or ride-hailing apps like Uber or Bolt, and make sure to identify your driver and vehicle before getting into the vehicle.
- Beware of unmarked or informal taxis.
- Keep your bags close and monitor your drinks in nightlife venues.
- Avoid confrontations.

6. UNIQUE THREATS IN SOUTH AFRICA

- Farm and rural attacks: choose secure lodges with alarm systems.
- Protest action: monitor news for service-delivery protests before travel.
- Wildlife safety: never get out of your vehicle in game reserves.
- Cyber scams and rental fraud: only book via verified platforms.
- Vehicle spiking on roads: avoid travelling at night whenever possible.
- Airport-follow heists: beware of your surroundings when you leave the airport and check to see if you are being followed.
- Blue-light gangs: Some gangs pretend to be police officers. They pull motorists over and then rob them. If you feel unsafe when you are approached by police officials while you are driving, switch on your emergency lights and drive to the nearest police station or public area in order to comply with instructions.



EMERGENCY

7. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Important numbers:

AfriForum national control room: 063 639 7170

Police (SAPS): 10111

Ambulance and fire: 10177

Mobile emergency (all networks): 112

Tourist safety hotline (SATSA): +27 83 318 2475

Make sure to store these numbers on your mobile phone. Also store your local embassy or consulate's number on your phone.

Keep a spare mobile phone in a separate location and remember to store emergency numbers on that device as well, because robbers are likely to take your phone along with your other valuables.

Keep a first-aid kit nearby and know how to use it.

If you become a victim of crime:

- Stay calm and comply with armed attackers.
- Move to a safe place and contact emergency services.
- Report incidents to the police or your embassy immediately.

8. FINAL THOUGHTS

Situational awareness is one of the most powerful tools you have to keep yourself safe – it is the ability to consciously observe, understand and anticipate what is happening around you before a threat becomes real.

In practice, this means staying alert of your surroundings rather than being distracted by your phone. It means noticing who is nearby and what their behaviour signals, as well as identifying exit routes or safe spaces in unfamiliar environments, and trusting your intuition when something feels “off”.

Whether you are driving, walking in a public place or withdrawing money, pause to scan the environment, assess the risks and make deliberate choices instead of reactive ones. Developing this habit turns you from a potential victim into a prepared and proactive individual – someone who notices danger before it notices you.





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