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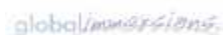
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South African adventure



Fantastic wildlife, awesome scenery and welcoming people make a South African language travel experience an adventure of a lifetime. Gillian Evans finds out more.

For language travellers and tourists alike, South Africa has many attractions: a great climate, vast unspoilt scenery, idyllic sandy beaches, an abundance of wildlife, a wide range of adventure activities, a multicultural population and a complex political history. Altogether this makes South Africa a destination that never fails to leave an impression on visitors – so much so, in fact, that some find it hard to leave.

For example, Diana Horvat, Operations Manager at Kurus English in Cape Town – which opened its doors this September – studied English in Cape Town in 2006. “After a year packed full of highlights and a lot of first-time experiences, it became clear that I had to come back,” she relates. When given the opportunity to return to the city to establish an English school she jumped at the chance.

South Africa is a popular destination for students from many world regions. Africans often choose to study there because it is easy to travel to, says Tania Copeland at the International English School in Somerset West in the Western Cape, while for European students it offers “something different – a great alternative to [other] overcrowded and expensive English language destinations”.

Sue Camilleri at EC Cape Town says that for most non-African students it is the lure of the exotic that tempts them to South Africa. “[Some] students want to go somewhere completely different and the call of Africa is exciting and full of interesting and diverse things to do,” she says.

Another major advantage of South Africa as a study destination is the fact that it offers good value for money. “I think many students are attracted to Cape Town because prices here are so much cheaper than most other destinations,” asserts Camilleri.

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Copeland agrees. "The rate of exchange is excellent – [students] get lots of value for their money." She also highlights the ease of visa issuance as another benefit of choosing South Africa. "Our visas are easy to obtain," she claims. "Students can study English only on a visitors visa for up to six months [and] many visas can be obtained at the airport – for less than three months stay." In addition, students can work for 20 hours per week while they study.

Being a fledgling English teaching destination, South Africa has experienced a rapid proliferation of language schools in recent years. EC, which has schools in the UK, USA and Malta, took over an existing Cape Town operation two years ago. For Camilleri, "This was a golden opportunity to start working in a relatively new EFL destination which had and still has lots of growth potential and unbelievable things to offer", she relates.

Another English language school in South Africa which has branches in various locations worldwide is LAL. "LAL [South Africa] was started in 2003 by two ex-English students who had studied here in South Africa," relates Gavin Eyre at LAL Cape Town. "The potential of South Africa was seen all these years ago – this includes the spoken English language, the beauty of the country, activities and [great] weather." LAL, which has schools in Cape Town and Durban, recently expanded its South African operations by opening a new residential centre for juniors at a boarding school situated on the slopes of Table Mountain in Cape Town.

Cape Town itself, which is home to a concentration of English language schools, is, according to Camilleri, "undoubtedly one of the most beautiful cities in the world". She continues, "[It] has so many diverse activities to offer students who come here. [These] range from visiting Table Mountain to wine tasting, whale watching, shark cage diving [and] going on safari to name but a few." The city is also a melting pot of different cultures, and, Camilleri says, "you can feel that vibrancy when you come here".

Craig Leith, Principal of Good Hope Studies in Cape Town, relates that one of his favourite activities is to visit the winelands, several of which are just a 45-minute drive from the city. "[Here you can] experience not only the breathtaking beauty of these regions, but also sample and purchase the incredible range of wines produced in this world-famous area," he says.

For the ultimate South African beach experience, Durban is an ideal location being a popular year-round holiday destination for South Africans as well as tourists thanks to its great surf beaches. "Durban has the beach life as well as the close proximity of the malaria-free game reserves and national parks along with a sub-tropical climate," says Eyre at LAL. Some of the city's highlights include UShaka, a 16-hectare marine theme park; going whale, dolphin and shark watching; sampling some of the great seafood along the Golden Mile; and experiencing authentic Zulu culture.

If students are looking for a more academic experience of South Africa they could head for Wits Language School, set on the campus of Wits University in Johannesburg. "Our language school is situated within the School of Literature and Language Studies, under the Faculty of Humanities. As a result we are expected to maintain the highest standards in order to maintain the university's standing," relates Trish Cooper, Course Coordinator at Wits Language School. She adds, "[As it is situated within the campus of Wits University], it is a very secure environment." Students have the opportunity

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of attending lectures, as well as making use of the sports facilities and clubs, libraries and theatres on campus.

South Africa's largest city, Johannesburg, is vibrant and bustling. It is affectionately known as the Big Apple of Africa and, like New York, it never sleeps. There are nightclubs and bars offering anything from jazz and R&B to kwaito – a genre of music developed in Johannesburg in the 90's. Other interesting activities include a visit to the Apartheid museum, planetarium, Johannesburg Zoo or a tour of Soweto. Johannesburg's appeal looks set to increase in the future as it is to host the final of the 2010 World Cup soccer championship, which is to be held in South Africa.

Port Elizabeth is another of South Africa's 10 host cities for the 2010 World Cup. As a result there is a lot of regeneration going on in the city. "[We are] building a new, multipurpose stadium for the event," comments Shaun Fitzhenry at Bay Language Institute in Port Elizabeth. "2010 will also result in a revamped, efficient, public transport system for the Nelson Mandela Metropole, of which Port Elizabeth is a part."

Port Elizabeth offers students a rather more off-the-beaten-track experience of South Africa. "The Eastern Cape is where I grew up, and is a relatively unknown and undersold part of SA," explains Fitzhenry. "Our city, Port Elizabeth, is growing rapidly, and is quieter and has a lower crime rate than many other South African cities."

Port Elizabeth is ideally situated to experience some of South Africa's famous wildlife – with the Addo National Elephant Park within 45 minutes of the city and the Karoo (large semi-desert area) within one hour. In addition, says Fitzhenry, "Our area is rich in history, being the meeting point of the early European settlers and the Nguni peoples, with the resultant 100 years of conflict and war between the Xhosa, the Boers and British settlers."

The city also has some great beaches and a coastline that is ideal for watersports – the world famous surfing beach of Jeffrey's Bay is less than a one-hour drive away. This means that among their English course offerings, which include golf and English for aviation, the school also offers courses that combine surfing or diving with English lessons. It also arranges volunteer programmes for those students who really want to get to know South Africa.

EC Cape Town also offers volunteer and internship programmes and, according to Camilleri, this is the best way for students to become involved in the local community. "Both [the volunteer programme and internship programme] have projects which help the local community in a variety of ways – helping in schools, helping orphans, helping disabled children, helping mothers and children who are infected with AIDS. Students usually follow these programmes for a minimum of three months but in this time they can give a lot to a needy community and they can learn a lot themselves."

Agent viewpoint



**Wolfgang Bauer, Carl Duisberg Centren,
Germany**

"Students are mainly attracted to South Africa by the somewhat exotic feeling, a destination out of the ordinary, plus

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lower everyday costs. We only send students to Cape Town because we have a very good and reliable partner there, Good Hope Studies. I would say that students are most surprised by the colourful multicultural mix. Then, of course, the striking contrast between (black) poverty and (white) wealth. Students enjoy going on a day tour to the Cape of Good Hope; some do an organised tour to one of the townships and are highly impressed by what they see there. At school it is the relaxed informal way they like. In the suburb schools, the teaching often takes place in the shaded garden; if they want they can hop into the school pool in the garden during lunch break.”



Kemâl Tatar, United Towers Educational Consulting, Turkey

“Students mostly choose South Africa as it is cheaper than other countries, and there are many social activities in the schools that we work with. We send students mostly to Cape Town and Durban. Cape Town is a city that is getting more popular day by day. The nature is so [beautiful] and the cute penguins are the most popular surprise for our students.”



Wael El Mahdy, Al Amoudi Travel Agency, Saudi Arabia

“[Our] students like the atmosphere in South Africa and its kind people. They generally choose to go to South Africa to learn English [because of the] low costs [and the] good schools with good teaching. We send students to Cape Town because Cape Town is a wonderful city. [Our students] enjoy the wonderful nature, kind people, nationality mix, and of course, safari trips.”



Dong Hoon Jang, FeelAfrica, Korea

“The reason why Korean students choose South Africa as a destination is that there are few Koreans in the country and the cost is cheaper than other countries. They also desire pure wildlife such as safari and nature. They definitely prefer Cape Town as it is safe and has a beautiful atmosphere.”



Luiza Vianna, CI, Brazil

“South Africa is a great destination for Brazilian students. It is good value and there are lots of places to visit and travel to. It is not too far from Brazil and there’s no visa for stays of less than 90 days. The nature in the Cape Town area is really special – the colours, flowers, mountains and beaches.”

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