

Places to visit in Gauteng Province

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Because of my involvement in amateur radio, I'm often asked about things to do and places to see when international visitors visit Gauteng Province. This article is an attempt to list and briefly describe some of the most interesting places in and around Pretoria. The information is not comprehensive enough to use directly to plan your outings. It's just a guide to suggest some possible destinations. Once you've decided what you want to see, ask the Internet for more specific information!

South Africa's geography

South Africa is a large place by European standards, and small by American standards. The three major population centres are Gauteng in the northeast, the Western Cape in the southwest and Durban on the southeast coast. The distance from Cape Town to Pretoria is about 1400 km, and you can expect to drive about 14 hours to get there.

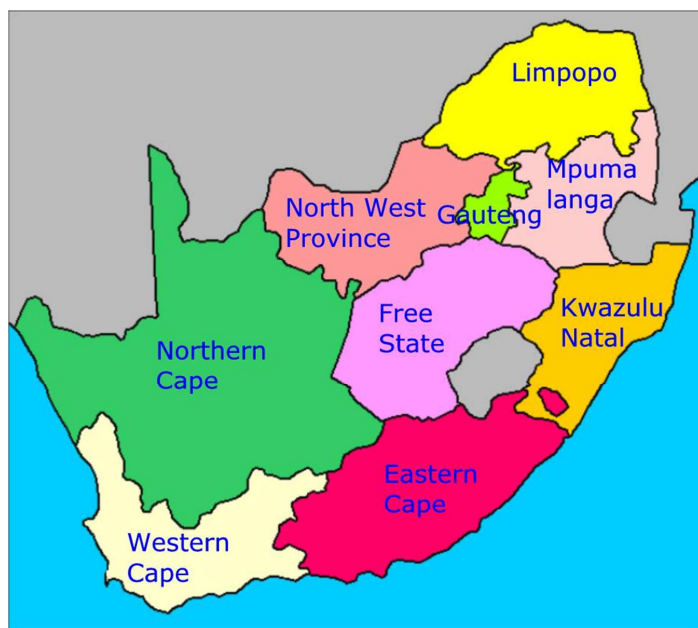


Figure 1: Stolen from www.southafrica.to

The Western Cape, with Cape Town as its most important city, is a winter-rainfall area with cool weather. Tourists rate Cape Town as one of the world's most sought-after cities, with a combination of natural beauty, history, nice beaches and a world-class wine industry as some of the drawcards.

Durban sprang up around a natural harbour. It is now a major industrial centre. Its beaches are legendary, and it is home to a large expatriate Indian population.

Gauteng (the Place of Gold) contains the gold boomtown of Johannesburg and the capital Pretoria, as well as a string of other cities that includes Soweto. Its

altitude is around 1500 m, very similar to that of Denver or Mexico City.

Gauteng is the second-most populous province of South Africa, and also the smallest. It is home to government and industry and most of the economic activity in South Africa.

There are nine provinces. Apart from the Western Cape and Gauteng, which have already been described, KwaZulu Natal province in the southeast contains the Durban metropolitan area. The other provinces (Northern Cape, Free State, Northwest, Limpopo and Mpumalanga) all have relatively small populations and subsist from a combination of agriculture, mining and tourism.

South Africa has several climatic zones, with an amazing diversity of climates. It is possible to drive from a lush tropical forest to a snow-capped mountain or an arid desert within a day.

The Cape Town area is a Mediterranean climatic zone with a unique floral heritage. The Cape Floral Kingdom is the smallest of the world's five floral kingdoms. An amazing diversity of plants can be found only there. The northern Cape is home to the Kalahari desert. The Karroo, in the Cape interior, is a semi-desert with striking rock formations surrounded by arid brush area. KwaZulu Natal is home to tropical forests. The Drakensberg, a mountain range that lies north-south in the eastern part of the country, produces high-altitude effects like snow-capped peaks and bergwinds, hot katabatic winds that produce a tropical effect in their path. The interior is a high-altitude savannah with vast grasslands and sparse trees.

Historical background

South Africa has a long history of human (or at least hominid) habitation. The Cradle of Humankind is near the modern cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria. The world's oldest complete hominid skeleton, Little Foot, is over three million years old. It is still being excavated from the Sterkfontein Caves. The area's more recent history started around 500 years ago, when nomadic tribes moved down from East Africa to settle the eastern part of what is now South Africa. Because of their nomadic existence, they did not build lasting structures. There is no legacy of architecture or urban settlements. Mapungubwe, on the Limpopo river at the northern end of South Africa, and Great Zimbabwe, after which our northern neighbour is named, are notable exceptions. Even then, their architecture is simple and most of the buildings have decayed to nothing more than piles of rock.

Around 1652, the Dutch East-India Company established a refreshment station for its ships plying the route to the East Indies, around which Cape Town eventually grew. Over the next 200 years, this settlement became the origin of European expansion into the interior.

Conflict erupted soon after the Dutch arrived. The area around Cape Town was settled by the Khoisan. Although trading happened on a cooperative basis, there were reports of theft and other minor misdemeanours, leading to occasional skirmishes. As the Dutch moved inland, more territorial conflicts eventuated.

The English took over the Cape during one of their many wars with the Dutch. The Cape changed hands three times. After 1800, the Cape remained a British colony, along with the colony of Natal to the east. The British had a series of wars with the Xhosa in the eastern Cape, lasting for more than a century.

Dissatisfaction with British rule led to the Voortrekker movement, an inland migration that peaked around 1838. The Voortrekkers settled in the interior, including what is now the five northern provinces of South Africa.

Late in the nineteenth century, gold was discovered in the Witwatersrand. Fortune seekers from all over the planet converged on the new boomtown of Johannesburg. Many of the Forty-Niners from California and gold diggers from the Klondike found their way to Johannesburg.

With the discovery of gold came imperial interests. British ambitions to access the new wealth were thwarted by the two Boer republics. The South African Republic (ZAR) and the Orange Free State were fiercely independent. The First Anglo-Boer War of 1880 to 1881 ended badly for the British, as did an invasion attempt around 1895, the Jameson Raid. Even the Second Anglo-Boer War became a protracted effort, starting in 1899 and ending in 1902. The war was finally decided when Lord Kitchener rounded up all the women and children and torched all the farms, leaving the soldiers in the field without supplies. His actions led to a world-wide outcry, but it did have the effect of forcing a surrender that resulted in the Union of South Africa being established in 1910 as part of the British

Commonwealth. The four provinces of the Union consisted of the two former Boer republics and the two former colonies, and the Union had a large degree of autonomy under British rule.

In 1947, the National Party came into power. The NP was strongly influenced by the Broederbond, a secret organisation that sought to assert the Afrikaner's influence in academia and government. The Afrikaners, mostly white citizens of Dutch and French descent, spoke a new language called Afrikaans, derived from Dutch with a mixture of Malay and local languages thrown in. The NP continued the British colonial policy of Apartheid (literally "separateness"), which sought to provide all population groups with opportunities for segregated development. Unfortunately, Apartheid gradually became a vehicle for promoting Afrikaner interests at the expense of others.

Final independence came in 1961 with the formation of the Republic of South Africa. The RSA established a series of Bantustans or Homelands, of which the four TBVC states (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei) were the most prominent. These states were nominally independent, and managed to profit from offering "diversions" that were illegal in South Africa, and keenly sought by its citizens. The most important example of this phenomenon is Sun City, which offered gambling and other vices to Gauteng's citizens within an hour's drive. Nevertheless, the Homelands were regarded as puppet states by most of the world.

Two factions resisted Apartheid, purporting to represent the interests of the majority. The Charterists, whose creed was the 1955 Freedom Charter's equal rights for all, were regarded as moderate and included the USSR-supported African National Congress in its ranks. The Pan-Africanists were less timid. They demanded more than equal rights, with slogans such as "One Settler, One Bullet" and "Black is Beautiful". The main organisation in this camp was the Pan-Africanist Congress, with support mainly from China. The ANC and PAC, along with their allies, were declared illegal by the NP government. Several decades of passive resistance, demonstrations and terrorism followed, along with an insurgency war that took place mainly on the border between Angola and South West Africa (now Namibia).

The writing was on the wall. When hardliner PW Botha was replaced by FW de Klerk at the helm of the NP, a process of negotiation was initiated with the release of political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela. The negotiations culminated in the first democratic elections 1994. The ANC won a two-thirds majority, which it maintains to this day. The ANC's policies are moderate with strong support for property rights and the free market, but its sympathies appear more Marxist in practice. It is in an alliance with the SA Communist Party and Cosatu, the largest grouping of trade unions, hampering its freedom to implement its free-market policies.

Today, South Africa is relatively peaceful, but a high crime rate with a high incidence of violent crime, and an alarming prevalence of corruption and inefficiency in the civil service plague most people's lives. Service delivery protests are common, with many of them turning violent.

Parallels between South African and American history

South African history has many parallels to American history. These parallels are not surprising, as both nations developed against the backdrop of migration from Europe, driven by the need to find better trade routes to the East and by religious persecution in Europe. However, these parallels extend beyond just the founding of the nation.

The Spanish visited North America only four years after the Portuguese sailed around South Africa. The Mayflower landed in New England about three decades before Jan van Riebeeck established a Cape halfway station for the Dutch East-India Company. Conflicts with Native Americans erupted in

1622 with the Jamestown Massacre, while the Xhosa wars started earnestly in the eighteenth century. America had its war of independence with Britain around 1775, while ours came around the turn of the twentieth century. In both countries, the inland migration started in earnest around 1838 to 1840. Black rights were restricted in both countries starting in the late eighteenth century. The Gold Rush came to California in 1849 and to the Witwatersrand in 1886. Slavery was abolished in South Africa in 1840 and in America in 1865. The wars with the natives ended in the 1890s. The US had its colonial war in Vietnam starting in 1955; South Africa's war started in Namibia and Angola around 1966. Both wars were unwinnable and became very unpopular domestically. Segregation ended in America in 1964 and in South Africa in 1994. Universal voting rights came to America in 1920, to South Africa in 1994. Affirmative action came to the USA in 1965, to South Africa around 2000. The first black president in South Africa was installed in 1994; the first in America in 2009.

The table below shows that America led the way in most cases by about 30 years. There are some major exceptions, though, with some things taking over 150 years to get here and slavery being abolished here about 25 years before the US.

USA		South Africa		Lag
Columbus sails to North America	1492	Bartholomeu Dias rounds the Cape	1488	-4
Mayflower lands in New England	1620	Jan van Riebeeck settles in the Cape	1652	32
Jamestown Massacre	1622	First wars with Xhosa	1779	157
War of Independence	1775	First Anglo-Boer War	1880	105
Migration to the West	1840	Great Trek	1838	-2
Restriction of Black rights	1790	Restriction of Black rights	1797	7
Gold rush in California	1849	Gold rush in Johannesburg	1886	37
Abolition of slavery	1865	Abolition of slavery	1840	-25
Last wars with Native Americans	1890	Last wars with Zulu	1897	7
Vietnam war	1955	Angolan war	1966	11
End of segregation	1964	End of segregation	1994	30
Universal suffrage (women)	1920	Universal franchise (blacks)	1994	74
Affirmative Action	1965	Black Economic Empowerment	2000	35
First Black President	2009	First Black President	1994	-15

There is one major difference in the two histories, though. South Africa's territorial wars resulted in treaties that led to a relatively peaceful coexistence. There were no bounty hunters, no new diseases, no genocides and no relocations to widely-different climatic zones. As a result, the Native American population has consistently been below 1% since 1890, making them a small minority in the US. In South Africa, around 80% of the population is of black native origin.

On that topic: The author is of Afrikaans extraction. The four families he descended from are of Dutch, German and French origin. All these families were in the country before 1700. Clearly, there is no ground for any European loyalty. Most of us are Africans alone.

Finally, you may have wondered if the historical parallels suggest certain similarities between geographical areas in the USA and areas in South Africa. Of course, you would be right. Cape Town has the air of tradition and stability that New England has. Maybe we should have called it New Holland. The architecture is of similar vintage and even of similar origin, although the Dutch influence in the Cape is hard to miss.

Gauteng, on the other hand, has the same pioneering bustle that California has. It also has the same absence of old buildings, with a century-old building being regarded as the exception rather than the

rule. The first large-scale building projects started at the turn of the twentieth century, when the ZAR started using its new-found mineral wealth in earnest. Downtown Pretoria and Johannesburg provide the best examples of European formal architecture, but both occupy no more than a few city blocks.

Another interesting historical parallel

Picture this: At the turn of the century, the world's foremost colonial power is in need of the strategic mineral of the day. There is a major source of this mineral, but a pesky little dictator in charge of some arbitrary little country sits on top of the minerals, making access difficult with his non-compliant attitude. Given the recent discovery of the strategic mineral, the little republic has suddenly gone from rags to riches, giving it access to a modern army with ample modern weaponry. Worse, it has made some successful advances to the rivals of the imperial power, establishing good working relations with most of the world's leading nations.

What to do? Well, the obvious answer is to use overwhelming military might to overthrow this pesky little dictator and to obtain access to the strategic mineral by force. It can't possibly take longer than a few months, right?

Wars are always unpopular and expensive (although the costs will be handsomely rewarded by access to the mineral). So to get popular support at home, some human rights abuses by the dictator will go down well. Religious extremism will make your voters even more indignant. Demonstrate some apparent wrongdoing on the dictator's part, stir in some allegations of weapons stockpiles that will destabilise the region, and your voters will gladly sign the cheques. Especially if you can convince them that you are the liberator of the weak, rather than an imperial buck-grabber.

Just set a few ultimatums, move the goal posts a few times, and hey presto: you have a righteous war.

So the war starts, with the intention to wrap it all up in a few months. Body bags pile up, costs soar and domestic discontent grows. Eventually, the war ends and the imperial power ends up wondering if it was all worth it.

Two events in recent history accurately fit this description. They happened a century apart and in different places, but the story line is remarkably similar.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Britain was looking for gold. The ZAR was the major source of gold at the time, but Paul Kruger did not intend to allow Britain free access. Milner, the governor of the Cape Colony, made good use of the "Uitlander" issue. The "Uitlanders", foreign non-citizens in the ZAR, were denied voting rights. Not to mention the fact that Kruger was a staunch Calvinist. On this basis, Milner engineered a war that was ostensibly based on a crusade for justice, but which a cynic might construe as a transparent effort to promote the interests of the gold magnates such as Beit, Werner, Rhodes and Jeppe. They minted 10 000 Queen's South Africa medals inscribed "1899-1900"; the war couldn't possibly drag on for more than a year. The British troops were initially humiliated, facing modern smokeless rifles and guerrilla warfare for the first time. More and more reinforcements were called for. In the end, they minted over 65 000 medals, with the war ending in 1902.

A century later, George Bush made most of the same mistakes. Iraq had the world's second-largest oil reserves. Its dictator had ruthlessly suppressed the Kurdish rebellion. A quick in-and-out campaign would fix all that. We all know the outcome: 4400 star-spangled body bags, 32 000 soldiers injured, plus over 100 000 local casualties. But at least the oil pipeline finally got built...

And another

The third historical parallel will only make sense to a small handful of people—those that have been to Paul Kruger's house in Pretoria and to Menelik II's house near Addis Ababa.

I personally have memories from my youth of countless faded black-and-white images of Paul Kruger. The staunch, religious statesman often had a bible on his lap. His bearded visage had a drooped quality that suggested someone who did not react hastily. He often wore a top hat and a lavish braided band across his chest. His wife Tannie Gezina was slightly thick-set, and wore a bonnet that covered her conservative hair style. They lived in a modest single-storey house within walking distance of Church Square, where ordinary citizens were welcome to request an audience at almost any time. He also had a farm near Rustenburg, where he actively farmed the land from a modest clay house with a dung floor and thatch roof.

His heroics were legendary. A typical yarn involves the time when he casually severed his damaged finger with a pocket knife after having damaged it in a shooting accident.

Under Kruger, the ZAR repelled two invasion attempts by the British. The third attempt was the Second Anglo-Boer War, which the British eventually managed to win by dubious means. Kruger died in exile in Switzerland.

Imagine my amazement when I visited Addis Ababa around 2009, and ventured out to Emperor Menelik II's house just outside Addis Ababa. Menelik was the original Salomonidic Emperor of Sheba and Ethiopia, said to be the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Jerusalem. His namesake governed Ethiopia in the 1880s, just when Paul Kruger was the president of the ZAR.

I felt right at home. The faded black-and-white photos show the bearded statesman with a Bible on his lap and his wife by his side. Even the banner across his chest and the top hat seemed familiar. His house was simple, with a dung floor and an open waiting area for normal people who wanted to speak to him.

The similarities did not end with appearances. Menelik II became legendary when he repelled the Italian invaders around 1896 (the year of the Jameson raid). The Italians never returned, leaving Ethiopia to claim the title of the only African country never to be colonised.

Interestingly, I remember intrepid Californian travellers telling me in 1983 of the similarities between Addis Ababa and Johannesburg. I can confirm their observations. Both cities ooze the same mixture of relative affluence and abject poverty side-by-side, the same high altitude, the same determination to make things work against all odds. Last but not least, the lush suburbs with their tennis courts and swimming pools lie adjacent to shantytowns where tin shacks provide the most basic of shelter. I've wondered about these similarities, especially when I hear how all South Africa's social ills are due to imperialism and colonisation...

Things to see in Gauteng

The preceding historical background is important in appreciating the background to the sights of Gauteng. Below is a list of places to see, organised by area. Each place also has an indication of the minimum amount of time you need to plan for to do it justice, on the basis of “been-there-done-that”. You could obviously spend a lot more time at each of these stops to soak in the atmosphere.

Shopping centres (or “malls” as you might know them) are not timed, as you already know what to do there. All of which makes it questionable whether you actually want to spend your valuable vacation time going there, except maybe to get a bite to eat. You can always visit a glitzy mall when you get home. On second thoughts, if you come from Bangui or Juba, you may want to disregard this advice...

Pretoria

Pretoria is regarded as a quaint town by most visitors. Its population is around one million. It houses the government and most civil service departments. It nestles in a valley with hills all around, giving the Pretoria weather station the lowest average wind speed of any in southern Africa. The municipality is now called Tshwane, with the name Pretoria reserved for the inner city around Church Square.

- **Klapperkop:** This hill, just south of the city centre, provides the perfect vantage point from which to see Pretoria. On a clear day, Johannesburg is visible to the south. A late eighteenth century fortress protects the southern approaches to the city, and now houses a military museum and a memorial to those that died in the border wars in the late twentieth century. The isolated lookout spots may attract unwelcome attention at night. (20 minutes excluding the fort, plus another 30 for the fort).
- **Church Square:** This D-shaped square is surrounded by limestone buildings that could easily have stood in any capital in Europe. It was the nucleus of Pretoria in the early days, and a perfect illustration of the might of the Boer Republics after the discovery of gold. The Pretoria post office has a postal code of 0001. The building was the original ZAR judicial headquarters and is still in daily use. (20 minutes)
- **Paul Kruger’s House:** Just west of Church Square, this modest house illustrates Kruger’s accessibility to his citizens in the late nineteenth century. The exhibition is small but interesting. (60 minutes)
- **Union Buildings:** The building was built in 1910, with the founding of the Union of South Africa. The President’s office is in the west wing. Large and well-manicured gardens surround the building. Although their former glory is no longer visible, they are still special at the right time of year, and they provide a great lookout opportunity over Pretoria, especially at night. (20 minutes)
- **Voortrekker Monument:** This monument was built in 1938 to commemorate the centenary of the Great Trek. The top of the Monument provides a great vantage point to look out over Pretoria and a museum in the basement. Although it was for many years a chauvinist bastion, it now features a balanced exhibit describing not only the lifestyles during the Trek, but also the wider migrations that led to the conflicts of the Trek. There is also a museum on the legacy of Afrikaans. An adjacent hill houses Fort Schanskop, another Boer fort from the late nineteenth century. (120 minutes)
- **Freedom Park:** This relatively recent memorial was built on the hill right next to the Voortrekker Monument. Its outdoor exhibits are intended to be atmospheric rather than

informative, but there is an indoor museum that describes some of the struggles in our recent history. (30 minutes outdoors, 40 minutes indoors)

- **Fountains Nature Reserve:** This gem is perfect for the active traveller. Mountain bikes and horses can be rented to traverse the reserve, but an astute runner can fit in a delightful run of 10 km or so. On most days, the wild animals allow you to get close enough to see them clearly, but not close enough to touch. The animals are not predatory—you should make it back to the car in one piece. (60 minutes)
- **Sammy Marks house:** Marks was a wheeler-dealer of note who operated in the ZAR around the time of the second Anglo-Boer War. He built an opulent mansion in the sticks outside Pretoria, while establishing a major portion of the ZAR's industrial capacity. The house is now a museum, more or less intact as it was at the time that it was occupied. (2 hours)
- **Cullinan:** This quaint diamond mining town retains most of its original atmosphere. The mine is still in full swing, and has produced 40% of all the world's gem diamonds over 400 carats. A mine tour is a special experience—both above-ground and underground tours are available. (Town: 1 hour. Mine tour: 2 hours. Underground tour: 3 hours)
- **Menlyn:** This major mall provides shopping, movies and a bewildering array of dining opportunities.
- **Brooklyn Mall:** Brooklyn is smaller and more opulent than Menlyn. Its movies include an art movie house.
- **Apies River:** See for yourself what Churchill had to endure when he swam the Mighty Apies during his daring escape from Boer custody as a war correspondent in the Second Anglo-Boer War. (30 seconds)

Cradle of Humankind

This area lies to the west of Pretoria and Johannesburg. It is home to the oldest known complete hominid skeleton that is still being liberated from the rock in the Sterkfontein Caves. Anthropologists believe that humans originated in this area before moving into the Middle East and from there throughout the world. The Cradle became a World Heritage Site around the turn of the century, and is now a worthy tourist attraction.

- **Maropeng:** An underground exhibit showing the development of hominids and the early origin of man. The entry tunnel is a lot of fun. (90 minutes)
- **Sterkfontein Caves:** The caves where many of the hominid skeletons were found. It is still being excavated, and the guided tours involve some clambering and crouching. If you battle with all kinds of phobias or inflexible joints, this one is not for you. (2 hours)
- **Hartbeeshoek Tracking Station and HartRAO:** The tracking station is not open to the public. It was built by NASA to track the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo missions, although it was replaced by a new station near Madrid for political reasons. It now serves as a gateway to a range of communications and surveillance satellites. The adjacent HartRAO (Hartebeeshoek Radio Astronomy Observatory) is in a natural valley and features a small science museum and live astronomy demonstrations. Prior booking is essential. (60 minutes)
- **Rhino and Lion Reserve:** This nature reserve offers realistic “wild” game viewing, unlike the nearby Lion Park (which is thoroughly unnatural and therefore not recommended, unless you are a creature comfort junkie and absolutely have to see a lion up close). Rhino and lion can be seen, as can the Wonder Caves. (2 hours)

Pilanesberg

The Pilanesberg is an extinct volcano crater about 150 km northwest of Gauteng, in Northwest Province.

- **Pilanesberg Nature Reserve:** This Reserve is probably the closest to Gauteng that offers real wild game viewing over an extended area. (4 hours)
- **Sun City:** Built into the crater, this resort features a fake Lost City, fake sea waves on a fake beach and an assortment of lavish and basic eating opportunities. It also has a world-class golf course. The kitch is world class—even Vegas doesn't leave this one in the shade. (3 hours)

Johannesburg

Johannesburg is a sprawling city, generating a substantial portion of South Africa's economic output. Tourists from large cities in the northern half do not seem to think that its bustle a good tourist attraction doth make.

- **Gold Reef City:** This theme park includes a tour of a real gold mine and a lot of rides. Described by a Californian friend as a lot of fun, like a “poor man's Disneyland”. (Underground tour 2 hours, amusement park 1 hour). The Apartheid Museum next door provides a glimpse into what is colloquially known as the “Old South Africa”. (2 hours)
- **Monte Casino:** Shop and eat (or even gamble) in a replica of an age-old Italian village. The décor is something to behold.
- **Sandton City:** A large shopping mall with limitless eating, shopping and movie-watching opportunities.

Hartebeespoort Dam

This dam was a major irrigation project just west of Pretoria. Nowadays, it provides a serene residential setting and an accessible getaway from the big city. Technically, it is in Northwest Province, so pedants may wish to disregard this paragraph in the context of a Gauteng tourism guide.

- **Cableway:** Ride the longest single cableway in Africa to the top of the Magalies mountains, from where you can see the Hartbeespoort Dam close by and Gauteng's cities in the distance. You can even see the research facility where South Africa developed its nuclear weapons capability, about 10 km away. (2 hours)
- **Reptile Park:** Snakes and various other reptiles in a semi-natural environment on the shores of the lake. (60 minutes)
- **De Wildt Cheetah Park:** See attempts to safeguard the cheetah and vulture gene pools with a breeding programme and various rehabilitation efforts. The animals are tame and completely unnatural, but if you want to stroke a cheetah, here is your chance. If you want to see a cheetah in its natural state, rather drive by and find a real nature reserve. (2 hours)

Townships

The Townships were a grand Apartheid social engineering experiment, where workers could live close to the cities and commute into work every day, without cluttering up the view outside office hours. They are basically purely residential, with little or no formal business activity. They provide a great opportunity to see how most South Africans live. Townships are not as menacing as many white South Africans believe, but there are rough 'hoods where you probably should not go if you don't have a street-smart guide.

- **Soweto:** The South-Western Townships make up a sprawling metropolis, home to about two million people. Its main historical area is around the Hector Pieterse memorial. No-one quite knows how to spell Pieterse; the guy's family name was actually Pitso. (2 hours)
- **Alexandra:** A real ghetto right next to the affluence of Sandton and Houghton. Alex provides an opportunity to see the grim reality of many South Africans' lives. (1 hour)