

# KwaZulu-Natal

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## Introduction

South Africa's third-smallest province, KwaZulu-Natal, is also one of its most exciting – it has a wealth of scenic and cultural attractions that include the country's most developed beaches south and north of Durban (the third-largest city in South Africa), as well as isolated, almost untouched beaches; world-famous game reserves; two UNESCO World Heritage Sites; and some of the South Africa's most famous historic battlefields.

## Top attractions



### Golden beaches and year-round sunshine

Choose one of Durban's popular beaches with amenities galore plus superb surfing, or make your way north to the Dolphin or Elephant coasts, or south to the Hibiscus Coast and Golf Coast. Wherever you find sand and sea, though, you're almost guaranteed good weather. Sodwana Bay is a diving and fishing mecca.



### Game parks

KwaZulu-Natal's game parks, although not so well known internationally and much smaller in scale than the Kruger National Park, are nonetheless teeming with game. Hluhluwe-iMfolozi – only a 20th the size of its big brother – seems wilder and freer in some ways, chiefly because, other than its award-winning Hilltop Camp, none of the smaller camps are fenced off. There are also superb private game reserves such as Phinda (Pinda) Private Game Reserve.



### The Drakensberg mountains

This magnificent mountain range, the largest part of which is in KwaZulu-Natal, borders the tiny mountain kingdom of Lesotho and stretches from KwaZulu-Natal's south-west right up to the Kruger National Park. The entire mountain range traverses the Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and ends in Limpopo. It's home to some of the finest and most accessible rock art in the world.



### **Battlefields**

This is the province where major South African battles took place: the Battle of Blood River; the Battle of Isandlwana; the Battle of Rorke's Drift; and major battles of the two Anglo-Boer Wars.



### **iSimangaliso Wetland Park**

South Africa's first natural World Heritage Site and third-largest park stretches from Mapelane (Cape St Lucia) in the south to Kosi Bay in the north, along about 220km of untouched coastline. It is home to astounding beauty, five interlinking ecosystems, game, coral reefs and hundreds of species of birds.



### **Zulu cultural villages**

A visit to an authentic Zulu village is often a highlight. Shakaland, north of Durban and Eshowe, was built as a film set in the 1980s. It's a fun experience where you can join in the sensational tribal dancing, eat local food, buy curios and stay overnight. At Simunye Zulu Lodge, also north of Durban, near Melmoth, you may well become part of a genuine local wedding or other local ceremony.

Although Durban is the most popular and well-known city in KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg is the capital.

## **Overview of KwaZulu-Natal**



**Part of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park**

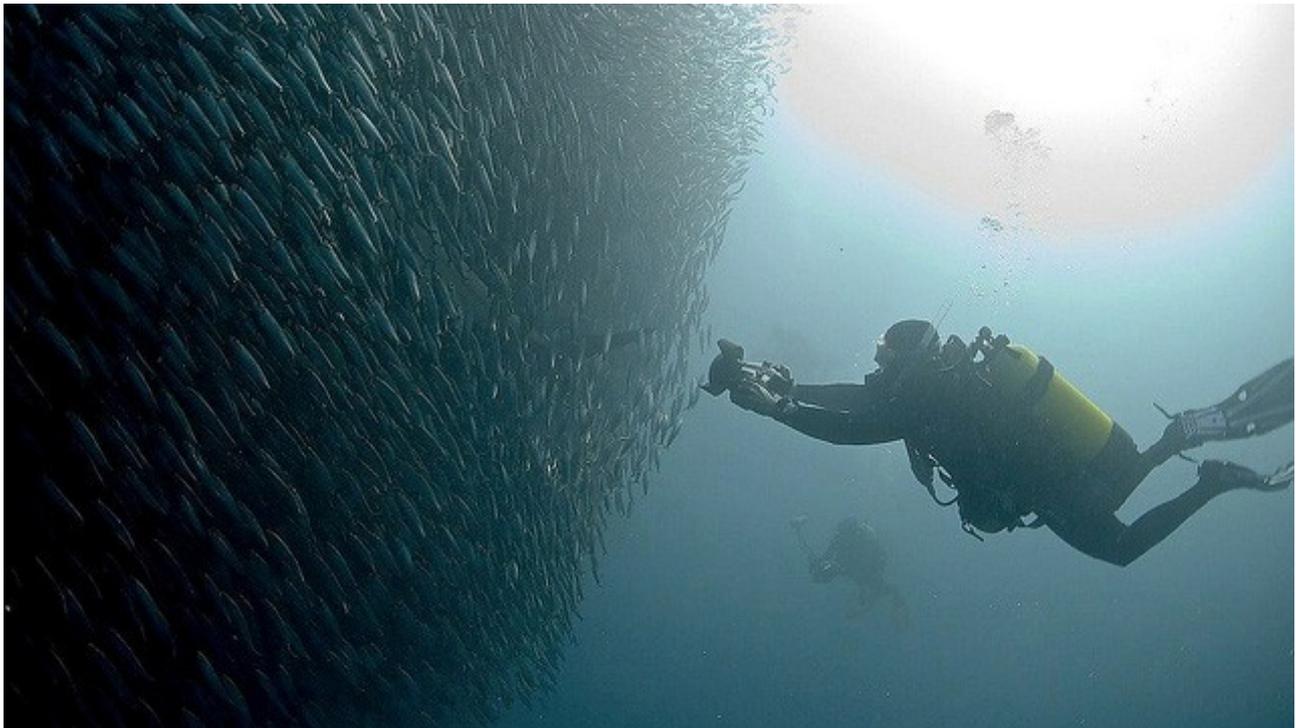
Although the richly diverse province of KwaZulu-Natal, which stretches along the warm Indian Ocean from Port Edward in the south to Swaziland and Mozambique in the north, has always been a favourite domestic holiday destination, it's only more recently that international visitors have discovered its abundant attractions.

In the west of the province you'll find South Africa's most magnificent mountains, the Drakensberg, in the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, a World Heritage Site.

Inland, the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands offer a lush, green countryside brimming with historical little towns, attractive country hotels and irresistible craft routes. KwaZulu-Natal is also where battles that captured the world's attention took place in the 1800s and early 1900s, when Boers and Brits battled Zulus, and Boers battled Brits.

The coast, which has a subtropical climate all year round, is home to Durban, South Africa's chief port, a fascinating mix of British, Indian and Zulu cultures. Expect palm trees, the best Indian curries in the country, beautifully preserved Victorian buildings, bustling markets, great shopping and a glitzy beachfront.

In the interior, north of Durban, among other smaller game parks and superb private Big Five game reserves, is the iconic Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (Hluhluwe is pronounced 'sh - shloo - ee') - your best chance of spotting black and white rhino.



### **Scuba diving in Sodwana Bay**

Further north up the coast is the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site because of its ecosystems that brim with game and marine life.

Apart from so much to see, there's so much to do: hiking; rock climbing; horse riding; swimming; snorkelling; scuba diving (some of the best sites in the world); turtle spotting; fishing; whale watching; visiting famous battlefields and rock art sites (also some of the best in the world), which offer insight into the culture and spiritual beliefs of South Africa's earliest people, the San; game viewing; interacting with authentic Zulu culture - and so much more.

The province has an excellent infrastructure, with good roads, fine accommodation and a wide selection of restaurants. Its main airport is King Shaka International Airport, about 30km north of Durban

## **Beaches and mountains**

KwaZulu-Natal is famed for its glorious beaches, which stretch both north (North Coast) and south (South Coast) of Durban. Its year-round favourable climate allows for beach-going 12 months a year. Both the North Coast and South Coast are dotted with holiday towns of varying sizes, while Durban itself offers excellent accommodation and beautiful beaches.

If you travel north to the Elephant Coast, which stretches along the coast from the iMfolozi River in the south to the Mozambique border in the north, you'll find some of the country's wildest and most beautiful beaches, ancestral nesting sites of giant turtles and abundant marine life.

The province is also home to the Drakensberg mountains (the Zulus call them the 'Barrier of Spears') in the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, a natural and cultural World Heritage Site owing to the mountains' rock art and natural beauty, and a popular destination for local and international tourists alike. The mountains offer dramatic views and outdoor activities, and are an important cultural resource, containing many thousands of works of San rock art that date back to the late Stone Age.

KwaZulu-Natal is home to two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: iSimangaliso Wetland Park and uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park

## **Game viewing, natural attractions and history**

Although they may not be as well known as the Kruger National Park, KwaZulu-Natal is home to a number of game reserves that offer Big Five experiences, including the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve and private game reserves. Choose self-drive or guided game drives or walks.

The province also offers the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, an amazing water wilderness about 280km north of Durban (a few hours' drive) that includes Lake St Lucia, the St Lucia and Maputaland marine reserves, the Coastal Forest Reserve and Kosi Bay Nature Reserve. There is about 220km of almost untouched coastline plus almost 333 000ha of gorgeous scenery, with habitats ranging from coral beaches and reefs to freshwater and saltwater marshes, coastal forests, high dunes and lush coastal plains ... plus, South Africa's biggest population of hippopotamus. It is home to game, natural beauty and interesting marine life.

KwaZulu-Natal is also a mecca for military history buffs – this is a province where some of South Africa's most famous (and infamous) battles took place: the Boers defeated the Zulus at the Battle of Blood River in 1838; and a Zulu army humiliated the might of the British army at Isandlwana in 1879, immediately followed by the Battle of Rorke's Drift, where a handful of British soldiers held off the same victorious Zulu army. The province also witnessed major battles between the Boers and the Brits in the Anglo-Boer wars of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

KwaZulu-Natal is the ancestral home of the Zulu people and Zulu is the most widely spoken African language in South Africa. The name of Shaka Zulu, the great warrior king, is widely known, and the 19<sup>th</sup> century battles between the Zulu and British Empire in KwaZulu-Natal are rooted in British and South African history. Reconstructed theme villages, where you can experience the culture, food and history of the Zulus, can be found throughout the province.

Sodwana Bay, a marine protected area, is one of the best scuba-diving sites in the world.

## Main centres



### Durban

The laid-back but busy city of Durban is South Africa's third-largest city. It's Africa's largest port, one of South Africa's favourite seaside destinations ('Durbs' to the locals), and an exciting mix of urban Zulu culture, a huge Indian population and English-speaking South Africans.



### Ladysmith

Ladysmith is a great start point for tours of the Anglo-Zulu battlefields and Anglo-Boer battlefields. The Ladysmith Siege Museum is well worth a visit. The town is also the home of one of South Africa's most famous music groups, multi-Grammy Award-winning Ladysmith Black Mambazo.



### Pietermaritzburg

Although one of South Africa's best-preserved Victorian cities and the province's capital, the town today is fully representative of the 'Rainbow Nation' with Zulus, Indians, South Africans of British heritage and a university student population making up the lively mix. It's only 80km inland from Durban.



### Sodwana Bay

Sodwana's spectacular coral reefs in a national marine protected area are among the southernmost in the world and are a scuba-diving and snorkelling mecca. Game fish abound. Off-season, Sodwana Bay is paradise. In season, it's very, very busy.



### Umhlanga Rocks

Once a small seaside village, Umhlanga Rocks has now grown into a bustling lively tourist and residential town. Its seafront pedestrian walkway takes in an old lighthouse, golden beaches, holiday resorts and glitzy hotels. It has great shopping and good restaurants but is packed in high season

## Timeline



### 160-million years ago

Approximately 160-million years ago, volcanic action splits the vast continent of Gondwana, and the Drakensberg mountains begin to form.



### Late Stone Age

From the Late Stone Age a few thousand years ago, until just a few hundred years ago, San people painted the caves and overhangs of the Drakensberg mountains with animals and images of spiritual significance.

Image courtesy of [Roger de la Harpe](#).



### 16th century

During the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Zulu people begin to migrate into the area from central Africa.



### 1497

Allegedly established on Christmas Day in 1497, the area is named 'Natal' by Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese sea captain.



### 1880-1881

The First Anglo-Boer War is fought between 1880-1881.



### **1899-1902**

The Second Anglo-Boer War is fought between 1899-1902. It is also known as the South African War, because it ultimately involved almost all people living in South Africa at the time.



### **1894**

The Natal Indian Congress is formed by Mahatma Gandhi to fight discrimination based on race and colour.



### **1994**

Natal is renamed KwaZulu-Natal with the advent of democracy in South Africa.

## **Tips for your traveller**

- Try to avoid popular beach holiday destinations like Durban, Umhlanga Rocks and Sodwana Bay at peak holiday times (particularly over December and the first half of January) unless you can stand crowds.
- Hire a knowledgeable local guide to enrich your battlefields tour.
- Try for accommodation at the very affordable award-winning Hilltop Lodge in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, but book well in advance.
- To get close and personal with the bush and its inhabitants, take a superb two- or three-night guided wilderness trail in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. Book well in advance.
- Didima and Giant's Castle are the most accessible and best locations for viewing San rock art.
- Sample local Indian cuisine in Durban – whether a slap-up curry or an inexpensive takeaway like a 'bunny chow' (hollowed out loaf of bread filled with curry).
- uShaka Marine World in Durban and the KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board at Umhlanga Rocks are must-sees.

KwaZulu-Natal is a mecca for buffs of British military history