

North West

Introduction

The North West province features premier wildlife destinations (the Pilanesberg Game Reserve and the Madikwe Game Reserve); parts of two UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Vredefort Dome and the Taung Fossil Site, which is part of the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site); and the Sun City gaming and entertainment resort.

Top attractions



Pilanesberg Game Reserve

A four-hour hot air balloon ride over the malaria-free Pilanesberg Game Reserve offers game viewing at its best. Here, 55 000ha of trees and grassland support a wildlife population that includes the Big Five.



Madikwe Game Reserve

The Madikwe Game Reserve is home to more than 20 luxury lodges. Here, you will be able to see cheetah, wild dogs, hyena, lion, elephant, black and white rhino, zebra, giraffe and more.



Sun City

Sun City offers game viewing (at the adjacent Pilanesberg Game Reserve), gambling, outdoor adventure, two internationally rated golf courses, luxury accommodation, water sports and more.



Magaliesberg Canopy Tour

A unique eco-adventure via zipline that entails a 2.5-hour ride down the spectacular Ysterhout Kloof near Rustenburg, stopping at 11 platforms along the way. Enjoy spectacular views of the one of the world's oldest mountain ranges.



Taung Heritage Site

Visit the site where the fossilised skull of a hominid child, the Taung Child, estimated to be 2.5-million years old, was found in 1924. © [palaeoanthropology](#)



Crocodile cage diving

A robust cage custom-built to withstand the power of these ancient reptiles offers a rare opportunity to view crocodiles – some more than 4m long – in their natural habitat.



Harties Cableway

A ride up the Harties Cableway offers panoramic views of the surrounding Magaliesberg mountains and the Hartbeespoort Dam, a popular tourist attraction.

The North West province is known as the 'platinum province' due to its many platinum mines.



Hot-air balloon safaris are popular in the Magaliesberg

Overview of North West

Covering about 106 000km², the North West province is South Africa's fourth-smallest province and is bordered by the country of Botswana to the north, and the South African provinces of the Northern Cape to the west, Gauteng to the east, Limpopo to the north-east, and Free State to the south.

Home to an estimated 3.5-million people, the most dominant ethnic group is the Setswana-speaking Tswana, with minority groups speaking Afrikaans, Sesotho, and isiXhosa. English is also spoken throughout the province, however.

Named South Africa's 'platinum province' for its vast underground resources, North West also produces platinum, gold, diamonds and uranium.

The northern and western parts of the province have many sheep farms and cattle and game ranches. The eastern and southern parts are crop-growing regions that produce maize (corn), sunflowers, tobacco, cotton and citrus fruits. The entertainment and casino complex at Sun City also contributes to the provincial economy.

The Magaliesberg mountain range in the north-east extends for 130km from Pretoria (in Gauteng) to Rustenburg, while the Vaal River flows along the southern border of the province.

The North West is a prime game-viewing destination and home of the well-known Madikwe Game Reserve and the Pilanesberg Game Reserve, as well as other smaller wildlife and nature reserves.

Parts of two UNESCO World Heritage sites fall within North West: the Vredefort Dome – the world's largest meteor-impact crater; and the Taung hominid fossil site, part of the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site.

From the opulence of the five-star Palace of the Lost City hotel in Sun City to boutique hotels, quaint guest houses, self-catering establishments, holiday cottages and chalets, the North West is well equipped with accommodation options.

The province is best accessed via OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, and then by car along its well-maintained road system. You could also opt for a fly-in safari to the Pilanesberg or Madikwe game reserves, both a short flight from Johannesburg.

North West's economy is driven by mining.

Fun in the North West

The Hartbeespoort Dam, or 'Harties' as it's known by locals, is located in a valley south of the Magaliesberg mountains and close to a small town of the same name.

Although originally built for irrigation purposes, Harties has become a popular weekend water-sports and adventure hub, particularly as it is just an hour or so's drive from the large cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria. Activities enjoyed here include visiting the animal and snake park, windsurfing, parasailing, waterskiing, jet skiing, ferryboat cruises, fishing, ballooning and golf.

The nearby Harties Cableway (a must-do!) and Welwitschia Country Market add to the popularity of the destination, which is just an hour's drive from Johannesburg.

Also in the North West, Sun City is famous for its glamorous casinos, its entertainment offerings, its luxury accommodation, the Nedbank Golf Challenge, and much more.

It comprises four hotels: the ultra-luxurious Palace of the Lost City, the Cascades, the Sun City Hotel, and the Cabanas.

Outdoor attractions include two world-class golf courses: the Gary Player Country Club and the Lost City Country Club; and the Valley of Waves water park, dominated by the Roaring Lagoon, a wave pool with a palm-fringed beach, and slides.

From safaris and Segway rides to riding the waves and relaxing in comfort, Sun City has a great deal to offer out in the African bushveld, surrounded by the Pilanesberg mountains, less than 200km (a drive of less than three hours) from Johannesburg.



Harties Cableway

A must-do when in Hartbeespoort, an hour or so's drive from Johannesburg and Pretoria, is the Harties Cableway.



Sun City

Sun City is famous for its glamorous casinos and entertainment offerings.



Hartbeespoort Dam

Hartbeespoort Dam: Relax or play at this popular attraction.



Pilanesberg game drive

Go game spotting in the Pilanesberg Game Reserve.

The largest population group in the North West is the Tswana.

Mining

The economy of North West is driven by mining, which generates more than 50% of the province's gross domestic product and provides employment for a quarter of its workforce.

Gold is mined at Orkney and Klerksdorp; uranium at Klerksdorp; platinum at Rustenburg and Brits; and diamonds at Lichtenburg, Christiana and Bloemhof.

North West mining ventures make up 20% of South Africa's mining industry, while more than 90% of the country's platinum comes from the province's mines.

North West is South Africa's fourth-smallest province.

Wildlife

The terrain in the North West province is typically flat, with scattered trees and grassland – ideal for sustaining wildlife. That said, it is characterised by low mountains in parts, including the Magaliesberg in the south of the province, the Pilanesberg area, and some areas of the Madikwe Game Reserve.

Madikwe Game Reserve lies in the north-west of the province, with Botswana bordering it to the north. It is one of South Africa's premier Big Five (lion, leopard, rhino, buffalo, elephant) game-viewing destinations and is especially attractive as it is malaria-free.

Developed from reclaimed farmland, the reserve boasts a large elephant population, more than 350 bird species and a wide range of game, including wild dogs. More than 20 luxury game

lodges in the Madikwe reserve offer five-star accommodation.

The province is also home to the malaria-free Pilanesberg Game Reserve (close to the Sun City gaming and entertainment resort), which sits in the circular hollow of an extinct volcano. The park is also Big Five country, along with wildebeest, hartebeest, tsessebe, giraffe, hundreds of birds, as well as interesting rock formations and rare minerals unearthed due to volcanic activity.

The North West is Big Five country – perfect for game viewing.

Main centres



Mahikeng

Mahikeng (formerly Mafeking and Mafikeng), the province's capital city, and the adjacent town, Mmabatho, comprise a single urban area. Mahikeng was made famous by the Siege of Mafikeng during the South African War when the British resisted a superior Boer force for more than 200 days before being relieved by British troops, largely thanks to the efforts of Lord Robert Baden-Powell – who later founded the Boy Scout movement.



Potchefstroom

Potchefstroom is defined by a vibrant agricultural economy, large university and numerous buildings of historical interest. Preserved examples of architecture date back to the 1850s, when the town was an economic hub for farmers and the bustling diamond fields of the Northern Cape.



Klerksdorp

The town was founded by 12 Voortrekker families in 1837. It owes its stature to the discovery of gold, when the arrival of thousands of prospectors in 1886 changed the face of the small rural town forever. Today it forms the centre of a large mining and agricultural economy.



Rustenburg

Rustenburg, just more than 100km from Johannesburg, is a thriving agricultural and mining town that is located at the base of the beautiful Magaliesberg mountains.



Brits

Like Rustenburg, Brits is an important mining area. It also offers crocodile cage diving. Nearby tourist attractions include the Ann van Dyk Cheetah Centre and the Vaalkop Dam Nature Reserve (340 recorded bird species).

Timeline



1899 to 1900

The Siege of Mafikeng. The British resist a superior Boer force for more than 200 days during the South African War (also known as the Anglo-Boer War) before being relieved by British troops. © [Albert Bridge](#)



1924

The skull of a child, the Taung Child, is found at limestone diggings near the town of Taung and identified as part of an early hominid, later described as *Australopithecus africanus* by Professor Raymond Dart, head of the University of the Witwatersrand's Department of Anatomy. It is estimated to be 2.5-million years old.



1979

The Sun City entertainment and casino complex built by hotel magnate Sol Kerzner opens. It now comprises four hotels, a man-made lake, two Gary Player-designed golf courses and an entertainment complex. © [Chantalsmith96](#)



1994

The North West province is established



2010

Originally known as Mafeking, the town's name was changed in 1980 to Mafikeng. In February 2010 the name changes once more, to Mahikeng.

Tips for your traveller

- If a long drive is not appealing, direct flights from OR Tambo International Airport to Mahikeng and Sun City are available.
- If you have a number of days to spend in North West, why not book a package that includes all elements: game viewing, cultural village visits, gambling, golf and more.
- Summer temperatures (August to March) range from 22°C to 34°C (71.6°F to 93.2°F), while winter temperatures (May to July) can vary from 2°C (35.6°F) to 20°C (68°F) in one day, so wear a hat, use sunscreen and carry water, but also pack warm clothes, particularly for night drives if you're in the bush.
- The African bush is the best place in the world to see big game – but these are wild animals, so always pay close attention to instructions from game guides, especially when travelling in open vehicles.
- The North West is a malaria-free province.
- The Valley of the Waves at Sun City includes a beach and wave pool ... as well as fun rides.

Part of the Vredefort Dome, the world's largest meteor site, is found here.