

Northern Cape

Introduction

The Northern Cape is a place of vast, arid plains, spectacular scenery and big sky. It is mostly desert or semi-desert – but make no mistake, it has plenty to offer. It is home to one of the world's most spectacular natural floral displays: each year during spring, the area of Namaqualand is transformed into a vibrant carpet of colour by millions of blooming wildflowers.

Top attractions



The Big Hole

The Big Hole in Kimberley is the world's largest man-made hole. Created by miners during the diamond rush of the 1870s, it has an estimated depth of 214m and a perimeter of 1.6km. Next to the Big Hole is the Kimberley Mine Museum, with a replica of the city from the diamond-rush days. The museum is home to the Eureka Diamond, the first diamond discovered in South Africa, and one of the oldest working trams in the world.



|Ai-|Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park

The |Ai-|Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park spans two countries – South Africa and Namibia. It is a cross-border conservation initiative that is managed locally by the Nama people and South African National Parks. It boasts some of the richest succulent flora in the world, including stem succulents known as the 'halfmens'. Image © Hein waschefort



Wonderwerk Cave

Situated in the Kuruman Hills, the Wonderwerk (Miracle) Cave is the site of excavations that provide evidence of earliest humankind. Two-million-year-old stone tools were excavated from the site in 2008. This was the latest in a string of discoveries in this massive grotto that have revealed so much about human evolution.



The Eye of Kuruman

The Eye of Kuruman, in the town of Kuruman, is the biggest natural fountain in the southern hemisphere. It delivers approximately 20-million to 30-million litres of crystal-clear water daily, which supplies the town's domestic water, and feeds the Kuruman River and two 7km irrigation canals.



Witsand Nature Reserve

The flowing white dunes surrounded by copper-red Kalahari sand make this a spectacular natural wonder. The dunes also emit an eerie rumble as countless millions of grains of sand rub together. Local legend has it that the dunes only roar in months that contain the letter 'R'. The reserve in which the dunes are situated is a scenic park, teeming with wildlife and a spectacular assortment of birds, including Africa's smallest raptor – the pygmy falcon.



Augrabies Falls

The Khoisan people referred to the Augrabies Falls as 'the place of great noise'. And it's easy to see why, as the mighty Gariep (Orange) River thunders over the 56m-high falls. The falls form part of the Augrabies Falls National Park, which is rich with endemic plants and animals. One of the unique plants is the quiver tree, or Kokerboom (*Aloe dichotoma*), from which Khoisan hunters made their quivers.



Southern African Large Telescope

Sutherland – a hamlet in the Northern Cape part of the Karoo – is one of a handful of locations in the world that is ideal for stargazing. It is remote, has high elevation (2 000m), is cold, and the absence of pollution ensures clear, cloudless skies. It is here that the Southern African Large Telescope (SALT) focuses its giant eye on the universe. Astrophysicists believe SALT will assist them to look deeper into the universe. This means giant leaps for humankind. Image © Carolina Ödman

Youngsters in the Richtersveld still perform a traditional dance, the Nama Stap, a ritual that signifies the final stages of a young Nama girl's entry into womanhood.



Trams represent Kimberley's heritage

Overview of the Northern Cape

The Northern Cape, which is bordered by Namibia and Botswana, is the largest of South Africa's nine provinces (it takes up about a third of the entire country) and is very sparsely populated. In some areas it is possible to drive for hours without coming across any people.

Its sparse desert landscape and spectacular open spaces are especially appreciated at night – with no light pollution, the night sky is ideal for astronomy enthusiasts.

The Northern Cape is also the home of the Khoisan, who are the descendants of two peoples – the San hunter-gatherers and the Khoikhoi.

The lure of the Northern Cape is definitely its natural attractions, which include the annual Namaqualand wildflower display in spring (late August/September), the spectacular Augrabies Falls, and the winding oasis that is the Green Kalahari.

Its rugged terrain also makes it ideal for 4x4 adventurers, while the Gariep (Orange) River is ideal for river-rafting enthusiasts.

The province is steeped in history and culture, so encourage your clients to take the time to explore some of its many unique museums, like the Windmill Museum in Loeriesfontein; or to go on a ghost tour through Kimberley's historic houses, monuments and battlefield sites.

It is also home to the Richtersveld World Heritage Site, home to the Nama, a semi-nomadic group of people who have followed the same seasonal migratory pattern for thousands of years.

Also encourage your clients to make a point of meeting the locals – here you will meet some of most friendly and hospitable people in the country, who have plenty of fascinating stories to tell.

The Northern Cape's capital, Kimberley, has air and rail links with most of the major cities in South Africa, which makes it easy to get there or travel around the province. The luxury Blue Train and Rovos Rail pass through the city. There are also a number of intercity bus companies that operate

across the province. But perhaps the best way to discover this rugged province is by driving yourself across it in a 4x4.

Game viewing

There are plenty of opportunities to go game watching in the Northern Cape.

Probably the best place for this is the 3.6-million-hectare Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – which comprises two adjoining national parks: the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in South Africa and the Gemsbok National Park in Botswana. The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is big enough to support large-scale migration of game, and is the home of the famous black-maned lion, as well as cheetah, hyena, leopard and birds of prey, among many other wildlife attractions.

The Augrabies Falls National Park, with its thundering Augrabies waterfalls, is home to the rare black rhino and animals like mongoose, rock hyrax (small mammals that South Africans call *dassies*) and the Cape clawless otter.

The early morning fog that rolls in over the |Ai-|Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park from the Atlantic Ocean sustains a remarkable range of small reptiles, birds and mammals. Be on the lookout for the rare Hartmann's mountain zebra, ground squirrel, rock hyrax and the jackal buzzard.

These are three of the larger parks, but there are a number of other reserves worth exploring, including the Tankwa Karoo National Park, revered for its beautiful landscape; the Goegap Nature Reserve, renowned for its flowers and home to the smallest tortoise in the world, the speckled *padloper* ('road walker' in Afrikaans); the Mokala National Park, which is well-known for its conservation of endangered animals, including tsessebe, black rhino and roan antelope; and the Tswalu Kalahari game reserve, South Africa's largest private game reserve.



A black-maned lion in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.



Home to the black rhino and other fascinating animals, the Augrabies Falls National Park also has the thundering Augrabies waterfalls.



Gemsbok near Xaus Lodge, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.



Renowned for its spring flowers in late August/September, the Goegap Nature Reserve is worth exploring. Image courtesy of Winfried Bruenken



Springbok pair near Xaus Lodge, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

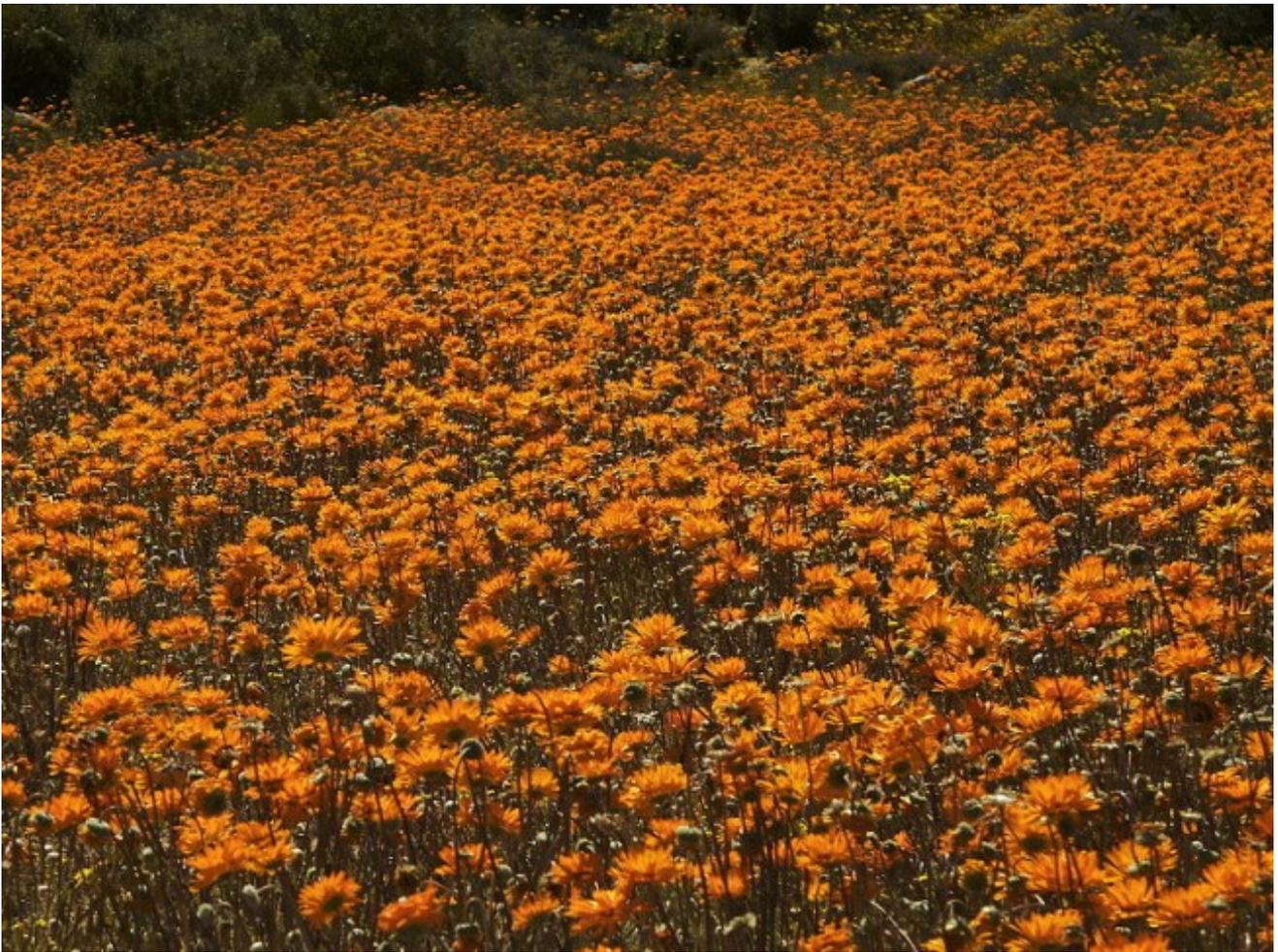


The Mokala National Park is well known for its conservation of endangered animals, including tsessebe, black rhino and roan antelope. Image courtesy of [NJR ZA](https://www.njr.za/)



Wildebeest seen during Game Drive run by Xaus Lodge, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

The Northern Cape's terrain offers great adventure opportunities like paragliding, 4X4 driving, river rafting and even 'bakkie skiing' – skiing on a board behind a pick-up truck.



The blooming of wildflowers in the Namaqualand region from late August to October is a wonder of nature.

Scenic attractions

From August to October, the Namaqualand region of the Northern Cape bursts into colour when millions of wildflowers come into bloom, forming one of the most amazing natural spectacles in the world.

The quiver tree (*Aloe dichotoma*) forest in Gannabos, to the west of the province, should also be on any itinerary. The collection of other-worldly trees makes it the largest aloe forest in the world. These trees are up to 400 years old and feature prominently in Khoisan culture.

The Northern Cape is also home to the Green Kalahari, an oasis of green in this desert region. Referred to as South Africa's green desert, it extends for hundreds of kilometres along the Gariep (Orange) River. It is region of natural wonder, and supports much wildlife. The magnificent Augrabies Falls form part of the green oasis.

While in the Northern Cape, visitors should make a point of visiting the hot springs of Riemvasmaak, a 75 000ha desert wilderness that lies to the far north of the province. The springs are the result of volcanic eruptions and are made up of two pools that lie in a deep ravine and are surrounded by high granite cliffs.

The Northern Cape province is bordered in the north by the countries of Namibia and Botswana.

Main centres



Kimberley

Kimberley, the City of Diamonds, came into existence with the diamond rush of the 1870s. It is the capital city of the Northern Cape and is steeped in history and culture. It is now a modern hub with malls, art galleries, restaurants and an active nightlife.



Upington

An original frontier town, Upington started as a mission station. Today it is one of the largest towns in the province. It offers many outdoor activities such as 4x4 adventures, and is a gateway to the Augrabies Falls National Park, the Fish River Canyon in Namibia and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.



Kuruman

Kuruman owes its continued existence to a natural spring – The Eye – which for over 200 years has never faltered, providing the town and surrounds with crystal clear water, even during times of drought. The 'Oasis of the Kalahari', as it is known, boasts a number of attractions for the off-the-beaten-track visitor.



Port Nolloth

This quiet seaside town's existence revolves around the offshore mining of diamonds. It is also the gateway to the rich and diverse Richtersveld World Heritage Site. Port Nolloth's McDougall's Bay, a gem in a province otherwise known for its deserts and wildflowers, is a Blue Flag beach.

Timeline



100 000 to 200 000 years ago

Early humankind inhabits the Wonderwerk Cave approximately 100 000 to 200 000 years ago.

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1500 years ago



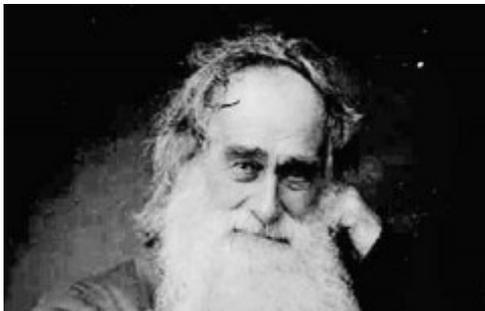
1500 years ago

Finger paintings of animals such as eland and elephant on the Wonderwerk Cave walls date back as far as 1 500 years ago.



1870s

The City of Kimberley springs up during the diamond rush of the 1870s. It is now the capital of the Northern Cape province, and the city's most famous landmark is the 'Big Hole', a hand-dug open diamond mine.



1831

The Scottish missionary Robert Moffat establishes the Moffat Mission in Kuruman. Moffat's daughter, Mary, later married David Livingstone in Kuruman.



1899

In 1899 South Africa is in the throes of the South African (Anglo-Boer) War between the Boers and British. The diamond-rich town of Kimberley was an asset worth fighting for. The Siege of Kimberley, in which the Boers laid siege to the town, took place from October 1899 to February 1900.



1994

The province of the Northern Cape is established with the new, democratic South Africa. Before that, the province was part of the former Western Province, which no longer exists today.

The Northern Cape is the largest province in South Africa, and makes up about a third of the country.

Tips for your traveller

- The Northern Cape is in the semi-desert, so advise clients to layer their clothing – light for the heat of the afternoons and a jersey or jacket for the chilly evenings and early mornings. It is almost always very hot during the day, even in winter, and winter nights in particular (from May to August) can be freezing.
- This is a malaria-free province.
- The use of sufficient sunscreen is advised as it gets very hot and the sun's rays can be harmful.
- The water in towns and cities is safe to drink, but visitors should ensure they have sufficient bottled water when travelling long distances.
- Want a souvenir? Kimberley is well known for its exquisite, individually crafted diamond jewellery.
- Make sure gadgets are fully charged before embarking on a long road trip through the province, as a viable electricity supply may not always be available between towns.

The Gariep (Orange) River, which flows through the province, is the longest river in South Africa, with a total length of 2 200km.