

British Hills Knowledge Base: South Africa

South Africa is a country at the southern tip of Africa. South Africa has three capital cities: Pretoria is the executive capital, Cape Town is the legislative capital, and Bloemfontein the judicial capital. It has a population of about 60 million – the fifth largest in Africa.



The South African Flag



South Africa in Africa

The region of South Africa has been settled by humans for at least 170,000 years, and researchers have found fossils of human ancestors up to 3 million years old. The nomadic Khoi Khoi people have lived there for thousands of years.

In 1488, explorers from Portugal sailed around South Africa, searching for a route for trading in the Indian Ocean. For the next 200 hundred years, Europeans often travelled past the region, as it was part of the route of the spice trade with India. However, it was not until 1652 that the Dutch made the first permanent settlement at Cape Town. Descendants of the original Dutch settlers stayed on in South Africa and became known as “Boers,” meaning farmers.

Britain took control of the Cape Town region in 1795. After many more years of conflict between groups including the Zulu, Xhosa, Boers, and British, the region became fully controlled by Britain.

However, South Africa would become independent from Britain in 1910. South Africa was then ruled by a white-nationalist government under a system known as *Apartheid*. This maintained the power of the white minority by oppressing the non-white majority using institutionalised systematic racism. Apartheid only ended in the late 1980's, with the first democratic election being held in 1994, although its effects continue. The Republic of South Africa today is a parliamentary democracy based on universal suffrage – the right to vote regardless of income, gender, race, ethnicity, or any other restriction.

The national flower of South Africa is the *King Protea*.

South Africa has 11 official languages. Zulu is the most common first language – 23% of South African speak it at home, and many more use it as a second language. Xhosa is the second most common home language, at 16%. English is only the fourth most common, with 9% speaking it at home. English is used widely for business and trade; however different regions use their local language in addition to English.



The King Protea



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Read about South Africa, then answer the following questions:

1. What is the capital city of South Africa?

2. Where was the first permanent European settlement in South Africa?

3. When did South Africa become independent from Britain?

4. What was *Apartheid*?

5. When did *Apartheid* end?

6. What is the most common language in South Africa?
