

CULTURAL INSIGHTS

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SOUTH AFRICA



a culture crash course every other month, sent right to your inbox!

QUICK FACTS

Group Orientation and Relationship Focused

- South Africans tend to focus on the interests of the collective community, rather than that of the individual
- Collective decision-making processes take precedence over individual autonomy
- Harmony is paramount when dealing with problems
- Personal relationships are important and investing in building networks is crucial for long-term business success.
- Initial meetings are often used to establish a personal rapport and to determine if someone is trustworthy

Fluid Time and Preference for Expectations

- South Africans view time as a flexible concept. Deadlines are often seen as fluid rather than firm commitments. Depending on the context, level of trust, and the relationship status “now” can mean immediately, just past, now, later, or sometime in the future
- “Now-now” is related to the Afrikaans term “nou-nou” and indicates the most immediate option. Cape Town is generally known for the lack of time urgency whereas business can be quite fast-paced in Johannesburg.
- The country has a rich heritage, and is diverse and culturally complex: South Africans tend to apply rules based on relationships and broad consideration of context

Risk Taking

Many South Africans tend to exhibit a higher risk-aversion and more fatalistic attitude than many Western countries. There is a belief that individuals have little influence on the outcome which may result in a lack of initiative and accountability. For any change to be accepted and implemented it is important to demonstrate benefits and any previous positive results.

Hierarchy and Egalitarianism

- There is a strong regard for senior executives and typical organizational structures tend to be hierarchical. Decision-making may be concentrated at the top and rather slow as decisions are often made after consultation with subordinates
- Major racial groups include Black South African (about 80%), White South African (8%), Coloured South African (8%), and 3% Indian South African. While there are 11 official languages, the three most spoken include Zulu, Xhosa, and Afrikaans with English being dominant in business, government, and the media.
- With the country continuing to strive towards greater equality, Black, Coloured, and Indian South Africans as well as women grapple with underrepresentation in senior-level positions

FUN FACTS

South Africa is also known as *The Rainbow Nation*, a term coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe post-apartheid South Africa following the country’s first democratic election in 1994, when Nelson Mandela was famously elected President.

South Africa is the only country in the world with three capital cities: Pretoria (executive), Bloemfontein (judicial) and Cape Town (legislative).

Mining, Energy, Tourism and Agriculture comprise South Africa’s major industries. The country is ranked among the Top 10 globally for wine production with a volume of more than 1 billion liters annually.

BE AWARE!

Apartheid was a system of racial segregation that existed in South Africa and South West Africa (now Namibia) from 1948 to the early 1990s.



Apartheid remains a highly sensitive topic. Proceed with tact and consider discussing only among your closest contacts.



COMMUNICATION IN

SOUTH AFRICA

INDIRECT

There are major differences in communication styles depending upon the individual's cultural heritage and most South Africans speak at least two languages. Generally, South Africans strive for consensus and win-win situations. Everyone’s opinion matters and it’s impolite to interrupt a South African while they are speaking. Direct communication may be seen as cold and unfeeling, and people often use metaphors and sports analogies to demonstrate a point.



EMOTIONALLY EXPRESSIVE & FORMAL

Touching, hugging and backslapping are more common in South Africa than in many countries. Showing emotions signals interest, dedication, and enthusiasm. Most South Africans prefer face-to-face meetings to more impersonal communication such as email. The meetings may start more formally, with titles, last names, and formal business attire but once the relationships have been established people quickly switch to first names and more informal communication patterns.



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DETAILS SOUTH AFRICA CULTURAL PROFILE



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