

Northern Cape

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Capital:	Kimberley
Principal languages:	Afrikaans 68,0% Setswana 20,8%
Population:	1 102 200
Area (km ²):	361 830
% of total area:	29,7%
GDPR* at current prices (2004):	R30 087 million
% of total GDP**:	2,2%

* *GDPR (Gross Domestic Product per Region)*

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The Northern Cape lies to the south of its most important asset, the mighty Orange River, which provides the basis for a healthy agricultural industry. The landscape is characterised by vast arid plains with outcroppings of haphazard rock piles. The cold Atlantic Ocean forms the western boundary.

This region covers the largest area of all the provinces and has the smallest population. Its major airports are situated at Kimberley, the capital, and at Upington. The Northern Cape has an excellent road network, which makes its interior easily accessible from South Africa's major cities, harbours and airports.

Important towns are Upington, centre of the karakul sheep and dried-fruit industries, and the most northerly wine-making region of South Africa; Springbok, in the heart of the Namaqualand springflower country; Kuruman, founded by the Scottish missionary Robert Moffat; and De Aar, second most important junction of South Africa's railway network. Sutherland is host to the southern hemisphere's largest astronomical observatory, the multinational-sponsored Southern African Large Telescope.

South Africa has been shortlisted as one of two countries to host the Square Kilometre Array (SKA), a giant next-generation radio telescope being developed by scientists from 17 countries. The proposed SKA will be located in the Northern Cape.

Other important Northern Cape towns include the sheep-farming towns of Carnarvon, Colesberg, Kenhardt and Prieska, which are renowned for its semi-precious stones and variety of succulents.

Apart from a narrow strip of winter-rainfall area along the coast, the Northern Cape is a semi-arid region with little rainfall in summer. The weather conditions are extreme – cold and frosty in winter, with extremely high temperatures in summer.

The largest part of the province falls within the Nama-Karoo biome, with a vegetation of low shrubland and grass, and trees limited to water courses. The area is known worldwide for its spectacular display of spring flowers that attracts thousands of tourists every year.

This biome is home to many wonderful plant species, such as the elephant's trunk (halfmens), tree aloe (kokerboom) and a variety of succulents.

The province has several national parks and conservation areas. The Kalahari Gemsbok National Park, together with the Gemsbok National Park in Botswana, is Africa's first transfrontier game park, known as the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. It is one of the largest nature-conservation areas in southern Africa and one of the largest remaining protected natural ecosystems in the world. The park provides unfenced access to a variety of game between South Africa and Botswana.

In October 2007, President Thabo Mbeki officially opened the Mata Mata Tourist Access facility to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

The Ai-Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Conservation Park spans some of the most spectacular scenery of the arid and desert environments in southern Africa. Bisected by the Orange River, which forms the border between South Africa and Namibia, it comprises the Ai-Ais Hot Springs Game Park in Namibia and the Richtersveld National Park in South Africa. Some of the distinctive features in the area include the Fish River Canyon (often likened to the Grand Canyon in the United States of America) and the Ai-Ais hot springs. This arid zone is further characterised by a unique and impressive variety of succulent plant species.

Nowhere is the Orange River more impressive than at the Augrabies Falls, which ranks among the world's greatest cataracts on a major river. The Augrabies Falls National Park was established to preserve this natural wonder.

The People

The Northern Cape is sparsely populated and houses more than 1,1 million people on 361 830 km² of land (*Mid-Year Population Estimates, 2007*). About 68% of the population speak Afrikaans. Other languages spoken are Setswana, isiXhosa and English.

The official unemployment rate of the Northern Cape is 26,5% (*Labour Force Survey, March 2007*).

The last remaining true San (Bushman) people live in the Kalahari area of the Northern Cape. The area, especially along the Orange and Vaal rivers, is rich in San rock engravings. A good collection can be seen at the McGregor Museum in Kimberley. The province is also rich in fossils.

Agriculture and Industry

The Northern Cape is enjoying tremendous growth in value-added activities, including game-farming. Food production and processing for the local and export market is also growing significantly.

Underpinning the growth and development plan of the province are the investment projects that link up with the existing plans of the Namaqua Development Corridor, where the focus is on the beneficiation and export of sea products.

The economy of a large part of the Northern Cape, the interior Karoo, depends on sheepfarming, while the karakul-pelt industry is one of the most important in the Gordonia district of Upington.

The province has fertile agricultural land. In the Orange River Valley, especially at Upington, Kakamas and Keimoes, grapes and fruit are cultivated intensively. Wheat, fruit, peanuts, maize and cotton are produced at the Vaalharts Irrigation Scheme near Warrenton.

Mining

The Northern Cape is rich in minerals. The country's chief diamond pipes are found in the Kimberley district. In 1888, the diamond industry was formally established with the creation of De Beers Consolidated Mines. Alluvial diamonds are also extracted from the beaches and the sea between Alexander Bay and Port Nolloth.

The Sishen Mine near Kathu is the biggest source of iron ore in South Africa, while the copper mine at Okiep is one of the oldest mines in the country. Copper is also mined at Springbok and Aggeneys. The province is rich in asbestos, manganese, fluorspar, semi-precious stones and marble.

Until recently, the majority of small- to medium-scale alluvial operations were concentrated along or near the Vaal River system. With the deposits available for mining declining rapidly, there has been a gradual shift towards the Orange River system. Two recent larger-scale investments also show continued prospects in this sector.

Source: [South Africa Yearbook 2007/08](#)

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