

INTRODUCTION

The Free State is known as South Africa's 'breadbasket' or 'granary of the country' and more than 30,000 farms produces over 70% of the country's grain. The province also boasts, among others productive gold and diamond mines, majestic sandstone mountains and archaeological and paleontological treasures. To the local rugby supporter this is 'Cheetah country'!

The landscape is characterised by the grassy plains of South Africa's interior plateau. This is South Africa's geographical heart, caught up between the Vaal and Orange Rivers. It is landlocked by KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, North West, the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape. The neighbouring Lesotho fits in the hollow of the province's bean-like shape.

The current borders date from 1994 when the Bantustans were abolished and included into the provinces of South Africa. It is the only Province of the former provinces of South Africa which did not undergo border changes (excluding the incorporation of the Qwa-Qwa Bantustan).

The Republic of the Orange Free State (Afrikaans: *Oranje-Vrystaat*; Dutch: *Oranje-Vrijstaat*) was an independent Boer republic in southern Africa during the second half of the 19th century. After the Second Anglo Boer War (Great South African War) it was a British colony for a short period, until 1910 when it became one of the four provinces of the Union of South Africa. In 1995, it became known as the Free State Province, one of the nine provinces of South Africa under the new dispensation. In Sesotho the province is known as *Foreistata* or *Foreisetata*.

The Free State might not have great appeal at first, but with time it will grow on you. Enjoy the journey!

COAT OF ARMS



Motto *Katleho ka kopano*
English: *Prosperity through unity*

The new coat of arms consists of the following elements:

- In the centre of the shield is the indigenous Orange River Lily (*Crinum Bulbispernum.*)
- The blue and green shield symbolises the green grasslands and the blue skies of the province.
- The sandstone formations of the Eastern Free State are represented by the top of the yellow shape.
- The shield is supported by two cheetahs.
- The crown on top of the shield consists of diamonds, mealie (maize)-cobs and ears of corn. These also bear witness to the agricultural and mining heritage of the province.
- The earth of the Free State is portrayed by the base of the coat of arms.

DEMOGRAPHICS

| | |
|---|---|
| Surface area | 3 rd largest 129,480 km ² (49,990 sq mi) |
| % of total area | 10,6% |
| Population (Midyear estimates 2007) | Second lowest population 2,773,059 (Community Survey 2007) 2,965,600 (midyear estimates 2007) |
| Population density | Ranked 8th in SA Density 21 /km ² (54 /sq mi) |
| Languages (SA Yearbook 08_09) | Sesotho 64,4% Afrikaans 11,9% isiXhosa 9.1% |
| Ethnic composition | Black 88% White 8.8% Coloured 3.1% Asian 0.1% |
| Unemployment rate (Labour Force Survey) | 22,6% (Quarter 4, 2008) 22,9% (Quarter 3, 2008) 26,4% (March 2007) |
| Capital | Bloemfontein |
| Largest city | Bloemfontein |
| Premier | Mr. Sekgobelo Elias Magashule (ANC) He is the longest serving Provincial Chairperson in the country. He has led the ANC in the Free State for over 12 years. Went into exile in 1989 and return in 1991. Previously Beatrice Marshoff (ANC) |

MUNICIPALITIES AND DISTRICTS

Fezile Dabi District Municipality (Northern Free State)

Local municipalities

Important towns

Mafube

- Frankfort
- Tweeling
- Villiers
- Cornelia

Metsimaholo

- Sasolburg
- Heilbron
- Deneysville
- Oranjeville

Moqhaka

- Kroonstad
- Steynsrus
- Viljoenskroon

Ngwathe

- Koppies
- Vredefort
- Edenville
- Parys

Thabo Mofutsanyane District Municipality

Local municipalities

Important towns

Phumelela

- Warden
- Vrede
- Memel

Maluti A Phofung

- Harrismith
- Witsieshoek
- Kestell
- Phuthadihaba/Qwa-Qwa

Dihlabeng

- Bethlehem
- Clarens
- Fouriesburg
- Paul Roux
- Rosendal

Nketoana

- Reitz
- Lindley
- Arlington
- Petrus Steyn

Sesotho

- Ficksburg
- Clocolan
- Marquard
- Senekal

Lejweleputswa District Municipality

Local municipalities

Nala

Important towns

- Bothaville
- Wesselsbron

Masilonyana

- Theunissen
- Brandfort
- Soutpan
- Verkeerdevlei
- Winburg

Matjhabeng

- Welkom
- Odendaalsrus
- Virginia
- Hennenman
- Allanridge
- Ventersburg

Tokologo

- Boshoff
- Dealesville
- Hertzogville

Tswelopele

- Bultfontein
- Hoopstad

Motheo District Municipality

Local municipalities

Mangaung

Important towns

- Bloemfontein
- Botshabelo
- Thaba 'Nchu

Mantsopa

- Ladybrand
- Hobhouse
- Excelsior
- Tweespruit

Naledi

- Thaba Phatswa
- Dewetsdorp
- Wepener
- Vanstadensrus

Xhariep District Municipality

Local municipalities

Kopanong

Important towns

- Trompsburg
- Bethulie
- Edenburg
- Fauresmith
- Jagersfontein
- Philippolis
- Reddersburg
- Springfontein
- Xhariep Dam
- Jacobsdal

Letsemeng

- Koffiefontein
- Luckhoff
- Petrusburg

Mohokare

- Zastron
- Rouxville
- Smithfield

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF THE LANDSCAPE

The Free State is situated on flat boundless plains in the heart of South Africa. Most of the province is about 1000 meters above sea level, but the Drakensberg and Maluti Mountains foothills reaches 2000m in the east.

The West stretches across savannah land and substantial mineral wealth, while the highlands of the east are dominated by mountain-tops. To the south it falls within the true Karoo semi-desert.

The Free State lies in the heart of the Karoo Sequence of rocks, containing shales, mudstones, sandstones and the Drakensberg Basalt forming the youngest capping rocks.

The main rivers and dams

BOUNDARY RIVERS

Vaal

Orange

BOUNDARY RIVERS

| | | |
|--------------|--|--|
| Vaal River | Vaal Dam Bloemhof Dam | Defines the border between the Free State and Gauteng, as well as the one with North West. |
| Orange River | Gariiep (Xhariep) Dam (Previously known as the <i>Hendrik Verwoerd Dam</i> .) | Defines the border between the Free State and the Eastern and Northern Cape. |

| Tributaries of the Vaal River | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. The Renoster River | Dam near Koppies | Koppies |
| 2. The Vals River | | Kroonstad |
| 3. The Sand River | Allemanskraal Dam | Ventersburg/Winburg area |
| 4. Vet River | Erfenis Dam | Close to Theunissen |
| 5. Modder River | Krugersdrift Dam Rustfontein Dam | Near Bloemfontein Botshabelo Flows along the Maselspoort Resort boasting the longest swimming pool in South Africa. |
| 6. Riet River | Kalkfontein Dam | Near Koppie Dam |

| The major tributary of the Orange River | |
|---|--|
| Caledon River | On the eastern border with Lesotho. It joins the Liebenbergs Vlei River to join the Wilge River (Clocolan, Clarens and Bethlehem). |

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|-----------------|--|
| The Wilge River | It is the major river which feeds the Vaaldam . It is supplemented by water from the Lesotho Highlands Project. |
|-----------------|--|

Mountains

- Drakensberg
- Maluti

CLIMATE

- The province falls within a summer-rainfall region and brief thunderstorms are common in the afternoons. Areas in the east around Harrismith, Bethlehem and Ficksburg are well watered, whilst it becomes more arid to the southern and western regions.
- The capital, Bloemfontein, experiences hot, moist summers and cold, dry winters frequented by severe frost.
- Snowfalls are common in the higher ranges

| | January max | January min | July max | July min | Annual rainfall |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Bloemfontein | 31°C | 15°C | 17°C | -2°C | 559mm |
| Bethlehem | 27°C | 15°C | 16°C | -2°C | 680mm |

NATURE AND CONSERVATION

World Heritage Site

VREDEFORT METEORITE IMPACT CRATER (Vredefort dome)

National Parks

Golden Gate Highlands National Park

Qwa-Qwa National Park

Ramsar Wetland Site

Seekoeivlei Nature Reserve

Other interesting Nature Reserves

- Platberg
- Sand River
- Willem Pretorius
- Tussen-die-Twee-Riviere
- Rustfontein
- Xharies Dam

ECONOMY

SA Yearbook 07-08

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| GDPR at current prices (2004) | R75 827 million |
| % of total GDP | 5,5% |

Agriculture

Cultivated land comprises of some 3.2 million ha, while natural veld and grazing covers 8.7 million ha. Field crops yield almost two thirds of the gross agricultural income of the province, animal products about 30% and the balance generated by horticulture.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Wheat, sunflowers, sorghum and soya | Cultivated mainly in the Eastern Free State where farmers specialises in seed production. |
| Vegetables and fruits | The province produces about 100 000 (tons) of vegetables and 40,000 tons of fruit each year. |
| Potatoes | 40% of the country's potatoes are grown in the high-lying areas. |
| Cherries | 90% is produced in the Ficksburg district |
| Asparagus | The main vegetable crop in the Province is Asparagus, both white and green varieties. The two largest asparagus-canning factories are also located in the Ficksburg district. The industry is expanding and becoming increasingly export orientated. (SA Yearbook 2008-09). |
| Floriculture | The province exports some 1.2 million t of cut flowers per year. |

Mining

The Free State contributes about 16% of South Africa's mineral output. The mining industry is the largest employer in the Province.

Goldfields stretch for approximately 400km across Gauteng, North West and the Free State and is collectively known as the 'Golden arch'. Free State Consolidated Goldfields is the largest gold-mining complex with a mining area of approximately 33 000 ha. Harmony Gold Refinery (Free State) and Rand Refinery (Gauteng) are the only two gold refineries in the country that may market gold on behalf of the South African Reserve Bank.

| | |
|------|---|
| Gold | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main gold-mining districts are Odendaalsrus, Virginia and |
|------|---|

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| | <p>Welkom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roughly 30% of South Africa's gold is derived from this region. |
| Silver | The gold mines also supply a significant portion of the total silver production of the country. |
| Uranium | Acquired as a by-product of gold-mining. |
| Bituminous coal | Mined in the province and converted into petrochemicals at Sasolburg. |
| Diamonds | High quality diamonds are extracted from kimberlite pipes and fissures. |
| Bentonite | The largest deposit in the country is found in the Koppies district. |

Manufacturing

Some 14% of the province's manufacturing is classified as being in high-technology industries, which is the highest percentage of all the provincial economies.

- Textiles
- Farm machinery and equipment
- Leather tanning and finishing
- Gold Jewellery
- Petrochemicals include fuels, waxes and polymers.
- Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) – gas supply to City of Johannesburg.
- Floriculture - the province exports some 1,2 million tons of cut flowers per year.
- Biofuel plants – In 2006 Ethanol Africa announced its plans to build maize-to-ethanol plants in South Africa. The cost is an estimated \$1 billion. The company planned to build eight biofuels plants near Bothaville. Construction was however put on hold to assess funding options and government support. (Science in Africa, November 2008).
- NATREF = major inland refinery. Mainly aircraft fuel and diesel.

Tourism

The prime tourist attraction in the province is the Golden Gate Highlands National Park, located at the foothills of the Maluti Mountains in the north-eastern Free State.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The road network density of the Free State is the third highest in the country and well signposted. Main roads are tarred but some of the smaller country routes are connected by well maintained gravel roads. Caution should be taken while driving on gravel roads.

Bloemfontein has an airport located in the east about 10km from the city centre.

Airports (Bloemfontein) and Harrismith

MAIN ROUTES

National roads

| | |
|-----------|---|
| N1 | Links Gauteng, the Western and Eastern Cape and cuts through the middle of the Free State. |
| N3 | Serves as a major link between Kwa-Zulu Natal and Gauteng via Harrismith. |
| N5 | The national road between Kwa-Zulu Natal, Free State and Western Cape, also via Harrismith. |
| N6 | See below |

Free State Tourist Routes

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| 'The Friendly N6' | Also known as "the value for money" route. The route links Bloemfontein with East London in the Eastern Cape. It offers a wide array of attractions such as art galleries, community projects, the Drakensberg Mountains, natural hot springs and farm stays. |
| Maluti Route | Scenic drive through the Highlands of the Free State and across the border to Lesotho and its magnificent Maluti Mountains. The route finally reaches the RAMSAR accredited Seekoeivlei Nature Reserve at Memel. |
| Goldfields Route | Explore the gold mining history within the Lejweleputswa district. |
| BBT Heritage Route | Explore the diverse cultural and political heritage of Bloemfontein, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu. |
| Diamond and Wine Route | This follows in the diamond prospectors of the past and present. At Jagersfontein the 760m man-made diamond hole rivals that of the better known Big Hole of Kimberley for size. The Jacobsdal area offers visits to wine cellars. |

Resources and further reading

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Brochures and maps

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The South African National Roads Agency Ltd (SANRAL) map

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Practical Exploration

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Photos

ML Kruger - Makiti Guides & Tours (Pty) Ltd. August 2008

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