

Fast Facts

biltong (bill-tong) - This South African favourite is dried and salted meat, similar to beef jerky, although it can be made from ostrich, kudu or any other red meat.

boma (bow-mah) - An open thatched structure used for dinners, entertainment and parties.

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koeksister (kook-sister) - A traditional Malay - and now also Afrikaner - sweet, made from twisted yeast dough, deep fried and dipped in syrup. The word comes from the Dutch koek ("cake") and sissen, meaning "to sizzle".

lekker (lekk-irr with a rolling r) - Nice, good, great, cool or tasty.

Food Etiquette

braai (br-eye) - An outdoor barbecue, where meat such as steak, chicken and boerewors are cooked, served with pap and bredie.

bunny chow - Delicious and cheap food on the go, bunny chow is curry served in a hollowed-out half-loaf of bread.

china - China means good friend, as in "This friend's my china". It's one of the few Cockney rhyming slang words to survive in the country, coming from "china plate" = "mate".

cooldrink, coldrink - This is the common term for a soda, such as Coca-Cola. Ask for a soda in South Africa and you will receive a club soda.

dop (dawp) - An alcoholic drink: "Can I pour you a dop?" It can also mean to fail: "I dopped the test."

Food etiquette in South Africa is mostly westernised, with some of its own idiosyncrasies. For instance, it's acceptable to eat pasta twirling it onto a fork with aid of a spoon, and lobster with your hands. The popular braai (barbeque) is another occasion where you can use your hands. In rural areas, traditional stew and mealie pap are also eaten with the hands - use your right hand only and roll the pap into a ball with your fingers, then dip it into the stew and eat.

muti (moo-ti) - Medicine, typically traditional African medicine, from the isiZulu umuthi.

potjiekos (poi-kee-kors) - Traditional Afrikaner food, generally a rich stew, cooked in a three-legged cast-iron pot over a fire. The word means "little-pot food" in Afrikaans.

robots - Traffic lights.

Where can I smoke?

The law prohibits smoking in public spaces, including airports and railway stations. Most restaurants and pubs have designated smoking and non-smoking areas. No one under the age of 18 may buy cigarettes, or enter a designated smoking area. Both the venue operator and the smoker can face penalties if they ignore the law.

Drinking Water

Drinking water in South Africa is safe to drink and cook with when taken from taps in urban areas. Not all tap water in rural areas is safe for consumption, so take precautions where applicable.

shebeen - A township tavern, illegal under the apartheid regime, often set up in a private house and frequented by black South Africans. The word is originally Gaelic.

Safety Precautions

Make sure you have the latest safety tips from the establishment where you will be staying and take common sense precautions as you would when travelling anywhere in the world.

toyi-toyi - A knees-up protest dance.