Our Stopover Guide to

JOHANNESBURG
THE CITY OF GOLD

We won’t show you the world; we’ll show you Africa, better than anyone else.
Johannesburg, also known as Joburg, Jozi and the City of Gold, is Africa’s economic powerhouse, driving trade and commerce across the continent. The city was founded in 1886 during the Witwatersrand gold rush, making it one of the world’s youngest major cities. Africa’s second largest metropolis (after Cairo in Egypt) is also home to the earth’s largest man-made forest, with over 10 million trees sheltering Joburg’s streets.

The city enjoys a wonderful climate: neither humid nor too hot, the days are warm and wind free in summer (November to February) and crisp and clear in winter (June to August).

OR Tambo International Airport is the regional hub for flights from around the globe, making it the biggest and busiest airport in Africa.

Go2Africa has been bringing travellers on safari since 1998. Our success is built on our passion for Africa and the technology that connects us with you. We have explored every destination we sell and because we are 100 percent independent, we only recommend the best, tried-and-tested suppliers to you. We don’t call our consultants African Safari Experts lightly - they earn this title through regular travel, training and written examinations. We publish travel reviews and tips, blogs and free guides (like this one) to inspire and inform our travel community.
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

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Our TOP 5 Joburg attractions:

- Soweto
- Sandton City
- Maboneng Design Precinct
- Constitution Hill
- Newtown
A modern metropolis filled with skyscrapers, Joburg is also the world's largest urban forest.
There is so much to see and do in this thriving city that we recommend you spend at least 48 hours here. We love the range of privately guided excursions that are available, from seeing indoor cultural attractions and historic memorials in air-conditioned comfort to heading outdoors to acclimatize in Joburg’s pleasant year-round sunshine on guided walks or Soweto cycling tours.

Johannesburg offers superb dining in eateries recognized on such illustrious lists as the World’s 50 Best Restaurants. You can expect plenty of other first-world pleasures too, from designer shopping districts to pampering spas and ultra-luxurious hotels, all set against the backdrop of a truly African city. This is where energetic kwaito music originates, served alongside Jozi’s vibrant nightlife, lavish casinos and live theatre productions.

Stop to catch your breath at the start of your vacation. It is tempting to book an immediate connection to your safari destination as soon as you arrive in Africa but you may have been travelling for 20 or more hours when you land in Johannesburg. Don’t start your safari with the disadvantage of aches and tension from a long-haul flight.

Stopping over in Johannesburg gives you all the advantages of rest and relaxation before the thrills and action of your safari begin. Choose a hotel with an in-house spa, tranquil gardens and excellent dining options so that you can unwind, acclimatize and ease yourself into vacation mode.

A stopover may be unavoidable if there are no immediate connecting flights with your international routing, or if you are mid-safari on the way to an Indian Ocean island or the Victoria Falls. Instead of begrudging the stopover, we recommend that you make the most of the opportunity to explore one of Africa’s most fascinating cities – you won’t regret it!
We have tried and tested the hotels and guesthouses we recommend to make sure that every suite delivers the standards of comfort and luxury claimed, that the in-house restaurant is excellent and that if there is a spa, it is a world-class facility. We prefer landscaped garden settings so that you can enjoy fresh air between flights and soak up some of Johannesburg’s famous sunshine.

When you have such a rich range of accommodation on offer, choosing the right hotel for your stopover depends on how long you’ll be in Johannesburg and what you want to experience while you are here. If your stopover is very short – for example, just an overnight wait for a morning flight – choose the most comfortable hotel you can afford. That way you don’t have to leave the hotel to make the most of your stopover – stay where you’ll have access to an in-house spa or quality gym (to unknot the aches and pains of a long flight) and a great restaurant on the premises so you can relax, eat, sleep and go on your way with minimal hassle.

If you are stopping to see the sights, choose a hotel that is centrally situated, with comfortable outdoor relaxation space (so that you can enjoy an afternoon poolside), and a great breakfast buffet (to fuel up before a day of touring). Ideally, stay near one of Johannesburg’s tourist-friendly spots offering a taste of the city’s vibrant nightlife, such as Melrose Arch or Sandton City.
An impressive welcome awaits in The Saxon’s triple-volume lobby.
WHERE TO **STAY**

Ultra-luxurious

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**THE SAXON BOUTIQUE HOTEL & SPA**

The gates open and your car wends its way up a long serpentine driveway that is flanked by mature trees on either side. The hustle of Johannesburg is left behind and exchanged for the serene cocoon of The Saxon, arguably South Africa’s finest hotel. Once a private residence, it has lost none of its welcoming, almost homely atmosphere, despite an impressive triple-volume entrance portico and a hall that includes a colossal chandelier constructed of delicate ostrich eggs.

This casual ‘at home’ ambiance is what keeps celebrated dignitaries, businesspeople and travellers returning year after year (former president Nelson Mandela famously wrote his autobiography – *Long Walk to Freedom* – while staying at The Saxon). Staff are attentive without being overbearing; suites are large without being sterile; and the décor hints at Africa without tipping over into pastiche.

Add fine dining at Qunu restaurant (try the basil ice cream) to the extensive gym, enormous swimming pools, a beautiful spa and several very private villas, and The Saxon gets a firm nod as the place to treat yourself after a long-haul flight or on a honeymoon stopover.
**WHERE TO STAY**

Luxury

**FAIRLAWNS BOUTIQUE HOTEL**

Fairlawn is, in many ways, a microcosm of Johannesburg’s delightful contrasts: hadedah birds give their iconic squawks from the garden while ladies enjoy a lavish high tea in one of the country-house rooms; guests peruse vibrant original African art while others breathe out in the Zen spa. One of the city’s most popular hotels for high-profile travellers, Fairlawn is riot of art, antiques and objet, all under-pinned by a cheerful atmosphere. The architecture may hint at Napoleonic France but the service ethos is strictly 21st century.

One of the most attractive aspects of Fairlawn is that cookie-cutters are used for those scrumptious high teas only – each suite is individually decorated, with the owner’s love for beauty keenly felt everywhere. The Chinese Room is bathed in imperial red, the Nelson Mandela suite has a nod to Africa and the Emily Hobhouse Room celebrates this Victorian activist with delicate pastels. With no two rooms alike, repeat guests often ask for ‘my room’ to be reserved on their return.

The swimming pool beckons from the centre of the immaculate lawns and the garden is dotted with the individual buildings that house Fairlawn’s villas, spa and double-storey suites. On sunny days, which Joburg enjoys almost year-round thanks to its dry winters, you can ensconce yourself happily under an umbrella on the patio after breakfast and catch up with reading or dozing, the staff bringing you the menu for a long, lazy lunch, washed down with glass of perfectly chilled South African Sauvignon Blanc...
**WHERE TO STAY**

Comfortable

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**THE PEECH HOTEL**

Once a private home on a large plot in one of the city’s most upscale neighbourhoods, The Peech is today a small hotel that couples a familiar ‘home from home’ feeling with being just a stone’s throw from the buzzing Melrose Arch mall and convenient Gautrain high-speed rail station.

Instead of a large block with an endless corridor punctuated by anonymous doors, The Peech consists of several small units, each with an upstairs and downstairs suite, maximising your privacy. There are two large suites that are ideal for honeymooners, and a swimming pool that is bathed in sunshine. In keeping with its contemporary feel, the interiors are modern with bold accents of colour and pattern. The downstairs rooms have small, walled gardens and the upstairs ones have step-out balconies – look out for agile yellow weaver birds that construct elaborate nests at the tips of drooping tree branches in the garden.

The Peech makes an excellent base for exploring Johannesburg. After a great night’s sleep and a delicious breakfast in the dining room – select from the buffet or pick your favourites from the menu – head out to explore with your guide. After a day of discovery, freshen up for a night of fine food and wine at the vibrant Melrose Arch mall nearby.
Johannesburg’s annual average of 73% sunny days make it an excellent acclimatisation stopover.
The activities in Johannesburg are diverse, with plenty of opportunities to make the most of the mild climate and great options for indoor fun if you prefer. We only recommend tours and activities that we’ve tried and tested ourselves, and that have earned rave reviews from our travellers over the years. As tailor-made specialists, we prefer to consult with you on the various historic, cultural and art attractions in the City of Gold and then create private, guided excursions around what interests you the most. There are half-day and full-day tours to choose from, and savvy itineraries that combine attractions with great lunch venues.

There are two broad categories to choose from:

**Active expeditions** This category includes walking and cycling tours undertaken in the care of professional guides in tourist-friendly settings like Soweto, Newtown and Maboneng. These tours are a great way to stretch your legs, enjoy the fresh air and sunny weather, and soak up Johannesburg’s rich cultural heritage. Enjoy the street art of Newtown, the hip creative district of Maboneng or the deeply moving memorials and living history of Soweto.

**Relaxed outings** This category covers any tours that take place indoors in air-conditioned comfort with the focus on rest and social recreation. These outings are in the care of a professional driver-guide who transports you from your hotel to the indoor venue and back again. Activities range from award-winning eateries to luxurious spas, from world-class shopping malls to museums and art galleries.
Although Johannesburg’s winter mornings can start off very chilly with plenty of frost, by mid-morning the sun is usually out, making for ideal weather to hit the streets. Setting out on foot is one of the best ways to truly immerse yourself in a place. There are plenty of half- and full-day guided tours of the city’s most exciting areas to stretch your legs and help you acclimatize to Africa.

One of our favourites is a tour of Soweto, a neighbourhood made up of many suburbs that lies a short distance from the city centre. Visit 8115 Vilakazi Street, where Nelson and Winnie Mandela lived with their children – this modest house is packed with personal memorabilia and a tangible spirit of resilience. Across the road is the house where fellow Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu lived, making it the only street in the world to be home to two Nobel laureates.

If you’re travelling with your children, consider a visit to Golf Reef City, which has many interactive experiences that explain the history of mining in South Africa – including descending into an old mineshaft! Kids will also enjoy popping in at the Orlando Towers where they can bungee jump, play paintball in a series of tunnels or ‘free fall’ from the edge of one of these enormous towers (this is easily combined with a Soweto tour).

Other options for walking include seeing the Art Deco masterpieces in the downtown mining district or the edgy street art of the vibrant Newtown area.
IT WAS THE OPPOSITE OF GRAND, BUT IT WAS MY FIRST TRUE HOME OF MY OWN AND I WAS MIGHTILY PROUD.

A MAN IS NOT A MAN UNTIL HE HAS A HOUSE OF HIS OWN.

- Nelson Mandela, Long walk to Freedom

MANDELA HOUSE 8115 ORLANDO WEST SOWETO
In our rush to see and do everything – especially if we want to feel like we’ve really got our money’s worth – we often forget that the point of a vacation is to relax. It’s fun to venture out and explore but, let’s face it, it is a rare indulgence to stay put and relax.

If you want plenty of opportunities to relax during your Joburg stopover, then your first step is to select accommodation that has a good spa, preferably with therapists who can come to your room to do massages, facials or pedicures. When you’re feeling jet-lagged from crossing several time zones, there is nothing better than being pampered. Our suggestions are The Saxon, The Michelangelo (which has an indoor heated pool for chilly winter days), The Residence, Fairlawns and the Four Seasons Westcliff.

The weather at the height of safari season (June to September) is so pleasant in Johannesburg, you might want to join a private guided tour of the city’s three most famous gardens. A stroll through Brenthurst, the Walter Sisulu Botanical Garden and the Montecasino Bird Garden – with a balloon ride! – will soothe jangled nerves and remind what bliss even a small dose of nature can deliver.
Head chef David Higgs at The Saxon’s five hundred restaurant.
Johannesburg is home to the richest square mile in Africa. It is the continent’s financial and commercial heart, home to its most resilient stock exchange and South Africa’s wealthiest entrepreneurs and investors. All this wealth demands the best of life’s fundamental luxuries, and the City of Gold’s restaurants are no exception. Thanks to a wonderfully cosmopolitan urban population, Johannesburg offers a juicy bite of cultural cuisine from around the world.

After-work drinks – echoing the ritual of sundowners on safari – are a daily event with hotspots ranging from hotel terraces with views to hipster cafes with artisanal food. Authentic ethnic eateries run the gamut of Africa-themed restaurants to Italian trattorias, sumptuous gourmet dining to casual Portuguese cafes serving king-sized platters of prawns. Service is generally excellent (tipping is customary – between 10 and 20 percent) and the restaurants we recommend offer sit-down, à la carte dining experiences, with tasting menus at a select few.

Eating out in Johannesburg is quite reasonably priced – at the top end of the best restaurants you can expect to pay around US$40 per person, excluding drinks. Unlike the gourmet offering in Johannesburg’s coastal cousin, Cape Town, the wine lists tend to be more diverse with European, Australian and Argentinian vintages making an appearance. In comparison with a famous foodie destination like Cape Town, Johannesburg competes favourably: it’s home to South Africa’s top steak restaurant, The Local Grill in Parktown North (2015 winner of Dining Out’s Best Steakhouse award) and two of South Africa’s Top 10 eateries, both previously featured on the World’s 50 Best Restaurants regional list: dw eleven-13 and, Luke Dale Roberts at The Saxon Boutique Hotel & Spa.

If you’re stopping over in Johannesburg, ask us to book your table at one of these great eateries and make it a night to remember.
Maboneng means 'place of light', an apt name for this design precinct.
MABONENG

Maboneng is an exciting design precinct where Johannesburg’s coolest, hippest and funkiest people gather to make art, swap design stories and have a good time. It’s jam-packed with eateries that offer everything from excellent coffee to great South African microbrews and craft beers. But since you’re in Africa, why not ‘go local’?

**Pata Pata** (named after the world-famous Miriam Makeba song that means ‘Touch Touch’) serves up classic African cuisine with a familiar touches – for a winter rib-sticker, try their tender oxtail stew. If you prefer something lighter, head to **Blackanese** where chefs combine traditional Japanese sushi with African flavours. On the weekend, their ‘prawn braai’ (pronounced ‘bry’) attracts fans who enjoy fresh shrimp straight off the barbeque.

Over at **Sha’p Braai** (pronounced ‘Sharp Bry’) you can savour a traditional South African barbeque, with T-bones, wors (a type of sausage) and chicken cooked right over the coals and accompanied by pap (a type of polenta) served with chakalaka (a spicy vegetable relish). Lekker (yum!), as we say in Jozi!
Nelson Mandela Square is a popular dining and shopping destination in Sandton.
WHERE TO EAT

Dinner in the city

MELROSE ARCH & NELSON MANDELA SQUARE

Both Melrose Arch and Nelson Mandela Square are very upscale malls that offer first-world shopping and plenty of options for a casual supper or fine dinner.

At Melrose Arch, try Moyo where you can either sample a range of goodies from the buffet or order off the à la carte menu. Consider ordering the African Platter, which has taster dishes from across the continent, from Lagos in Nigeria to Durban in South Africa. Try at least one of the mini bunny chows (a small hollowed-out loaf filled with a tasty stew) and end with malva pudding, traditionally served with hot custard. Between courses, have your face lightly decorated in a style inspired by traditional Xhosa markings and enjoy the energetic live entertainment.

Over at Nelson Mandela Square, The Butcher Shop & Grill will demonstrate why South African red meat and wines are held in such high regard. If you don’t feel like a perfectly cooked and aged steak with a glass of excellent Shiraz or Pinotage, then head to Buhkara, a lavish Indian restaurant where you can indulge in authentic tandoori and dosa dishes. South Africa has one of the largest populations of people of Indian origin outside India and Mahatma Ghandi spent part of his legal career living and working in Joburg.
High tea at Fairlawns is a decadent, silver service affair complete with cakes and fine teas.
JOHANNESBURG’S TOP 3 RESTAURANTS

FIVE HUNDRED AT THE SAXON
SANDHURST
saxon.co.za

A sophisticated hideaway at The Saxon, five hundred has set the benchmark for fine dining on the continent. Chef David Higgs creates dishes with complicated but rewarding flavours that turn food into art. Try the 6-course menu featuring rabbit, skate wing with marron, and Waygu beef with smoked brisket. For a special occasion, nothing beats the Ruinart Experience in the private dining room, where each course is accompanied by a perfectly partnered Ruinart champagne.

DW ELEVEN-13
DUNKELD WEST
dw11-13.co.za

While Chef Marthinus Ferreira is well versed in the classical food canon, he likes change and his tasting, vegetarian and degustation menus are constantly evolving. Dip into delicacies like springbok tartar, veal sweetbreads or truffle-infused churros. Although the exterior of the Dunkeld West Shopping Centre that houses dw eleven-13 may look uninspiring, Ferreira has created an understated interior that allows the sensational food to really sing.

CUBE TASTING KITCHEN
PARKNORTH HEIGHTS
cubekitchen.co.za

Considered one of the most exciting newcomers on the Johannesburg foodie scene, the chefs at Cube – Jessica Whitford and Darren O’Donovan - recommend allotting at least three hours to experience their 10-course progression menu. And with perfectly cooked Zanzibar prawns, chilli biltong and duck with apricot brandy on the cards, it would be difficult not to! Each course is perfection on a small scale and the menu changes periodically to make the most of seasonal ingredients.
YOUR JOHANNESBURG STOPOVER
Quick links and travel tips

QUICK READS

A Guide to Your First South Africa Safari

Where to Go in Johannesburg

In his Footsteps: Finding Mandela in Johannesburg

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

Summer is November to February
Afternoon thunderstorms with humid mornings and clear evenings
Average temperature of 21°C (69°F)
Average rainfall of 130mm.

Winter is May to August
Six chilly weeks midyear - no rain
Coldest is June with average temperature 10°C (50°F)

JOBURG. MORE THAN JUST A STOPOVER.

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