

# Northern Cape



Covering nearly a third of the country, the vast and sparsely populated Northern Cape surely is South Africa's last great frontier. With a restless air of untamed energy, this is a place where the Africa of storybooks comes alive – the kind of spot you'd expect to find the Marlboro Man and Indiana Jones swapping yarns with Lara Croft over pints of ale in some rough-and-ready old saloon. In this land of stark contrasts the red sands of the Kalahari tumble into the churning, inky waters of the desolate Atlantic Coast; while the Karoo's umbrageous grasses and strange-shaped kopjes (hills) – home to grazing sheep, ramshackle windmills and tiny dorps (villages) – collide with the sun-scorched lunar landscape of Namaqualand, where roads dissolve into an oblivion of endless space. Lions stalk their prey across crimson plains in remote Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park at dawn, while in the evening big, orange-ball sunsets made for Hollywood movies steal the show. Days are best spent playing cowboy in the desert – building a fire in the middle of nowhere, listening for the hyena's call and dreaming under a twinkling velvet blanket made from a million stars.

The Northern Cape is a captivating magician with more than a few tricks up its sleeve. In its favourite, it appears as an inhospitable desert, so hot and dry you'd never believe anything could grow. But just when you're ready to fall for it, the Cape pulls a rabbit from the hat – turning dust to diamonds, rocks to flowers. Believe it or not, the hills around Kimberley have yielded enough of the world's favourite stone to fill a bathtub or two; in spring Namaqua gives birth to a miraculous sea of technicolour wildflowers.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Tracking lion through red, searing sands in remote and beautiful **Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park** (p537)
- Photographing the explosion of colourful wildflowers blanketing **Namaqua National Park** (p548) each spring
- Digging for diamonds and a dose of Wild West culture in the old mining town of **Kimberley** (p526)
- Hiking through stunning mountainous desert in **Richtersveld National Park** (p547), South Africa's wildest park
- Marvelling at pearly white dunes rising from a blanket of crimson sand in magnificent **Witsand Nature Reserve** (p537), a place where the desert roars



■ POPULATION: 816,976

■ AREA: 361,830 SQ KM

## HISTORY

The Northern Cape's first residents were the San: skilled hunter-gatherers who gradually became settled pastoralists known as the Khoekhoen (men of men) – see p32 and p33 for more on the history of these people.

In northwest Namaqua is another well-known Khoekhoen tribe, the Nama (also known as Namaqua or Namakwa, which means 'Nama people'), famous for their copper metalworking skills. Not surprisingly, this attracted the attention of Dutch explorers, who came into contact with the tribe in 1661. Because of the region's isolation, however, the Namaqualand copper rush did not properly begin until the 1850s. The first

commercial mine (now a national monument) was established just outside Springbok in 1852, and there are still a number of working mines including one at Nababeep.

Diamonds were first discovered in the Kimberley area in 1866, when a young man by the name of Erasmus Jacobs stumbled upon a pretty white pebble, picked it up and altered the course of South African history. In his hand he held a 21.25-carat yellow diamond called Eureka. Five years later, the source, a small hill that came to be known as Colesberg Koppie (later Kimberley), was identified and the excavation of the mine known as the Big Hole commenced. By 1872 there were an estimated 50,000 miners in the vicinity and Cecil John Rhodes

(see the boxed text, p527) had arrived on the scene (he would later buy out all claims and found one of the world's most powerful diamond conglomerates, De Beers Consolidated Mines Company).

Namaqua is also an important source for alluvial diamonds. Prospectors converged on the area in 1925, after a young soldier named Jack Carstens found a glittering stone near Port Nolloth and it soon became clear that another enormously rich source of diamonds had been discovered.

## CLIMATE

The Northern Cape is a land of extremes. The province is semidesert and summer temperatures in the Kalahari and the Karoo often soar above 40°C during the day and drop below freezing at night.

Rainfall in the region is scant, with annual precipitation between 50mm and 400mm, most of which falls in the western areas of the province. This rain leads to magnificent spring (July–November) wildflowers in Namaqualand. The Senqu (Orange) River runs through the Northern Cape and the river valleys are so fertile the area is called the Green Kalahari.

## NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

The Northern Cape has the country's most spectacular and remote national parks. In the far north of the province, bordering Botswana and Namibia, is the outstanding Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (p537), one of Africa's newer parks.

The wildest of all of South Africa's national parks is Richtersveld National Park, in a very remote location on the Namibian border in the northwest corner of the province. The park is mostly only accessible by 4WD, and due to the amount of time it takes to reach it, day visitors are discouraged. It's best to visit the park on an organised tour (see p547).

Two other major parks in the region are easily accessible: Augrabies Falls National Park (p541), where the Senqu (Orange) River plunges over a series of waterfalls; and newly established Namaqua National Park (p548), which offers some of the best wildflower-season views in the region.

Excellent nature reserves include the Witsand Nature Reserve (p537), 200km east of Upington, where you can feast your eyes on giant red-and-white dunes.

## LANGUAGE

The Northern Cape is one of only two provinces in South Africa (the other is Western Cape) where coloureds, and not blacks, make up the majority of the population. Afrikaans is the most widely spoken language with about 66% of the province speaking it. The indigenous population is varied and includes the San, who can still be seen around the Kalahari (small numbers of San lead semitransitional lifestyles in isolated parts of neighbouring Botswana), the Tswana and some Khoekhoen groups. Tswana (19%) and Xhosa (6%) are the other main languages. English is spoken everywhere.

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

The Northern Cape is easily accessible by car, bus, train and plane. With the exception of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier and Richtersveld National Parks, where private vehicle hire is a necessity, with a little patience most places can be reached by bus. There is daily bus service between the transportation hubs of Kimberley and Colesberg from both Cape Town and Johannesburg (Jo'burg). Buses to and from Cape Town, Jo'burg and Windhoek (Namibia) also pass through Upington and Springbok at least three times a week. **South African Airlink** (SAAirlink; ☎ 054-838 3337; www.saaairlink.co.za) has flights from Jo'burg and Cape Town to Kimberley and Upington.

Public transport within the province is generally straightforward, and you won't be kept waiting anywhere for too long. If you're on a tight budget, but still want to experience the Kgalagadi on your own, it's possible to pick up a rental car in Upington for a couple of days, although prices are generally higher than if you rent in one of the country's major cities.

## KIMBERLEY & UPPER KAROO

Kimberley is the epicentre of the region. An old diamond town with a chequered past, it's also the capital of the Northern Cape and definitely worth a few days' pause. The north-south N12, an alternative route between Jo'burg and Cape Town, passes through Kimberley and crosses the



### TOP FIVE NORTHERN CAPE DRIVES

Although driving through much of the Northern Cape is a magnificent experience, there are some drives that take this province's unspoilt appeal entirely to another level. Whether you are an experienced back-roads driver, or simply looking for a beautiful spot to snap some pictures, we're sure these roads won't disappoint.

- Just outside Kakamas (p541) on the N14 heading towards Keimos is the turn-off for the **Riemvasmaak 4WD Trails** (☎ 054-431 0945). Here you can challenge your skills on three trails ranging from beginner to expert. The existence of this area is proof of the triumph over apartheid. In 1973 the government forcibly removed the local inhabitants – Xhosa, Nama and coloured – to the Eastern Cape and Namibia. Following the transition to democracy in 1994, efforts began to bring back the local population, and Riemvasmaak became one of the first land restitution projects in South Africa. In 2002, the formerly displaced residents were given the deeds to the plots they live on and a community-driven tourism initiative began. This now includes the 4WD trails as well as a mountain-bike route, hiking paths, a natural hot spring and accommodation in chalets.
- Rte 364 between Calvinia (p548) and Clanwilliam in the Western Cape runs through empty countryside and over several magnificent passes. There are excellent displays of wildflowers in early spring. There's a great view from the top of **Botterkloof Pass**, and a couple of nice flat rocks overlooking the gorge that are perfect for a picnic. You hit irrigation country around Doringbos, where you'll find dramatic views of the Cederberg Range. The **Pakhuis Pass** takes you through an amazing jumble of multicoloured rocks. Allow at least two hours for the journey – more if you have a picnic or are tempted to take the road to **Wuppertal**. This is an old Rhenish mission station and little has changed since it was established in 1830. It has whitewashed, thatched cottages, as well as cypresses and donkeys.
- There is a stunning stretch of Rte 27 between Calvinia and Vanrhynsdorp in the Western Cape with magnificent views over the Knersvlakte Plain from **Vanrhyns Pass**. In spring there can be a breathtaking contrast between the green and fertile wheat fields, the flowers at the top of the pass and the desert far below.
- The dirt roads around **Hondeklip Bay** on the Northern Cape's coastline are spectacular. After climbing through rocky hills you drop onto the desert-like coastal plain, which is dotted with enormous diamond mines. The flora is fascinating – make sure to take time to walk around, even if it's just off the side of the road. A 2WD is OK for this area.
- The **Namaqua 4WD Route** traverses some of South Africa's most remote and rugged territory east and south of Richtersveld National Park (p547). The route has been divided into two parts: Pella Mission Station to Vioolsdrif and Vioolsdrif to Alexander Bay. To drive either route you must first obtain a permit from the **tourism information office** (☎ 027-712 2011) in Springbok. Permits cost R150 per vehicle per route and include a detailed map and information on designated camping sites along the way. The first route, designed for novice drivers, traverses 328km and takes between two and four days to drive. The second route, designed for more experienced drivers, is 284km long and is usually completed in six hours.

east-west N10 at Britstown in the Upper Karoo.

The Upper Karoo, which is part of the Great Karoo (see p264 and p227), is sprinkled with small towns, scrub brush and little else; it's probably the least-enticing portion of the expansive Karoo. However, nearly everyone driving the N1 between Cape Town and Jo'burg stops for the night in Colesberg, as it's about halfway between the two cities.

### KIMBERLEY

☎ 053 / pop 166,000

Like all good mining towns, Kimberley is pockmarked with legends and ghost stories. Step inside one of the atmospheric old pubs with their dark smoky interiors, scarred wooden tables and last century's Castle Lager posters, and you'll feel you've been transported back to the rough-and-ready diamond heyday. Spend a night in one of the old-world hotels, the slightly shabby air

only adding to its charm, and you'll wake up thinking it's the late 1800s.

This is the city where De Beers Consolidated Mines began; where Cecil John Rhodes (see boxed text, below) and Ernest Oppenheimer (mining magnate and mayor of Kimberley) made their fortunes. It's been more than a century now, and yet Kimberley is still synonymous with diamonds and mining.

After a long slog across the Karoo the relatively bright lights of Kimberley are a welcome sight. The Big Hole is amazing, there are some excellent galleries around and the Galeshewe Township is inextricably linked with the history of the struggle against apartheid – although unfortunately at the time of research the once highly regarded tours were no longer running.

### Orientation

The town centre is a tangle of streets, a legacy of the days when Kimberley was a rowdy shantytown, sprawling across flat and open veld. If you're trying to find the train station, look for the red-and-white communications tower. The tourist tram, which departs from the town hall, is a good means of getting your bearings.

The satellite township of Galeshewe is northwest of the city centre.

### Information

**Diamantveld Visitors Centre** (☎ 053-832 7298; tourism@kbymun.org.za; 121 Bultfontein Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Good maps and brochures of Kimberley and the Northern Cape; can arrange tours of the area.

**Small World Net Café** (☎ 053-831 3484; 42 Sidney St; per hr R30; ☎ 8am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Internet access.

### Sights

#### THE BIG HOLE

The area surrounding the largest manually dug hole in the world was undergoing renovations worth R30 million when we stopped by. When completed, the touristy complex, dubbed the **Big Hole Project** (☎ 053-833 1557; West Circular Rd; phone for admission prices & opening hr), will combine the best of history and entertainment and include space for six hotels, numerous restaurants, shops, a cinema and a giant diamond display. As for the Big Hole itself, you'll be able to view it through a glass-enclosed complex with interactive displays and underground experiences. At 800m deep, water now fills it to within 150m

### CECIL RHODES

The sickly son of an English parson, Cecil John Rhodes (1853–1906) was sent to South Africa in 1870 to improve his health. Shortly after arriving, he jumped on the diamond-prospecting bandwagon, and in 1887, after working feverishly, founded the De Beers Consolidated Mines Company and bought Barney Barnato's Kimberley Mine for UK£5 million. By 1891 De Beers owned 90% of the world's diamonds and a stake in the fabulous reef of gold on the Witwatersrand (near Johannesburg).

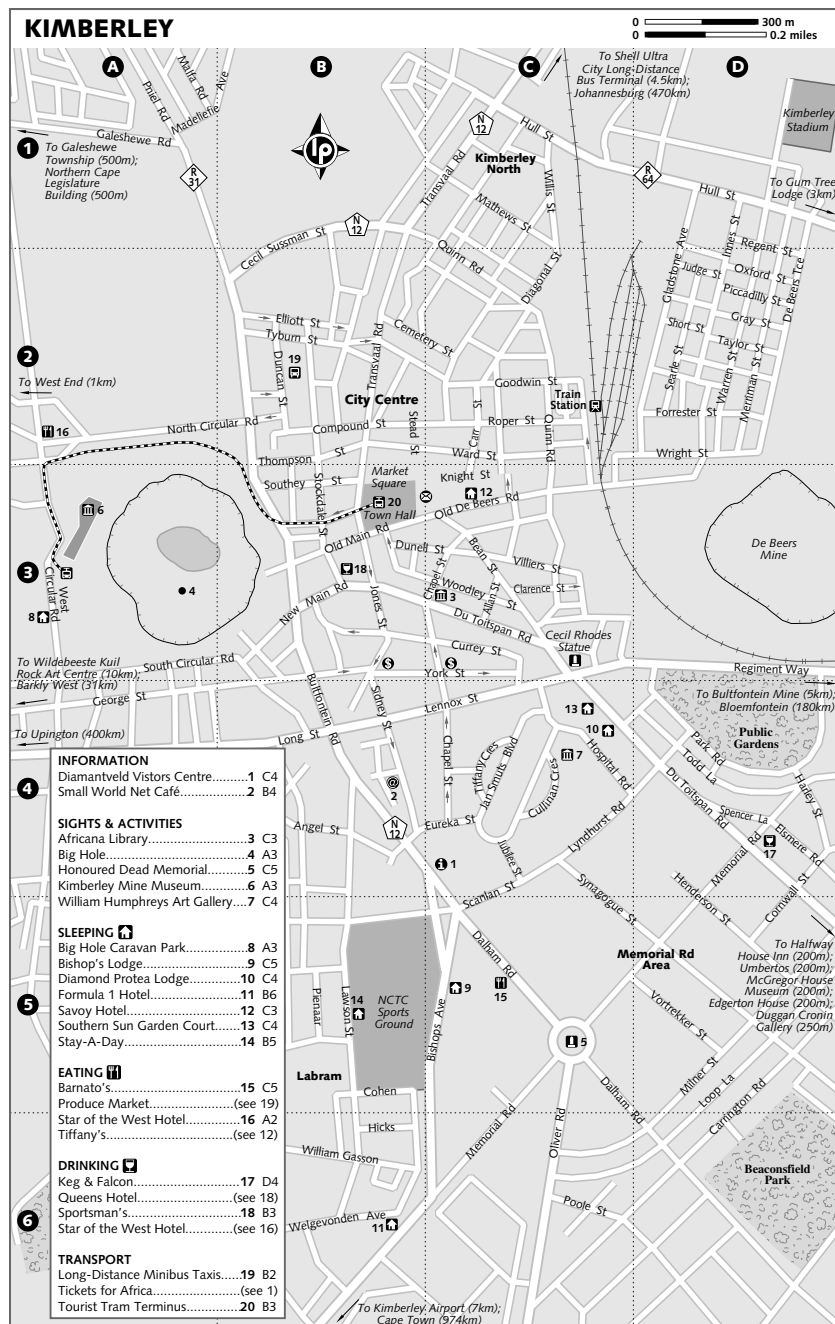
But personal wealth and power alone did not satisfy Rhodes. He believed in the concept of the empire, and dreamed of 'painting the map red' and building a railway from Cape to Cairo, running entirely through British territory. Rhodes was successful in establishing British control in Bechuanaland (later Botswana) and the area that was to become Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe).

In 1890 Rhodes was elected prime minister of the Cape Colony, but was forced to resign five years later after encouraging a raid on the Witwatersrand, in Paul Kruger's Transvaal Republic (see p37). The British government was publicly embarrassed by these actions, and along with forcing Rhodes' resignation, took control of his personal fiefdoms of Bechuanaland and Rhodesia.

Rhodes' health deteriorated after these disasters. Following his death in South Africa in 1906, though, Rhodes' reputation was largely rehabilitated by his will, which devoted most of his fortune to the Rhodes Scholarship that still sends winners from the Commonwealth and other countries to study at Oxford University.

If you're interested in learning more, *Rhodes* by Antony Thomas has received good reviews. Thomas, a native South African best known for his movie-production work, was exiled from the country in 1977 after creating an anti-apartheid documentary. His biography on Cecil John Rhodes, which spurred a six-part Masterpiece Theatre TV show, presents a thorough picture of the man without trying to force too many personal opinions on the reader.





of the surface, which still leaves an impressive void, but don't forget that there is over four times as much hole below the water's surface. Diamond mining stopped here in 1914, but not before 14.5 million carats of diamonds were carted away.

The complex will also incorporate the already excellent **Kimberley Mine Museum**, set up as a reconstruction of Kimberley in the 1880s, where you can browse for ladies shoes, bottled water or petticoats amid the dusty shops and dance halls. It also includes a diamond-digging area perfect for the kids.

The renovations were scheduled to conclude in May 2006.

### GALESHEWE TOWNSHIP

The satellite township of Galeshewe rates with Soweto as an important source of activists in the struggle against apartheid. The township is home to the house and grave of Sol Plaatje, a founding member of the African National Congress (ANC), noted journalist and one of the first black South Africans to have a novel published in English. It is also home to Robert Sobukwe, founder and first president of the then-Pan African Congress (PAC). Galeshewe was where the Self Help Scheme was implemented by Helen Joseph, an organiser of the 1956 mass demonstration in Pretoria against the extension of regulations governing the carrying of passes.

A visit to Galeshewe may well be one of the highlights of your stay in South Africa. Unfortunately, at the time of research organised township tours were no longer operating. Check with the visitors centre, however, as this could easily change (the guy who used to run them went off to college, so we really can't feel anything but happy for him). The township is not particularly dangerous, however, and if you have transport and go during the day you'll likely be met more with smiles than trouble, especially if you show interest in the area and its history. If you choose to visit, show respect. Galeshewe provides a chance to glimpse how the ANC's commitment to provide housing is progressing, but desperate conditions still exist and the reality is that there are simply too many people and too little money for drastic change to really occur.

The outskirts of the township are also home to the **Northern Cape Legislature Building** (☎ 053-830 0600; Nobengula Rd; ☎ hr vary),

where the provincial government meets. Creatively designed, it features hardly any hard lines, instead opting for underemphasised angles and inviting curves. Numerous sculptures, depicting the varied faces of the people of the province, grace both interior and exterior surfaces of this building, which resembles a fine work of art. The location, in a low-income area, was no coincidence. Government officials built it here in the hope of creating new employment opportunities for township residents.

### ANGLO-BOER WAR BATTLEFIELDS

The Brits and Boers really had it out in the land surrounding Kimberley between 1899 and 1902. The siege of Kimberley lasted for 124 days before the British army of Lords Roberts and Kitchener relieved the town on 15 February 1900. The **Honoured Dead Memorial**, to those who lost their lives in the siege, is at the intersection of Memorial and Dalham Rds, 2km south of the city centre. The large gun is Long Cecil, built and used in Kimberley during the siege.

Several major battles were fought in the vicinity of Kimberley, both during the siege and after. The most important was Magersfontein on 11 December 1899, when entrenched Boers decimated the famous Highland Brigade. The visitors centre has details on the Diamond Fields N12 Battlefields Route southeast of Kimberley.

Rhodes sat out the Kimberley siege in two downstairs rooms of the building now home to the **McGregor House Museum** (☎ 053-442 0099; Atlas St; adult/child R8/4; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun). The museum has exhibits on the Anglo-Boer War and runs daily **Magersfontein battlefield tours** (tour R10), when there's enough interest.

### WILDEBEEST KUIL ROCK ART TOURISM CENTRE

There's not a lot going on at this government-funded **tourism initiative** (☎ 053-833 7069; www.museumsc.co.za/wildebeestkuil.htm; Barkly West Rd; adult/child R10/5; ☎ 9am-5pm) right now, but it has the potential to be a culturally fascinating excursion if enough folks visit to sustain it. Built with a grant from the department of environmental affairs and tourism to help create jobs for poor local communities and a renewed understanding of the Khoesaaan past, this place is worth visiting for this cause alone. There are 10 rock-art

displays on the property. Each is marked and you will be given headphones and a cassette player before you start out on the self-guided walking tours. Also check out the 20-minute film on the Xun and Khwe peoples. The gift shop is free to browse and has a very reasonably priced, although limited, selection of traditional regional crafts. The centre is 10km west of town.

#### OTHER MUSEUMS

A unique collection of photographs of tribes taken in the 1920s and 1930s before many aspects of traditional life were lost can be found at the **Duggan Cronin Gallery** (☎ 053-842 0099; Egerton Rd; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun).

An excellent collection of contemporary works by black artists, in addition to pieces by Dutch, Flemish, English and French artists can be found at the **William Humphreys Art Gallery** (☎ 053-831 1724; admission R2; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun). Some argue it's the best gallery in South Africa.

The **Africana Library** (☎ 053-830 6247; 63-65 Du Toitspan Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) collection covers the first period of contact between the Tswana and the missionaries. Included in its holdings is missionary Robert Moffat's copy of his translation of the Old Testament into Tswana.

#### Tours

**De Beers Tours** (☎ 053-842 1321; tours R15; ☎ 9am & 11am Mon-Fri) offers group visits to the diamond treatment and recovery plants at Bultfontein Mine, located 5km east of the centre on the city's outskirts. Tours depart from the visitors centre at the Bultfontein Mine gate.

**Diamond Tours Unlimited** (☎ 053-861 4983; www.diamondtours.co.za; tours from R150) offers a variety of tours including battlefield trips, diamond digs and city-sightseeing trips. They also organise personalised yellowfish fly-fishing trips. Call for departure times and to arrange pick-up.

To tap into Kimberley's wild past from a different angle, take a haunting hike down memory lane by joining a ghost tour. Both **Jaco Powell** (☎ 093-256 4795) and **Dirk Potgieter** (☎ 053-861 4983; www.diamondtours.co.za) offer 3½-hour trips for R150 (book in advance). Tours depart from the Honoured Dead Memorial (p529) at 6pm – just in time for the sky to darken and your guide to inform you

that the vault here is supposedly haunted with the souls of 27 British soldiers who perished during the siege of Kimberley. From the monument, tours continue to Kimberley's most haunted sights, dishing up an entertaining and educational introduction to town legends.

**Underground tours** (☎ 053-842 1321; tours R80; ☎ 9.30am Mon, 8am Tue-Fri), also run by De Beers, is the more adventurous of the mine tours. Descend deep under the earth and get a feel for the life of a miner. You can't wear contact lenses because of the pressure at the depths you'll descend to, and you have to be over 16 to go on one of these 3½-hour tours. The tours depart from the visitors centre at the mine gate.

#### Sleeping

##### BUDGET

Kimberley doesn't have any traditional backpacking options, but its budget places, while a little sterile, are perfectly adequate for a few nights.

**Big Hole Caravan Park** (☎ 053-053-830 6322; West Circular Rd; camp sites R25, plus per person R15; ☎) Cool off in the swimming pool on a hot day or lounge in the grass under the shady trees and read a novel; either way this centrally located camp site is an appealing spot.

**Gum Tree Lodge** (☎ 053-832 8577; fax 831 5409; cnr Hull St & Bloemfontein Rd; dm R50, s/d R110/180; ☎) This former jail is a good place to bring the family – there's a playground and lots of grass. Accommodation is in basic flats with a stove and fridge and shared ablution facilities. It's about 3km east of the town centre.

**Stay-A-Day** (☎ 053-832 7239; 72 Lawson St; s/d from R110/180) It doesn't have much atmosphere and the rooms are tiny, but it's also sparkling clean and you'll feel good knowing profits go towards an orphaned children's home. Most rooms share bathrooms, but a few en suites are available for R250.

**Halfway House Inn** (☎ 053-831 6324; 229 Du Toitspan Rd; s/d R160/190) If you're hoping to literally stumble into bed this is a good option – the place is attached to a lively pub. Those seeking quiet, look elsewhere. Rooms are large and come with TV.

##### MIDRANGE

If none of these options sound appealing head to the Diamantveld Visitors Centre, which has details on more guesthouses.

**Formula 1 Hotel** (☎ 053-831 2552; www.formula1hotels.co.za; cnr Memorial & Welgevonden Aves; r R200; ☎) Rooms are tiny, but they are also spotless, come with TV and air-con and are great value (they can sleep up to three). It's a little way out of town, but perfect for odd-numbered groups just wanting a place to crash.

**Savoy Hotel** (☎ 053-832 6211; 15 Old De Beers Rd; r from R300) An old-fashioned hotel that charms with cosy well-loved rooms and the soft-spoken gracious ambience of a time long past, this good-value place appeals to those interested more in attitude than amenities.

**Bishop's Lodge** (☎ 053-831 7876; www.bishops-lodge.co.za; 9 Bishops Ave; r from R300; ☎) Modern and spotless inside, the self-contained flats come with sitting rooms, TV and full kitchenettes. Chill by the inviting pool and throw together your own private braai (barbecue). There are cheaper doubles in the main house.

**Diamond Protea Lodge** (☎ 053-831 1281; dplkim@global.co.za; 124 Du Toitspan Rd; r from R400; ☎) Rooms are decked out with the standard chain-hotel schlock, but they are larger than usual with firm beds, nicer than expected linens and extra-cool air-con for those unbearably hot days. Not bad value and there are often special.

#### TOP END

**Southern Sun Garden Court** (☎ 053-833 1751; fax 053-832 1814; 120 Du Toitspan Rd; r R600; ☎) Under new ownership this place has a giant, quite posh, lobby. Rooms are all clones of each other but come with all the amenities including wi-fi access. The attached Spur restaurant means you don't have to wander far for sustenance. Children stay free.

**Egerton House** (☎ 053-831 1150; 5 Egerton Rd; r R1000; ☎) Exquisite furniture, African hospitality and a tea garden make this charming guesthouse the best luxury option in Kimberley. It has the honour of having had Nelson Mandela stay on more than one occasion.

#### Eating

**Tiffany's** (☎ 053-832 6211; Old De Beers Rd; mains R25-50; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) This is a lovely, if very pink, old-style restaurant in the Savoy Hotel with good service and a varied menu – including a few vegetarian options. The leather-and-wood bar adjoining Tiffany's is good for a quiet drink before dinner.

**Umbertos** (☎ 053-832 5741; 229 Du Toitspan Rd; mains R35-80; ☎) lunch & dinner) Big hearty portions of Italian food are served along with loads of ambience. For dining choose either the rooftop patio with its pretty sunset views or the more intimate downstairs area, with a red-and-white theme. There are loads of pizza and pasta options and lots of dishes for vegetarians.

**Star of the West Hotel** (☎ 053-832 6463; North Circular Rd; mains R35; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Walk through the thick wooden door and step back into Kimberley's mining heyday at this atmospheric city staple. Tables are scarred, and old posters and newspaper clippings grace the walls (this was a men-only pub until the late 1980s). Food is pub grub, the clientele mostly local. Despite its past, women won't feel uncomfortable eating or drinking here.

**Barnato's** (☎ 053-833 4110; 6 Dalham Rd; mains R60-90; ☎) lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat, lunch Sun) Posh and always popular, Barnato's is a favourite with locals and tourists alike. It's known for its creative gourmet menu, elegant atmosphere and professional service.

There's a produce market and takeaway food at the Indian shopping centre on Duncan St.

#### Drinking

Kimberley is one of the few towns in South Africa with a range of decent pubs, some of which have been around from the time diamonds were the town's lifeblood. In fact at one time the number of bars in the city apparently twice outnumbered its churches.

**Halfway House Inn** (☎ 053-831 6324; 229 Du Toitspan Rd) It's easy to resurrect the bad old days at this ultimate dive. Once a ride-in bar (a concept invented by Rhodes, who was afraid to dismount from his horse and reveal his true height), today it's a drive-in kind of place – yes, believe it or not you can pull up front, toot your horn and someone will come out and deliver you a beer. We'd suggest wandering inside, however, and having a whisky at the scarred old bar amid the ancient beer posters, dusty mirrors and floor-side spittoons. The Half has pool tables downstairs and live music on Friday and Saturday nights in the pleasant rooftop beer garden.

**Star of the West Hotel** (☎ 053-832 6463; North Circular Rd) There are often live bands in the

big beer garden. Pool tables and a cocktail bar upstairs add to the ambience.

**Queens Hotel** (☎ 053-831 3704; 12 Stockdale St) In the centre of town this large pub in the hotel gets rowdy on weekends and has gambling. Sportsman's is the attached disco.

**Keg & Falcon** (☎ 053-833 2075; 187 Du Toitspan Rd; mains R35-60) Head here if you're looking for a slightly older crowd. You have to be over 23 to get in and the dress code is smart casual. It also serves food.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**SA Express** (☎ 011-978 5315; www.saexpress.co.za) has regular direct services from Jo'burg (R1000, 1½ hours). **SAairlink** (☎ 054-838 3337; www.saairlink.co.za) has a direct service to Cape Town (R1600, two hours).

### BUS

**Translux** (☎ 011-774 3333; www.translux.co.za) stops in Kimberley on its run between Jo'burg/Pretoria (R140, seven hours, daily) and Cape Town (R230, 10 hours, daily). **Greyhound** (☎ 012-323 1154; www.greyhound.co.za) and **Intercape** (☎ 086-128 7287; www.intercape.co.za) have similar fares and routes.

Book tickets for all three companies through **Tickets for Africa** (☎ 053-832 6043), at the Diamantveld Visitors Centre. Buses stop at the Shell Ultra City long-distance bus terminal on the N12.

### MINIBUS TAXI

The main minibus taxi area in Duncan St is around the Indian shopping centre in the city centre. Destinations from Kimberley include Bloemfontein (R50, 2½ hours), Kuruman (R75, two hours), Jo'burg (R120, seven hours), Upington (R75, four hours) and Cape Town (R135, 10 hours).

### TRAIN

For information on trains call **Spoornet** (☎ 053-838 2111; www.spoornet.co.za). The *Trans Karoo* runs daily between Cape Town (R150, 18 hours) and Jo'burg/Pretoria (R80, nine hours) via Kimberley; the *Diamond Express* runs overnight between Jo'burg/Pretoria and Bloemfontein via Kimberley (R80, nine hours, three times weekly); and the *Trans Oranje* between Cape Town and Durban (R120, 18 hours, weekly) takes a slow and circuitous route via Kimberley.

## Getting Around

The Kimberley airport is about 7km south of the city centre. A taxi costs about R150.

Kimberley has one surviving antique tram (one-way/return R7/14) that departs from the terminus near the town hall every hour on the hour (9am to 4pm daily) and runs to the Big Hole complex.

A minibus taxi around town costs about R1.50. Try **AA Taxi** (☎ 053-861 4015) or **Rikki's Taxi** (☎ 083-342 2533) for a private taxi from the pubs.

## VAALBOS NATIONAL PARK

This is the only **national park** (☎ 053-561 0088; adult/child R60/30) in South Africa where three distinct ecosystems are present: the Karoo, *grassveld* (grasslands) and the Kalahari. Proclaimed in 1986 and divided in two by a belt of private land, the park is 61km northwest of Kimberley on Rte 31. There are **camping sites** (camp sites R75) and **self-catering cottages** (up to 4 people R350), but you must bring all your supplies with you, as the park does not have restaurant or shopping facilities.

## DE AAR

☎ 053 / pop 26,000

Too big to be called a one-horse town, but not quite justifying a two-horse title, De Aar is a major service centre for the Karoo and one of those places you'll likely forget as soon as you pass through. If you need a break from driving, however, it's a good lunch stop.

The **De Aar Hotel** (☎ 053-631 2181; Friedlander St; s/d R180/260; ☎) is a large, well-maintained place with a pleasant feel. It's not luxurious, but the bathrooms are spotless and the rooms have TV. There is an attached restaurant and bar.

The **Upstairs Restaurant** (☎ 053-631 1000; on Hoof & Voortrekker Sts; mains R25-50; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) has a rather extensive menu of seafood, pasta, pizza and various meats. Eat on the upstairs patio and catch all the town's action on the main drag below.

The *Trans Karoo* and *Blue Train* (Jo'burg/Pretoria–Cape Town), and the *Trans Oranje* (Durban–Bloemfontein–Kimberley–Cape Town) stop here; see p641.

## BRITSTOWN

☎ 053

At the centre of a prosperous sheep-grazing area in the Upper Karoo, tiny Britstown is a pleasant and orderly place at the cross-

roads of the N10 and the N12. If you find yourself here at dusk and want to stay, try the long-established **Transkaroo Country Lodge** (☎ 053-672 0027; fax 053-672 0363; s/d R200/380; ☎). It has a provincial French feel with a cosy lounge, friendly staff and quaintly furnished, immaculate rooms. The attached restaurant and bar does a dinner buffet for R75 and light lunches. It also runs activities such as bird-watching trips, and excursions to San rock-art sites.

Minibuses pass through Britstown; ask at the Transkaroo Country Lodge.

## COLESBERG

☎ 051 / pop 12,000

A classic Karoo town, Colesberg's only real attraction is that it's an ideal halfway stopping point on the N1 between Cape Town and Jo'burg. It's big enough to offer a choice of sleeping and eating options, but not too big to get lost trying to find your way around.

Founded in 1829, many of the old buildings are still intact, including a beautiful **Dutch Reformed church** built in 1866.

Colesberg's friendly **information centre** (☎ 051-753 0678; belinda@mjvn.co.za; Murray St; ☎) 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is in the town museum. If you're yearning to surf the Web, try the **Colesberg Apteek** (☎ 051-753 0618; 18 Church St; per hr R60; ☎) 9am-5pm Mon-Sat).

## Sleeping

Most of the town's accommodation options are on Church St, which is sometimes spelled the Afrikaans way – Kerk St.

**Colesberg Backpackers** (☎ 051-753 0582; 39 Church St; dm/d R50/120) A homely place right on the main drag, this backpackers doesn't have tonnes of atmosphere but it's quiet and is good value. Often empty, you'll probably have the dorm to yourself. All rooms share bathrooms.

**Light House** (☎ 051-753 0043; 40A Church St; rR250) The best option in town, the Light House is in a large rambling home with stately, well-appointed and airy rooms.

**Colesberg Lodge** (☎ 051-753 0734; fax 753 0667; Church St; R280-360; ☎) A solid choice for quality service, Colesberg Lodge offers three classes of rooms – budget, regular and luxury. The budget digs have fans only, while the luxury abodes come with air-con and TV. There's a bar and restaurant attached.

## Eating

**Bordeaux Coffee Shop & Restaurant** (☎ 051-753 1582; 7A Church St; mains R20-50; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) With a cosy atmosphere, decent wine list and flavoursome, if nothing fancy, country cooking this is Colesberg's best eating option. Vegetarians might be happier elsewhere.

**JC's Pizzeria** (☎ 051-753 1170; 29 Church St; mains R30-55; ☎) lunch & dinner) The menu at Colesberg's best veggie option focuses on pizzas, pastas and steaks, with pizzas coming out best. Sit outside under the vines or inside among the twinkling candles.

## Getting There & Around

**Translux** (☎ 011-774 3333; www.translux.co.za) and **Intercape** (☎ 086-128 7287; www.intercape.co.za) both pass through Colesberg on their daily Jo'burg (R220, 7½ hours) to Cape Town (R300, 9½ hours) run and stop at the Shell Ultra to the north of town on the N1. Intercape also has services to Bloemfontein (R110, 2½ hours, daily).

## THE KALAHARI

A voyage to the Kalahari is akin to catapulting into a parallel universe – a surreal Alice-through-the-looking-glass experience where you'll feel really small and everything around you looms larger than life. Timeless and magical, solitary stretches of space spin on into infinity; shapes distort under a blanket of scorching desert heat. A mystifying collage of fiery sunsets and shifting crimson sands, of lush green fields and gushing waterfalls, magnificent wildlife preserves and tidy vineyards, this region will enchant long after you depart. Laurens Van der Post brought the world of the Kalahari alive in many of his books including *Lost World of the Kalahari* and *A Far Off Place*, but even if you know these tomes by heart be ready to be swept away again after tasting the real thing.

The Kalahari is not limited to South Africa. It actually covers much of Botswana and its fingers extend into Angola and Namibia as well. In South Africa it's divided into two distinct areas – the arid, semi-desert and desert regions on its periphery and the 'green' Kalahari, the irrigated, fertile region along the banks of the Senqu (Orange) River. Most visitors to South



Africa miss the Kalahari. Don't. Even the extra driving it takes to reach the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park is well worth it.

## KURUMAN

☎ 053 / pop 9000

An oasis in the desert – thanks to a permanent water supply in the shape of an amazing natural spring – Kuruman has the rough-and-tumble vitality of a feisty little frontier town set deep in the heart of wild country. Its name derives from a San word, but the Bathlaping, a Batswana tribe, also settled in the area c1800.

The main road is called simply that, and most businesses are concentrated around the intersection of this and Voortrekker/Tsening Sts. Adjacent to the Eye of Kuruman is a useful **tourist office** (☎ 053-712 1095; Main Rd; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-12.30pm Sat).

## Sights & Activities

Kuruman is worth an out-of-the-way stop if birds of prey fascinate you. The **Raptor Rehabilitation Centre** (☎ 053-712 0620; Tsening St; admission free; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) provides a map of the best routes to follow when searching for these creatures. The Kalahari is home to 40 of South Africa's 67 raptor and vulture species.

The **Eye of Kuruman** (Main Rd; adult/child R1/0.50) is the natural spring that produces 18 to 20 million litres of water per day, every day. It has never faltered. The surrounding area has been developed into a pleasant-enough picnic spot, and is a good place to break your journey – note the masked weaver-birds and their nests over the pond.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Kuruman Caravan Park** (☎ 053-712 1479; Voortrekker St; camp sites R50, chalets R200) Another decent option, it offers well-equipped and comfortable chalets. Camping spots are mostly shady, and the place is just a short walk from the town centre.

**Riverfield Guesthouse** (☎ 053-712 0003; www.riverfield.co.za; 12 Seodin Rd; s/d R210/330; ☎) Rooms are good value and quite comfortable with modern conveniences. The grounds are shady. The on-site bar is a great meeting place, dinners can be arranged during the week and the included breakfasts are mighty.

**Over-de-Voor** (☎ 053-712 3224; Hoof St; mains from R25; ☎ lunch & dinner) Over-de-Voor, which

serves 'Kalahari cuisine', is the town's best eating option. Vegetarians beware – the menu is meat plus meat.

## Getting There & Around

**Intercape** (☎ 086-128 7287; www.intercape.co.za) stops daily in Kuruman on its way between Jo'burg (R250, seven hours) and Upington (R170, three hours).

The taxi rank is next to the Shop Rite supermarket on Voortrekker St.

## MOFFAT MISSION

The first white settlement in the area, the London Missionary Society, established the **Moffat mission** (☎ 053-732 1352; adult/child R5/2; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, 3-5pm Sun) in 1816 to work with the local Bathlaping people. It was named after Robert and Mary Moffat, two Scots who worked at the mission from 1817 to 1870. They converted the Bathlaping to Christianity, started a school and translated the Bible into Tswana. The mission became a famous staging point for explorers and missionaries heading further into Africa. The Moffats' daughter, Mary, married David Livingstone in the mission church, which is a stone and thatch building with 800 seats.

The mission is a quiet and atmospheric spot shaded by large trees that provide a perfect escape from the desert heat. It is along Rte 31 to Hotazel, about 4km from the N14.

## UPINGTON

☎ 054 / pop 53,000

On the banks of the Senqu (Orange) River, orderly and prosperous Upington is a good place to catch your breath on either end of a long Kalahari slog. The area is intensively cultivated, thanks to limitless sunlight and irrigation water. Wide boulevards slightly cluttered with supermarkets and chain stores line the centre of town, but step onto one of the side streets and you'll enter a world where lazy river views and endless rows of trees create a calm and quiet atmosphere perfect for an afternoon stroll (if the heat is not too stifling).

## Information

**Café de Net** (☎ 054-331 2252; Pick 'n Pay Centre; per half hr R20; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Has Internet access; look for it behind the Dros pub. You pay in half-hour blocks, so don't go over or you'll be paying another R20.

**First National Bank** (cnr Schröder & Hill Sts) On the northwestern corner.

**Standard Bank** (cnr Hill & Scott Sts)

**Tourist office** (☎ 054-332 6046; greenkal@mweb.co.za; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) This helpful office is in the Kalahari Oranje Museum.

## Tours

Readers highly recommend **Kalahari Safaris** (☎ 054-332 5653; www.kalaharisafaris.co.za; 3 Oranje St) who run a variety of safaris to Kgalagadi, Augrabies Falls, Witsand Nature Reserve and Kruger. The three-day Kgalagadi starts at R3500 and includes entrance fees, equipment and meals. If you'd rather just hire a guide to help you explore on your own, it costs R1000 per day for a guide and R2500 for a guide, vehicle and trailer. It's best to book through the website or by phone, as the office doesn't seem to regularly open.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

All backpackers in Upington have shut their doors, so budget options tend to be on the higher end of the price scale.

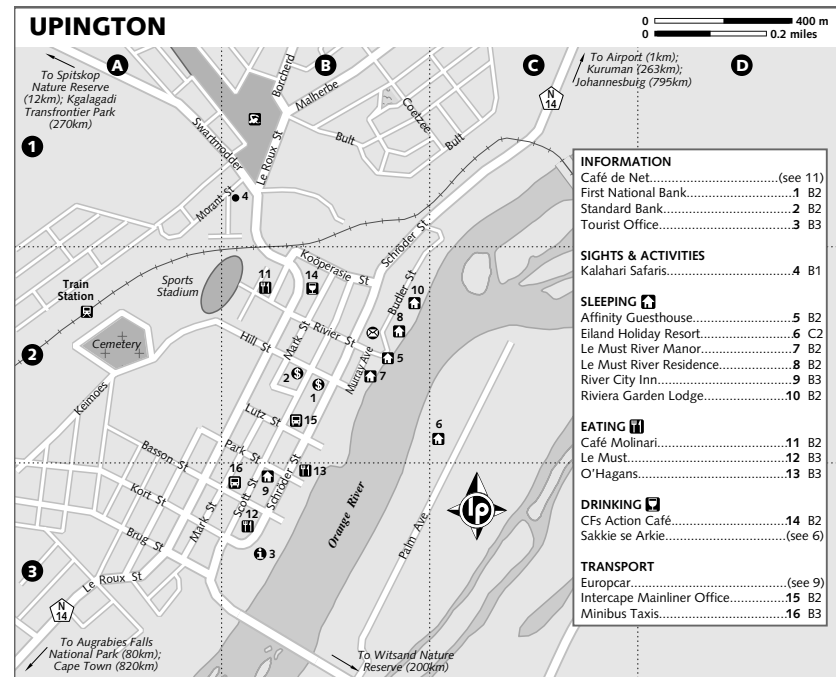
**Eiland Holiday Resort** (☎ 054-334 0286; tourism@kharahais.gov.za; camp sites R60, r from R150; ☎) The town's cheapest option offers a range of huts and bungalows and shaded camping spots on tranquil and expansive grounds adjacent to the eastern bank of the river.

**River City Inn** (☎ 054-331 1971; cnr Park & Scott Sts; s/d R225/285; ☎) The rooms are the standard aging provincial hotel variety – bland but affordable with perks like TV and air-con. It's smack in the middle of town, so if you're coming through late at night it makes a good crash pad. There's no off-street parking.

## MIDRANGE & TOP END

Budler St has some gorgeous guesthouses with grassed areas overlooking the river.

**Affinity Guesthouse** (☎ 054-331 2101; www.affinityguesthouse.co.za; 4 Budler St; s/d R280/380; ☎) Right on the river, this place is great value for money. The rooms are small, but comfortable with firm mattresses and a movie channel. The air-con is cold enough to take the edge off the city's mind-numbing heat. Ask for a river-view room – they come with giant windows looking out on the gardens.



**Le Must River Manor** (☎ 054-332 3971; www.le mustupington.com; 12 Murray Ave; s/d from R390/580; 🍷 🍴) For those on a tighter budget, the quality at River Manor is only slightly less luxurious than the River Residence and also well worth a stay.

**Riviera Garden Lodge** (☎ 054-332 6554; 16 Budler St; d incl breakfast R400; 🍷) The gardens here are a fairy-tale creation, all sweetly scented flowers, leafy trees and fountains cascading down to the river. The friendly lodge has two cosy rooms with flowery bedspreads.

**Le Must River Residence** (☎ 054-432 3971; www.le mustupington.com; 14 Budler St; s/d from R590/700; 🍷 🍴) The classiest of the Le Must franchises, this place was awarded five stars by the South African Tourism Grading Council. Service and facilities are impeccable. Rooms are luxuriously decorated with antique furniture and African themes and come with satellite TV; the grounds are a work of art.

### Eating & Drinking

The town has a few good spots to indulge.

**Café Molinari** (☎ 054-331 2928; Pick 'n Pay Centre; mains R20-40; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner; 🍷) We loved the variety of breakfast options here. Lunch focuses on sandwiches, pastas and salads. There's a big stack of magazines to thumb through while waiting for your food.

**O'Hagans** (☎ 054-331 2005; 20 Schröder St; mains R35-60; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner) You can't beat O'Hagans' location for an early evening meal – sit outside on the patio overlooking the river. It doesn't hurt that the place has the best food of the 'chain' pubs, with generous portions and plenty to choose from. If you're not hungry, the bar and patio are good spots to drink the night away.

**Le Must** (☎ 054-332 3971; 11 Schröder St; mains R65-90; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Presidents Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki and FW de Clerk have all eaten here, and it's worth going out of your way to dine at this renowned, and excellent, restaurant serving mouth-watering Kalahari creations. The place uses only the highest-quality ingredients, and the flavoursome results it gets from fusing Cape Malay and Karoo cooking are superlative. Considering the professional service, phenomenal food and sleek modern décor, we can't believe the prices are so low.

**Sakkie se Arkie** (☎ 082-564 5447; admission R35) A sundowners cruise on the Senqu (Orange) River is the perfect way to start your

evening. Admission covers the cruise; drinks are extra. The company picks up from many of the riverfront guesthouses.

**Cfs Action Café** (☎ 054-332 1414; 65 Mark St) A dance floor and pool tables draw a young rowdy crowd.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

If you're short on time and want to see the Kgalagadi, it may be worth flying into Upington and then renting a car. **SAAirlink** (☎ 054-838 3337; www.sairlink.co.za) flies to/from Jo'burg (R1660, daily) and to/from Cape Town (R1660, Sunday to Friday). Upington hotels usually provide a free taxi from the airport.

#### BUS

Two Intercap services provide links to the rest of the country. For tickets visit **Intercap Mainliner office** (☎ 054-332 6091; Lutz St). Buses go to Jo'burg and Pretoria (R260, 10 hours, daily), Windhoek, Namibia (R250, 12 hours, four times weekly), Cape Town (R220, 10½ hours, four times weekly) and Calvinia (R145, five hours, four times weekly).

#### CAR RENTAL

Car hire is generally more expensive here than in Jo'burg or Cape Town. There's an agent for **Avis** (☎ 054-332 4746) at Upington airport. There is a **Europcar** (☎ 082-426 8489) agent inside the River City Inn. Both rent 4WDs for about R950 per day, and compact cars for R400.

#### MINIBUS TAXI

You'll find minibus taxis nearby the Checkers supermarket near the corner of Mark and Basson Sts. Not all long-distance taxis leave from here but it's a good place to start asking. Fares from Upington include Jo'burg (R170, 10 hours), Cape Town (R180, 10 hours) and Windhoek (R170, 10 hours). There's usually at least one bus per day.

**VIP Taxis** (☎ in Port Nolloth 027-851 8780) operates a weekday taxi service from Port Nolloth to Upington, via Springbok. It costs R80 to travel from Upington to Springbok. Call to arrange pick-up.

### AROUND UPINGTON

Its unusual species make the small **Spitskop Nature Reserve** (☎ 054-332 1336; teuns@intekom.co.za; adult/child R12/6; camp sites per adult/child R25/12,

huts/chalets per person R60/80), about 13km north of Upington, so interesting. Most intriguing are the black springbok (there are six), whose colour results from genetic mutations that are seldom seen. The all 'black' zebra you see dominating a group of female zebra is a runt of a pony who decided to take over the herd – just look at the intensity on his face when he rounds up a female who breaks away. The camels are remnants of those that the German cameleers left in the region after skirmishes during WWI.

The reserve also has gemsboks, springboks, wildebeests, bonteboks, zebra and elands among other smaller animals.

There are 37km of gravel roads through the reserve as well as three short hiking trails and a novice 4WD trail. You can view wildlife through a telescope from the top of the prominent Spitskop.

Accommodation includes sandy, shady camp sites, a four-bed chalet and, most fascinating of all, a rustic, isolated 'veld hut' in the middle of the reserve (bring your own bedding). There is no electricity in the hut, which sleeps five.

### WITSAND NATURE RESERVE

As if a **reserve** (☎ 053-313 1062; www.witsandkalahari.co.za; adult/child R20/10; 🍷 8am-6pm) based on a 9km-wide by 2km-long by 100m-high white sand dune standing out in stark contrast to the typical red Kalahari sands surrounding it weren't enough, this one also comes with a soundtrack. When the wind blows here the sand sings. Known as 'roaring sands' the effect is created by the movement of air across the dunes and creates a bass, organ-like sound; walking on the sands produces a muted groan.

The reserve is approximately 200km east of Upington (or 200km southwest of Kuruman). You can walk anywhere in the park, but 4WDs are restricted to the roads. A bird hide, and mountain bike (R50 per day) and dune board (R70 per day) hire are added entertainment.

There's a delightful bush camp with two swimming pools and 10 thatch-roofed, open-plan, tastefully decorated **self-catering lodges** (per adult/child R200/100; 🍷). The lodges have three bedrooms and can sleep up to six people. On weekends there is a minimum charge of R660 per lodge. The reserve does not have a restaurant or bar, but for R725

per person a chef will prepare you dinner and breakfast in your lodge. The fee also includes your accommodation, park entrance fee and a guided walk. Advance booking is essential. **Camping** (camp sites per person R50) is also an option.

### KGALAGADI TRANSFRONTIER PARK

If you have the means (namely a vehicle), a visit to the other-worldly **Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park** (☎ 054-561 0021; www.sanparks.org; adult/child R120/60) is more than worth the effort it takes to get there. The scenery in this magical place is phenomenal. Even the drive in, a seemingly endless jostle down dusty crimson roads, is an invigorating trip, evoking images of the grand African safaris of lore. Once inside, the sight of a giant black-maned lion napping under the shade of a camel thorn tree in a land of shifting red-and-white sands is an awesome experience. Herds of gentle-looking gemsbok picking their way through sparse vegetation, those massive yellow-pink sunsets the continent is famous for and the chance to watch wildlife without the crowds all heighten this remote park's delicious appeal.

Proclaimed a national park in April 1999, Kgalagadi is the result of a merger between the former Kalahari-Gemsbok National Park in South Africa and the Mabuasehube-Gemsbok National Park in Botswana.

The accessible section of the park lies in the triangular segment of South African territory between Namibia and Botswana. This region covers 9591 sq km. The protected area continues on the Botswana side of the border (there are no fences) for a further 28,400 sq km. South Africa's side of the park was proclaimed in 1931 and Botswana's in 1938. Kgalagadi is one of the largest protected wilderness areas in Africa, allowing the unhindered migration of antelopes, which are forced to travel great distances in times of drought to reach water and food.

Although the countryside is described as semidesert (with around 200mm of rainfall a year) it is richer than it appears and supports large populations of birds, reptiles, rodents, small mammals and antelopes. These in turn support a large population of predators. Most of the animals are remarkably tolerant of cars. This allows you to get extraordinarily close to animals that are otherwise wild – it's as if you are invisible.



The landscape is hauntingly beautiful – at times it feels you’ve reached the ends of the earth. The Nossob and Auob Rivers (usually dry) run through the park and meet each other a few kilometres north of the entrance at Twee Rivieren rest camp. Between the two rivers, the Kalahari dunes are characteristically red due to iron oxide. In other areas the sand varies from pink and yellowish to grey.

## Orientation & Information

Visitors are restricted to four gravel/sand roads – one running up the bed of the Nossob River, one running up the bed of the Auob River (there are also some small loop roads) and two linking these. Make sure to



take one of the roads linking the rivers for unobstructed views of the empty expanses of the Kalahari. Visitors must remain in their cars, except at a small number of designated picnic spots.

The best time to visit is in June and July when the days are coolest (below freezing at night) and the animals have been drawn to the bores along the dry river beds. September to October is the wet season and if it does rain, many of the animals scatter out across the plain to take advantage of the fresh pastures. Despite the fact that temperatures frequently reach 45°C in December and January, the chalets in the park are fully booked during the school holidays.

All the rest camps have shops where basic groceries, soft drinks and alcohol can be purchased (fresh vegetables are hard to come by); these are open from 7am until 30 minutes after the gates close. Petrol and diesel are available at each camp. There are public phones, a pub, a swimming pool and an information centre detailing the history of the park and giving details of the flora and fauna (there are also slide shows four nights a week) at Twee Rivieren rest camp (see opposite).

The gate opening hours change based on month, but generally follow the rising and setting sun. Gates open between 5.30am and 7.30am and shut between 6pm and 7pm.

The speed limit is 50km/h. The minimum travelling time from the entrance gate at Twee Rivieren to Nossob rest camp is 3½ hours; to Mata Mata rest camp it's 2½ hours. Allow plenty of time to get to the camps as no driving is permitted after dark.

If you want to venture into the Botswana side of the park, this is only possible via a 4WD trail. You need to make arrangements with the **Botswana Department of Wildlife & National Parks** (☎ 09-267 580774) in Gaborone.

## Wildlife

### PLANTS

Only hardy plants survive the periodic droughts that afflict the Kalahari. Many have adapted so that they germinate and produce seed within four weeks of a shower of rain.

The river beds have the widest variety of flora and are dominated by a variety of camel thorn trees. Various grasses and woody shrubs survive on the dunes. There are occasional shepherd's trees (*Boscia albitrunca*),

which have white bark and a dense thicket of short low branches where many animals take refuge in the heat of the day. The dried-oring shrub (*Rhigozum trichotomum*), with fine leaves and forked branches, is the most common shrub in the park.

Many of the animals depend on plants as their source of moisture. In particular, the tamma (*Citrillus lanatus*), a creeper with melon-like fruit, is an important source of water. There are several prickly cucumbers that are important for the survival of animals, especially the gemsbok.

### ANIMALS

Finding fauna requires luck, patience and a little intelligence. There is no guarantee that you will see one of the big predators, but you are more likely to here than in many other places. Most of the region's wildlife, with the exception of elephants, rhinos and zebras, are found in the park.

There are 19 species of predator here, including the dark-maned Kalahari lion, cheetah, leopard, wild dog, spotted hyena, black-backed jackal, bat-eared fox, Cape fox, honey badger and meerkat. The most numerous antelope is the springbok but there are also large numbers of gemsbok, eland, red hartebeest and blue wildebeest.

Spend an hour or so in the morning and the afternoon by a water hole. Watch for signs of agitation among herds of antelope – they don't automatically flee at the sight of a predator but wait until the predator commits itself to a charge before they run. Be sure to keep an eye on the top of the ridges overlooking the river beds, especially near herds of grazers, as these are good places to spot predators surveying their next meal. The lions like to walk along the side of the road because the soft dust is kind to their paws. Look for recent prints, as the lion may have moved off the road at the sound of your vehicle. Binoculars are essential.

Some 215 species of bird have been recorded here. Sighting birds of prey is a real treat and they are incredibly numerous; the Mata Mata road is especially good. Some of the most impressive species are the bateleur eagle, martial eagle, red-necked falcon, pygmy falcon, pale chanting goshawk and tawny eagle.

Two common birds are the secretary bird, seen strutting self-importantly over

the claypans, and the kori bustard, the largest flying bird in Southern Africa.

A distinctive sight is the huge thatched nests of the weaverbird. These birds live in many-chambered nests that can last for more than a century and are inhabited by as many as 200 birds at a time. They weave twigs and straw in the crowns of acacias, on quiver trees and atop telephone poles.

## Tours

Park rangers offer early morning, sunset and night **wildlife drives** (adult/child R110/55) from the rest camps at Twee Rivieren and Nossob. These can be booked at the ranger stations. Trips run when at least four people sign up.

## Sleeping & Eating

There is accommodation both inside and outside the park. The park's only restaurant is at Twee Rivieren. Park fees are based on a daily rate, so if you arrive late in the afternoon you may want to spend the night outside the park to avoid paying that day's fees and head in early the next morning.

## INSIDE THE PARK

There are three rest camps and six luxury wilderness camps. All can be booked through the **South African National (SAN) Parks Board** (☎ 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org; 643 Leyds St, Muckleneuk, Pretoria). Advanced bookings are recommended.

### Traditional Rest Camps

All rest camps have **camp sites** (per 2 people R110, extra person R38) without electricity and with shared ablutions facilities. The camps also have a range of huts, bungalows and cottages equipped with bedding, towels, cooking and eating utensils, kitchens and bathrooms.

**Twee Rivieren** (6-bed cottage per 2 people R520, extra adult/child R110/54; ☎ ☎) The closest camp to the park's entrance, and the one with the most facilities, it's also the only rest camp with a swimming pool and air-con.

**Mata Mata** (d R275, 6-person chalets per 4 people R660, per extra adult/child R110/54) This camp, 2½ hours' from Twee Rivieren, is on the park's western boundary with Namibia. Surrounded by thorny Kalahari dune *bushveld* it's a good place to spot giraffe. There are a limited number of park homes and chalets so booking is advised through SAN (above).

**Nossob** (2-person chalets R400, 4-person guesthouse R785) Situated within the dry river bed of the Nossob, this camp is a good place to spot predators; it even has a predator information centre. The camp is a 3½-hour drive from Twee Rivieren.

**Lion's Den Restaurant** (breakfast/dinner from R30/60; ☎ 7.30-9am & 6.30-9pm) At Twee Rivieren, this restaurant offers a menu of mostly meat and seafood, with only one vegetarian option. The food is not bad. There's also a snack bar selling burgers and other takeaways.

### Wilderness Camps

A few years back the park built three luxury wilderness camps, which were a big-enough hit for authorities to go ahead and construct three more. These remote sleeping options give you the opportunity to really get off-the-beaten path. The camps are not fenced, which means animals can wander in at will, although a ranger is on duty at all times. Make sure to stock up on petrol and drinking water before visiting, as neither is available on-site. All six camps have been designed to accommodate disabled people. The camps fill quickly, so book ahead.

**Bitterpan Camp** (2-person cabins R600) Constructed from reed and canvas, this stilted camp blends beautifully into the environment. The camp is on a one-way 4WD route starting from Nossob and will allow you to access a very remote portion of the park. It takes about 2½ hours to drive from Nossob to Bitterpan, so either start early in the day or first spend the night at Nossob. From Bitterpan it's about three hours' drive back to Twee Rivieren.

**Gharagab Camp** (2-person cabins R660) In a camel-thorn veld in the northern reaches of the park, the log cabins at this new camp are built on stilts above the hot sand. Outdoor showers and a private deck with water-hole views are perks at this remote spot.

**Grootkolk Camp** (2-person cabins R660) Nestled amid red sand dunes, and only 20km from Union's End where South Africa, Botswana and Namibia meet, this camp is a six-hour drive from Twee Rivieren rest camp. The camp has desert cabins made from sand bags and canvas – definitely a different sleeping experience. At night the silence and the stars will overwhelm you.

**Kieliekrankie Camp** (2-person cabins R660) One of the newest camps, about 44km north of

Twee Rivieren, the entrance is pretty spectacular – a tunnel through a dune. The four cabins built into the red sand environs have private balconies with views over the conveniently located water hole.

**Urikaruus Camp** (2-person cabins R660) On the banks of the Auob River, the four units at this new place are nestled amid gnarled old camel thorn trees. Perched over the dry river bed, they are connected with wooden walkways. The camp is easy to access, about halfway down the road between Twee Rivieren and Mata Mata.

**Kalahari Tent Camp** (2-person desert tents R690, 3-person tents R800, honeymoon tents R820; ☎) The most accessible of the wilderness camps is also the most luxurious. Only 3km from Mata Mata rest camp, accommodation is in 15 desert tents created from wood, sand and canvas and decorated with rustic furnishings.

### OUTSIDE THE PARK

There are a few options near the road to the Twee Rivieren gate.

**Rooiduin** (☎ 082-589 6659; camp sites per person R25) Rooiduin is about 32km from the Twee Rivieren gate on the road into the park, and offers camping sites under wooden structures (to keep the blowing sand out). Rooiduin rents sandboards for R25 per day, including a short lesson. It also does horse riding on the dunes for R50 per half-hour.

**Kalahari Trails Nature Reserve** (☎ 054902 ask for 91634; www.kalahari-trails.co.za; camp sites R60, s/d from R170/340) Run by a former professor of animal behaviour and desert ecology, this 3500-hectare reserve is 35km from the Twee Rivieren gate on Rte 360 towards Andriesvale. The reserve is home to all the wildlife found inside the park, with the exception of the big cats, and offers visitors a Kalahari experience they will not see from a car. Morning and evening dune walks (R35 per person) and wildlife drives (R45, three hours) teach basic tracking skills and provide geology lessons. Responsible tourism is emphasised heavily here – the host hopes visitors leave with a deeper respect for the Kalahari and all that lives in it. There are a variety of sleeping options from tented bush chalets 2km into the reserve to a guesthouse sleeping four. Meals can be arranged. For a different look at the magnificent world of the Kalahari we highly recommend stopping by.

**Molopo Kalahari Lodge** (☎ 054-511 0008; www.molopo.co.za; s/d R200/400; ☎) This lodge is about 60km before the Twee Rivieren gate on Rte 360. It is an attractive place built in traditional African safari-lodge style. Accommodation is in thatched roof huts, and the lounge area is covered in animal skins. It makes a good stop either before or after a park visit. Children aged 12 and under stay half-price. There is also a restaurant.

### Getting There & Away

It's a solid, 385km, six-hour drive from Kuruman to Twee Rivieren. The drive from Upington to Twee Rivieren gate is 250km, made up of about 190km on bitumen and 60km on dirt roads.

Be very careful driving on the dirt roads as we've had several letters from travellers who wrecked their cars on this trip. If you stop, don't pull too far off the road or you might become bogged in the sand. Beware of patches of deep sand and loose gravel, which makes corners treacherous. Petrol is not available between Upington and Twee Rivieren, so start out with a full tank.

It's important to carry water, as you may have to wait a while for help if you break down.

### KEIMOS & KAKAMAS

☎ 054

The N14 southwest of Upington follows the course of the Senqu (Orange) River and passes through oases of vineyards (still irrigated with the aid of wooden water wheels) and the quaint and quiet little towns of Keimos and Kakamas. Keimos is particularly lush, with palm tree-lined streets and plenty of green grass. The turn-off to Augrabies Falls National Park is just west of Kakamas.

With big grassy lawns where springbok graze between self-contained cottages, **Die Werf** (☎ 054-461 1634; s/d R215/308; ☎) is the best sleeping option in Keimos. The on-site **café** (mains R15-60; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) and bar is a good place to grab a quick meal, especially if you're on the run. At night it serves more substantial fare. It stays open all day too, so it just might save you from having to lunch on crisps from the petrol station if you arrive in these parts during an off-hour. Die Werf is on the N14; if you're coming from Upington it will be on your right side just before Keimos.

In Kakamas, the **Kalahari Gateway Hotel** (☎ 054-431 0838; www.kalaharigateway.co.za; Main Rd; s/d R275/385; ☎) has massive rooms with coffee tables, couches and TVs. The zebra-themed restaurant (mains from R50, pizzas R30; open for dinner) and bar inside the hotel serve an assortment of steak and seafood dishes, as well as pasta, burgers and pizzas. There is a large wine list focusing on regional wines. The Kalahari Gateway also provides information on the area and can arrange 4WD hire.

### AUGRABIES FALLS NATIONAL PARK

☎ 054

The Khoesaa people called it 'Aukoerbis', meaning place of great noise. And when the waterfall for which this **park** (☎ 054-452 9200; www.sanparks.org; adult/child R60/30; ☎ dawn-dusk) is named is fat with rainy season run-off, its thunderous roar is nothing short of spectacular. You won't find any big animals here, but the place doesn't suffer for it. Set in a rocky mosaic around an 18km ravine through which the Senqu (Orange) River flows, the most interesting facet of Augrabies Falls is the fascinating desert/riverine ecosystems on either side of the river. The ravine was created around 500 million years ago when a scar in the underlying granite caused the river to chisel a deep abyss with several impressive cataracts. The main falls drop 56m, while the Bridal Veil Falls on the northern side drop 75m.

The park has a harsh climate, with an average rainfall of only 107mm and daytime summer temperatures that often reach 40°C. The flora includes kokerboom aloes, the Namaqua fig, several varieties of thorn trees and succulents. The park has 47 species of mammal (most of which are small) including klipspringer and other antelope species, rock dassie and ground squirrel.

### Activities

The three-hour, 9km **Dassie Trail** is well-worth doing, particularly if your time is short. It involves clambering over rocks through some magical landscape – if you haven't seen any of the cute little rock daisies yet, this is your big chance.

The popular three-day, 40km **Klipspringer Hiking Trail** (R125) runs along the southern bank of the Senqu (Orange) River. Two nights are spent in huts built from local

### SENQU (ORANGE) RIVER WINE ROUTE

Although not as well known as its Western Cape counterparts, the wine region along the banks of the Senqu (Orange) River is starting to take off. Tastings here are a much less pretentious affair, and meandering between the five vineyards run by the **Orange River Wine Cellars Cooperative** (☎ 054-337 8800; www.owk.co.za) is a pleasant way to pass an afternoon.

Wine making in the region dates back to the early 1900s when vineyards were planted in the fertile river valley for raisin production. However, it was discovered that the sultana grape was much more suitable for wine than raisins and in 1965 the Orange River Wine Cellars was born. The first grapes were harvested in Upington in 1968, and since then the co-op has grown to be the largest in South Africa with about 750 members and five cellars concentrated along the N10 and N14. The cellars produce about 30 different products, including grape juice concentrates. They are best known for their desert wines. Try the earthy Jerepigo with a taste of pineapple and plum or the sweet Muscadell with flowery undertones and an essence of peach and apricot.

All five cellars are well signposted – just keep an eye out for the Orange River Wine Trail signs. Keimos and Kakamas make good bases from which to explore the region, and each features a cellar. The **Keimos Winery** (☎ 054-461 1006; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) is just off the N14 slightly north of the intersection with Rte 2. The **Kakamas Winery** (☎ 054-431 0830; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) is just off the N14, in Kakamas. Both cellars offer tastings, and during harvest time (mid-January to mid-March) tours of the vineyards and a chance to chat with the wine maker.

stone (these can sleep 12 people). Camping is not allowed. Hikers must supply their own sleeping bags and food. Advance booking is advised. The trail is closed from mid-October to the end of March because of the heat. The **Gariep 3-in-1 Route** includes canoeing, walking and mountain biking; book and check out prices at the visitors centre when you enter the park.

The **Kalahari Adventure Centre** (☎ 054-451 0177; www.kalahari.co.za) runs canoeing and rafting trips on the Senqu (Orange) River. Try its very popular ‘Augrabies Rush’. You will raft an exciting grade 2 to 3, 8km section of the river in an inflatable kayak; it costs R275 per person. It also runs a 60km five-day/four-night canoe trail for R1695. If you want to explore the desert in depth, join its safari trip. Guides are super-knowledgeable and you’ll get to look for animals in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (p537). The five-day/four-night trip costs around R5250 per person, although prices are based on fuel prices and likely to fluctuate. The office is 10km outside the park on the road from Kakamas. Follow the signs.

### Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation in the park can be booked through the **SAN Parks Board** (☎ 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.org; 643 Leyds St, Muckleneuk, Pretoria), or you can take your chance and just show

up as there’s often space. Options include **camp sites** (per 2 people R110, extra person R38) and a variety of **self-contained chalets** (from R420). Many of the chalets have outstanding views and are within earshot of the falls.

There’s a cafeteria where you can buy sandwiches and cold drinks, and a **restaurant** (mains around R65; ☎ lunch & dinner) with meals such as fillet steak or chicken. Cold water is free from the dispenser – you’ll probably drink it dry if you are here in summer.

The friendly **Augrabies Falls Backpackers** (☎ 054-451 0177; www.kalahari.co.za; camp sites per person R30, s/d R75/150) has a great reed bar for watching the distant thunderclouds build, a chilled-out atmosphere and clean, comfortable rooms with animal-print-patterned bedding. Run by the **Kalahari Adventure Centre** (☎ 054-451 0177; www.kalahari.co.za), it’s perfect for chilling out after a day on the river. The hostel is about 10km before Augrabies Falls National Park on the road from Kakamas. Follow the signs.

### Getting There & Away

Private transport is recommended. The park is 38km northwest of Kakamas and 120km from Upington. The Kalahari Adventure Centre will pick you up from Upington (and other towns in the area). The shuttle fare is R150 per person (minimum of four).

## NAMAQUA

In the Northern Cape’s rugged northwestern corner the roads stretch on forever, traversing the unspoiled expanses of ever-shifting scenery that is Namaqualand and the Hantam Karoo. The region is immense – a wild void stretching from the Namibian border in the north to the west coast’s bleak beaches, then south towards Vanrhynsdorp in the Western Cape before merging with the area known as Bushmanland in the east.

The region has a noticeable ‘frontier atmosphere’, due largely to its bleak and beautiful landscape and the presence of diamond miners. This is a land of immense sky and stark country. At night the sky is bright with stars, and it’s easy to drive for ages without seeing another car.

### SPRINGBOK

☎ 027 / pop 10,400

Springbok lounges in a valley surrounded by harsh rocky hills that explode with colour in flower season. Outside of flower season there’s little to see or do, although the town’s remoteness is alluring. The air always feels fresh, the desolate landscape is

endearing and step outside at night and it will be thoroughly still and quiet.

The first European-run copper mine, the Blue Mine, was established on the town’s outskirts in 1852. From an edgy frontier town, Springbok has been transformed into a busy service centre for the copper and diamond mines in the region.

In the 1920s, Springbok had a large population of Jews who traded in the region. Most have moved away and their synagogue (built in 1929) has been converted into a small but good **museum** (☎ 027-712 2011; admission free; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri). Look for it behind the Springbok Hotel, west of Kowie Cloete Street.

### Orientation & Information

The town is quite spread-out but most places are within walking distance of the small kopje (hill) in the elbow of the main street’s right-angled bend.

**Tourism information office** (☎ 027-718 2985; Voortrekker St; ☎ 7.30am-4.15pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun) Has loads of information about flowers, attractions and drives in the area.

### Sleeping

During flower season accommodation in Springbok can fill up. The tourist office can

### WILDFLOWERS OF NAMAQUALAND

For the majority of the year Namaqualand appears a barren wasteland where seemingly nothing but the hardiest shrubs can survive. But with the winter rains comes the revelation of a secret: the dry lands are transformed into a kaleidoscope of colour as daisies, perennial herbs, aloes, lilies and a host of other species blanket the ground creating a sight that will enchant and mesmerise the eye, the artist’s pallet and the photographer’s lens. At this time visitors are drawn from all over the world to this often-forgotten corner of the country. All in all about 4000 species of plant grow in the region.

The optimum time to visit varies from year to year, but you have the best chance of catching the flowers at their peak between mid-August and mid-September (sometimes the season can begin early in August and extend to mid-October). The best flower areas also vary from year to year, so it is essential to get local advice on where to go. Bear in mind most varieties of wildflower are protected by law, and you can incur heavy fines if you pick them.

The flowers depend on rainfall, which is variable, and the blooms can shrivel quickly in hot winds. Many of the flowers are light-sensitive and only open during bright sunshine. Overcast conditions, which generally only last a day or two, will significantly reduce the display, and even on sunny days the flowers only open properly from around 10am to 4pm. They also face the sun (basically northwards), so it is best to travel with the sun behind you.

There are generally good flowers east of the N7 between Garies and Springbok. Other reliable flower-viewing routes are between Springbok and Port Nolloth, and through Kamiesberg, which is southeast of Kamieskroon in the direction of Garies. The Goegap Nature Reserve (p545), east of Springbok, and the hills around Nababeep are also good.



tell you about private, overflow accommodation. There is a big difference between low-season prices (given here) and flower-season prices.

**Cat Nap Accommodation** (☎ 027-718 1905; Voortrekker St; dm R80, r from R300; 🍷) One of the best-value options in town. The walls of the spacious old house are adorned with nature photos and original art, and rooms are cosy African-themed affairs. There's a self-catering kitchen and backpackers can shack up in dorm beds in the barn.

**Annie's Cottage** (☎ 027-712 1451; annie@springbokinfo.com; 4 King St; s/d from R185/370; 🍷) Each of the 10 rooms is decorated differently, but all are lovely. The pool and garden area is quaint with fountains, trees, flowers and benches. Room rates vary depending on amenities. This is an excellent choice.

**Springbok Lodge** (☎ 027-712 1321; fax 712 2718; 37 Voortrekker St; s/d from R190/310) This place is actually a collection of old houses scattered around town that have been steadily upgraded over the years; rooms range in size from the small Matchbox to the sizable Die Geweluis and Die Ark.

**Springbok Hotel** (☎ 027-712 1161; fax 712 1932; 87 Van Riebeeck St; s/d R200/325; 🍷) It's your typical South African tourist-class hotel – nothing special, but the clean and acceptable rooms have TVs. There is an attached restaurant (mains R35 to R70) that serves buffet breakfasts and a variety of lunch options.

**Blue Diamond Lodge** (☎ 027-718 2624; 19 Union St; s/d incl breakfast R270/400; 🍷) An attractive place north of the centre with neat units set around a swimming pool, with a resident macaw and a trail up the mountain behind the lodge with good views.

**Old Mill Lodge** (☎ 027-718 1705; 69 Van Riebeeck St; d/tr incl breakfast R400/500) Pleasantly situated in a peaceful garden up against the rocks on a quiet side street, the rooms here are plush and done up with modern art. Bathrooms are larger than average, with lovely touches like candles by the tub. Beds come with firm mattresses and luxurious, fluffy white duvets.

## Eating

**Springbok Restaurant** (☎ 027-712 1321; 37 Voortrekker St; mains R20-50; 🍷; breakfast, lunch & dinner; 📺) Pictures and animal heads clutter the

walls and seating is at plastic dinner tables. There is a good breakfast selection. Lunch and dinner include steaks, chicken and schnitzel as well as pizza and burgers.

**Titbits Restaurant** (☎ 027-718 1455; cnr Namaqua & Voortrekker Sts; mains R25-50; 🍷; breakfast, lunch & dinner) Despite the name and the mural of the big-breasted woman on the pink wall, this place does have a certain titillating atmosphere. There are loads of tasty options, including sandwiches, steak, pasta, pizzas and breakfast choices. There's also an outdoor balcony and kiddie's menu.

**Godfather Restaurant** (☎ 022-518 1877; Voortrekker St; mains R25-50; 🍷; lunch & dinner) This simple, small place has a large menu, featuring everything from meat to pasta to sandwiches, all served to a very peppy soundtrack. There's a fun bar out the back.

**BJ's** (☎ 027-718 2270; cnr Van der Stel & Hospital Sts; mains R35-50; 🍷; lunch & dinner; 📺) This classy basement joint with a cellar vibe serves tasty, and very reasonably priced, steak cooked exactly how you like it. White archways, wooden beams and leopard-skin print make up the décor. Classical music adds to the ambience, and the food does not disappoint. Vegetarians will be happier elsewhere.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

**Intercape** (☎ 086-128 7287; [www.intercape.co.za](http://www.intercape.co.za)) has buses to Cape Town (R210, 7½ hours, twice weekly) that leave from opposite the Springbok Lodge. Buses leave for Windhoek, Namibia (R330, 12 hours, four times weekly) at 6.45pm from the same spot.

### CAR RENTAL

Springbok is a popular jumping-off point for Richtersveld National Park and Namibia. For 4WD hire, stop by **Cat Nap Accommodation** (☎ 027-718 1905; Voortrekker St); it rents vehicles for R750 per day, or R900 per day including camping equipment. These prices include unlimited kilometres and insurance. Ask at the **Springbok Lodge** (☎ 027-712 1321; 37 Voortrekker St) or the **tourism information office** (☎ 027-718 2985; Voortrekker St) for other rental options.

### MINIBUS TAXI

**Van Wyk's Busdiens** (☎ 021-559 1601) runs a daily door-to-door taxi to Cape Town (R160, five hours) and Kamieskroon (R45, one hour). You'll find ordinary minibus taxis at the taxi

rank opposite the First National Bank near the kopje. Destinations include Cape Town (R160, five hours, daily) and Port Nolloth (R40, 2½ hours, five times weekly).

**VIP Taxis** (☎ 027-851 8780) operates a taxi from Springbok to Upington (R80, four hours, Monday to Friday) that departs from the Masonic Hotel (across the street from Springbok Hotel).

## AROUND SPRINGBOK

### Nababeep

The hills surrounding Nababeep are fantastic during flower season, when they turn a rainbow of colours. The town is on the site of a large copper mine, and mining enthusiasts will find a visit to the **Nababeep Mine Museum** (☎ 027-713 8121; admission free; 🍷; 9am-5pm) worthwhile. **Nababeep Hotel** (☎ 027-713 8151; s/d R110/190) is a simple country hotel on the town's main street that also serves meals. Breakfasts are about R40 and dinners from R65. Prices go up considerably here in flower season.

Nababeep is 16km northwest of Springbok on the N7. Public transport options are sporadic. Ask at the minibus stop in Springbok if there are any minibuses heading in this direction.

### Goegap Nature Reserve

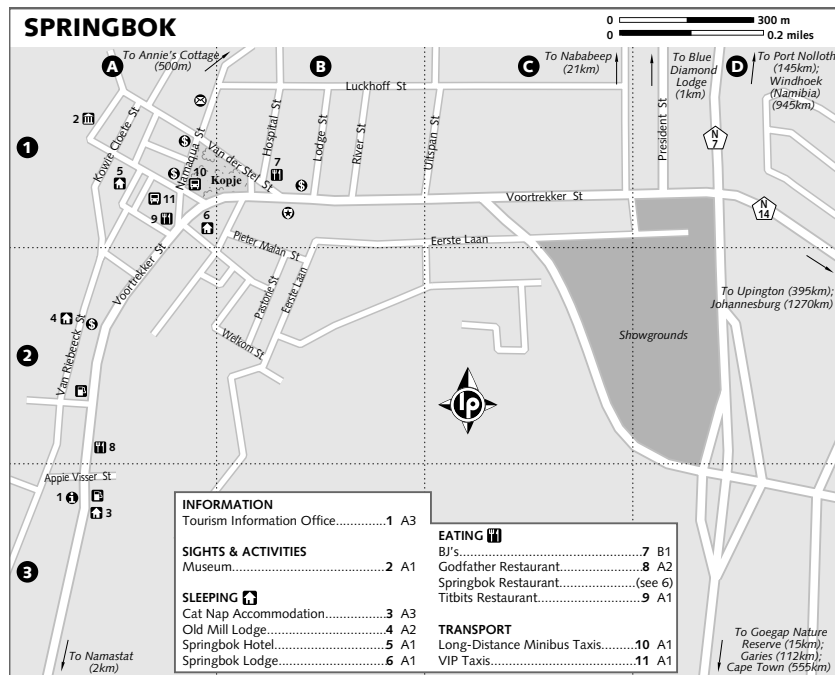
Don't miss this semidesert **nature reserve** (☎ 027-712 1880; admission R10; 🍷; 7.45am-4.15pm), famous for its extraordinary display of spring flowers and a nursery of 200 amazing Karoo and Namaqualand succulents at the **Hester Malan Wildflower Garden**.

There are a few driving routes around the reserve, but you'll see more on one of the circular walks (4km, 5.5km and 7km). There are two **mountain-biking routes** (14km and 20km), which are particularly memorable during flower season; bring your own bike (R7 bike permit per person).

### PORT NOLLOTH

☎ 027 / pop 5000

The drive in to Port Nolloth could be worthy of a visit alone. One minute you're engulfed in nothingness, covered in a layer of red Kalahari sand. The next you're cresting a hill, watching the ground lighten and the icy blue vastness of the Atlantic appear on the horizon. Way off-the-beaten path, the place



exudes a certain kind of raw, last frontier at the end-of-the-earth vitality. An exposed and sandy little nowhere town, where the bracing air smells of fish and salt, it's home to a motley, multicultural group of fortune-seekers.

First developed as the shipping point for the region's copper, Port Nolloth is now dependent on the fishing boats that catch diamonds and crayfish. The boats are fitted with pumps, and divers vacuum up the diamond-bearing gravel from the ocean floor.

**Bedrock** (☎ 027-851 8865; www.bedrocklodge.co.za; s/d/tr/q from R225/300/380/460), an extremely funky place crammed with all sorts of eccentric knick-knacks and antique collectables, occupies a number of old wooden cottages lining the seafront. The shabby nautical-chic self-catering cottages are spacious with sea views. Turn right onto the beachfront from the main road through town and the Bedrock is the second building along.

The other sleeping option, the **Scotia Inn Hotel & Restaurant** (☎ 027-851 8353; s/d R195/225) is also on the beachfront road, in a large, white building to the left. It's a modern place with comfortable rooms and big windows.

Across from the Scotia, **Anita's Tavern Seafood & Grill** (☎ 084-726 7090; mains R25-40; ☺ dinner) is a rustic, reed, beach shack. Full of fishing junk and nonchalant character, it's not a bad place to pop in for a drink and dinner. The menu is seafood oriented (of course).

**Mare Sole** (☎ 082-821 2083; Main Rd; mains R20-40; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is another option. It's a lovely little spot with cheery yellow walls and bright environs. A range of breakfasts, sandwiches, light meals and a variety of coffee and tea drinks are on the menu.

There's little public transport, and hitching from the N7 turn-off at Steinkopf is slow.

**VIP Taxis** (☎ 027-851 8780) runs a taxi to Springbok (R40, 2½ hours, five times a week).

## ALEXANDER BAY

☎ 027

The archetypal remote seaside community of Alexander Bay is a government-controlled diamond mine on the southern bank of the mouth of the Senqu (Orange) River (Namibia is on the north side). Basically it looks like a smaller, even more remote version of Port Nolloth and there is not much going on. The road from Port Nolloth is open to the public, but stopping anywhere along it is illegal. North of Alexander Bay, the road to the Namibian border is entirely off limits.

Activities in town include **mine tours** (☎ 027-331 1330; ☺ 8am Thu), which should be booked one day in advance. Bird-watchers come here looking for Barlow's lark, which is found nowhere else in the world.

**Brandkaros** (☎ 027-831 1856; fax 831 1390; camp sites per person R50, d R150; ☺) is a citrus farm by the river, about 30km northeast of Alexander Bay. It has a great swimming pool. The farm is en route to Richtersveld National Park and is a good base from which to tour this area. Accommodation is in self-catering rondavels. Bring your own food.

## VIOLSDRIF

This town is at the border post with Namibia on the N7, 677km north of Cape Town. The short drive from Steinkopf, with its views of the Senqu (Orange) River carving its way through desolate mountains, is spectacular. The border is open from 7am to 7pm.

**Peace of Paradise** (☎ 027-761 8968; camp sites R150, s/d R200/300) is 22km west of Vioolsdrif on the banks of the Senqu (Orange) River.

### ILLEGAL DIAMOND BUYING

In South Africa it is illegal to sell diamonds to any person or company other than the De Beers Consolidated Mines Company. The diamond mines are thus hives of security. The independent divers who work Port Nolloth and other submarine diamond fields on the west coast, however, have more opportunity to get away with extracting diamonds from their catch and selling them on the black market. Diamond diving is hard work and it isn't lucrative – the divers can only work about 10 days per month because of the weather.

Illegal diamond buying (known as IDB) is a subcurrent of life in the Port Nolloth area and chances are that a few of your fellow patrons in a diamond town bar are undercover members of the police IDB branch. You may meet locals who offer to sell you cheap diamonds – don't do it! Not only is this highly illegal, you are also likely to end up with what is known as a *slenter*, or fake diamond. These are cut from lead crystal and only an expert can pick them.

It's very pleasant with hot showers, clean toilets and electricity for campers, as well as canoes for hire. There are San engravings 100m from the camp, and you can cool off with a swim in the river.

## RICHTERSVELD NATIONAL PARK

Within a mountainous desert – a spectacular wilderness of jagged peaks, grotesque rock formations, deep ravines and gorges – is this enormous (185,000 hectares) **national park** (☎ 027-831 1506; www.sanparks.org; adult/child R80/40; ☺ 7am-6pm). It's especially spectacular during the spring flower season, when the park turns into a technicolour wonderland.

In the northern loop of the Senqu (Orange) River, northwest of Vioolsdrif and the N7, the park is the property of the local Nama people who continue to lead a semitraditional, seminomadic pastoral existence; hopefully they will benefit from increased job opportunities from tourism and the rent paid by the park authorities.

The hiking possibilities in this surreal, almost lunar-like landscape, are excellent (though demanding). Despite its apparent barrenness, the region has a prolific variety of succulents – 30% of South Africa's known succulent species grow here.

Fill up your petrol tank and cooler in Alexander Bay before entering the park; there are no shops in the parks, and only one petrol station and a small general store, both at Sendelingsdrift (see right). Neither is open on weekends.

### Hiking Trails

Three hiking trails have been established in the park. The **Ventersville Trail** (42km, four days) encompasses the southwest wilderness; the **Lelieshoek-Oemsberg Trail** (23km, three days) takes in a huge amphitheatre and waterfall; and the **Kodaspiet Trail** (15km, two days) allows the average walker to view mountain desert scenery. Accommodation is in *matjieshuis* (woven Nama 'mat' huts) and there are field toilets. The trails are open from April to September and you must take a guide. For information about prices contact the **SAN Parks Board** (☎ 012-428 9111; www.sanparks.co.za; 643 Leyds St, Muckleneuk, Pretoria).

### Tours

An organised tour could be the easiest way to visit this remote park. The **Richtersveld**

**Challenge** (☎ 027-718 1905; www.adventureaddicts.com) is run by Springbok photographer Rey van Rensburg, and operates between April and October. Rey is enthusiastic, experienced and very knowledgeable about the area. A five-day vehicle tour costs R650 per person per day including camping equipment and meals (minimum eight people). Try to book a few months in advance.

### Sleeping & Eating

To make accommodation bookings, contact the **national park** (☎ 027-831 1506; www.sanparks.org).

There is a brand-new rest camp at **Sendelingsdrift** (2-person camp sites R110, chalets from R415; ☺ ☺), which is surprisingly luxurious for such a remote area. The self-catering chalets have porches with river views, and campers can cool off in the sparkling pool.

**Tataberg** (chalets R420) and **Ganakouriep** (cabins R420) are the park's wilderness camps. Both provide remote, and simple, digs in rustic self-catering cabins or chalets. Bring your own drinking water.

There are four other **camping areas** (per 2 people R110) around the park. All accommodation should be booked in advance.

### Getting There & Around

Most of the park is virtually inaccessible without a fully-equipped 4WD and maybe a local guide, although it is slowly becoming easier to access. Two-wheel drive vehicles with high clearance, such as a *bakkie* (pickup truck) can usually negotiate the southern section of the park without problems.

## KAMIESKROON & AROUND

☎ 027

Out amid the tumbleweed and scrub brush, forgotten-looking Kamieskroon sits in the heart of wild country. Craggy mountains and boulder-strewn hills surround the little place. The feel is desolate and remote, and many of the roads in town are still not paved. The name Kamieskroon means 'Jumble' or 'Huddles Together' in Nama. It's a great spot to get away from it all and to explore the area, especially in flower season.

The **town clerk** (☎ 027-672 1627; Voortrekker St; ☺ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) serves as the tourist information office.

About 18km southwest of Kamieskroon is the newly established **Namaqua National**

**Park** (☎ 027-672 1948; [www.sanparks.org](http://www.sanparks.org); admission R60; 🕒 8am-5pm Jul-Oct), which incorporates the old Skilkop Nature Reserve. The shrubland and old wheat fields burst into flower in spring, and their clarity and prevalence often surpass all other areas in the region, making this one of the best places to photograph the flowers (visit between 10am and 4.30pm when the flowers look their best). Note that the park is only open during flower season and that it has no sleeping or eating facilities – pack a picnic before you head out.

Just off the N7 (follow the signs), you'll find the **Kamieskroon Hotel & Caravan Park** (☎ 027-672 1614; [www.kamieskroonhotel.com](http://www.kamieskroonhotel.com); camp sites per person R45, s/d R150/250; 📍). It's quite comfortable and deservedly popular, especially from July to September (when bookings are essential and prices rise). It serves a set price dinner every night for R80 and breakfast for R35. During flower season it runs photographic workshops.

Kamieskroon is 80km south of Springbok on the N7. **Van Wyk's Busdiens** (☎ 021-559 1601) runs a bus service to Springbok (R45, one hour, daily). From here, if you're looking for a little scenic adventure, head west to Hondeklip Bay. While the town itself is just a smaller, less interesting version of Port Nolloth, the local dirt roads are spectacular.

## CALVINIA

☎ 027 / pop 8100

Engulfed in a sea of 'Wild West' countryside, Calvinia is the main centre of the Hantam Karoo. As the church clock tolls the hours, it's easy to imagine that decades, if not centuries, have slipped away. The nearby township is friendly, with several convivial eateries and *shebeens* (unlicensed bars).

The **tourist information office** (☎ 027-341 1712; 44 Church St; 🕒 8am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), adjoining the museum, is well organised. Staff can provide a walking-tour map of town and will help arrange accommodation; bookings are advisable in flower season.

## Sights

For a small town, the **Calvinia Museum** (☎ 027-341 1712; 44 Church St; admission R2; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) is of a surprisingly high standard. The main building was a synagogue – it's incongruous but not unusual to find disused Jewish buildings in tiny, remote South

African towns. The museum concentrates on the white settlement of the region, including sheep and farming activities, and there are some great oddities such as a four-legged ostrich chick (a fake used by a travelling con artist), and a room devoted to the lives of a local set of quadruplets.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Die Tuishuis, Die Dorphuis & Die Hantamhuis** (☎ 027-341 1606; [www.calvinia.co.za](http://www.calvinia.co.za); 44 Hoop St; s/d from R225/370; mains R100) These are a complex of antique guesthouses that are some of the oldest buildings in town. Die Tuishuis and Die Dorphuis are your lodging options: both are furnished with antiques and offer a variety of elegant rooms. Candles and romantic music set the atmosphere for traditional three-course dinners served in Die Hantamhuis; meals include old favourites such as mutton on a stick.

**Pionierslot** (☎ 027-341 1263; 35 Water St; s/d incl breakfast R180/320) One of the nicest B&Bs in town, the owners here are hospitable without being overwhelming.

**Cobusegat** (☎ 027-341 2326; caves per person R70, stone houses per person R90) Definitely a unique experience, this place is 116km south of Calvinia on Rte 355. Accommodation is in self-catering caves – OK, they are really more like over-hanging rocks enclosed three-quarters of the way around and come complete with electricity, fridges and a stove. Each cave can accommodate up to eight people. The place also has two thatched-roof stone houses. The area boasts glacier scrapings from the last ice age.

**Die Blou Nartjie Restaurant** (☎ 027-341 1484; Pionierslot St; mains R35-75; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) The range of dishes at this excellent restaurant is limited, but very good quality for such a small town. We love an open kitchen! Traditional *bobotie* (curried mincemeat topped with beaten egg, and served with turmeric rice and chutney) is delicious.

## Getting There & Away

**Intercape** (☎ 086-128 7287; [www.intercape.co.za](http://www.intercape.co.za)) has buses to Cape Town (R170, six hours, four times weekly) and Upington (R145, five hours, four times weekly). Book at the **travel agency** (☎ 027-344 1373) incongruously situated in the *slaghuis* (butcher). Buses stop at the *trokkie* (truck) stop on the western side of town.

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