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# Tour Guide to The Free State



**Module # 1 - Free State Province Overview****Component # 1** - Free State Province Overview**Module # 2 - Free State Cultural Overview****Component # 1** - Meet the Basotho People**Module # 3 - Free State Historical Overview****Component # 1** - Free State Historical Overview**Module # 4 - Free State Wildlife and Nature Conservation Overview****Component # 1** - Free State Wildlife and Nature Conservation Overview**Module # 5 - Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality****Component # 1** - Bloemfontein, Botshabelo, and Thaba 'Nchu**Component # 2** - Other towns in Motheo**Module # 6 - Fezile Dabi District****Component # 1** - Towns between the N1 and Vaal River**Component # 2** - Towns between the N1 and N3**Module # 7 - Thabo Mofutsanyana District****Component # 1** - N3 and surrounding towns**Component # 2** - The Highlands Route**Component # 3** - The N5 and other eastern Free State towns**Module # 8 - Lejweleputswa District****Component # 1** - N1 and Free State Gold Fields**Component # 2** - Other towns in Lejweleputswa**Module # 9 - Xhariep District****Component # 1** - N1, N6 and other towns**Component # 2** - Towns west of the N1

## Introduction

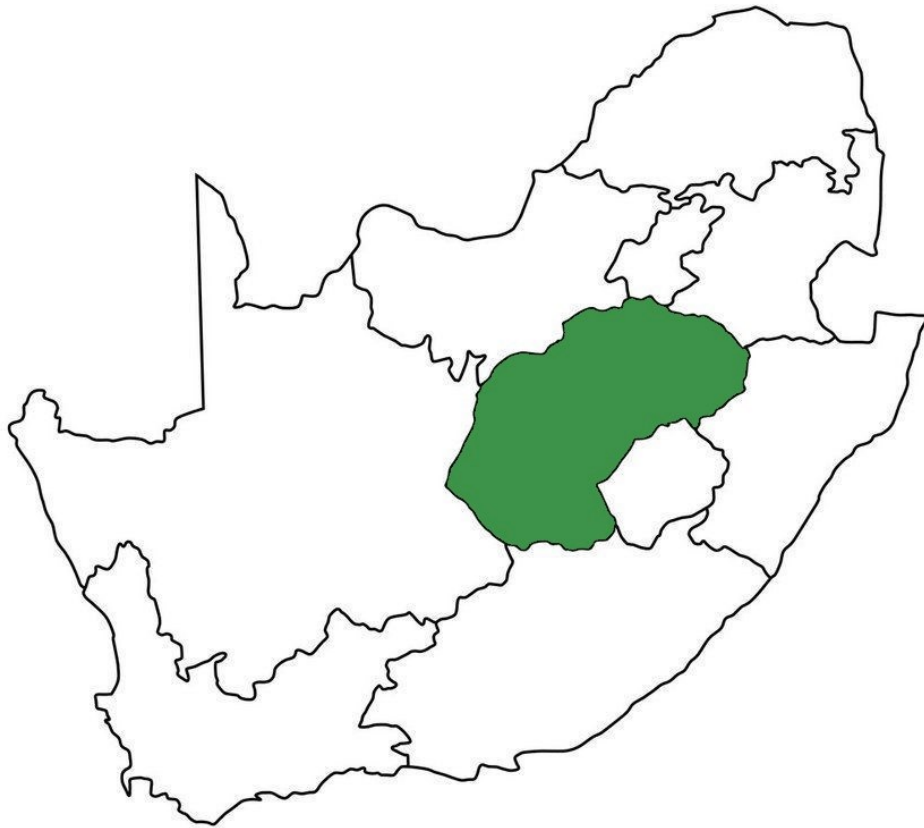
The Free State is South Africa's 'breadbasket' or the 'granary of the country'. More than 30,000 farms produce over 70% of the country's grain here. The Province also boasts productive gold and diamond mines, majestic sandstone mountains and archaeological and paleontological treasures.

To the local rugby supporters, this is 'Cheetah Country'! The grassy plains of South Africa's interior plateau characterise the landscape. This is South Africa's geographical heart, caught up between the Vaal and Orange Rivers. It is landlocked by KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Gauteng, North West, the Eastern Cape and the Northern Cape.

Neighbouring Lesotho, it fits in the hollow of the Province's bean-like shape. The current borders date from 1994, when the Bantustans were abolished and included in South Africa's provinces. It is the only Province of the former provinces of South Africa that has not undergone border changes (excluding the incorporation of the QwaQwa Bantustan). The Republic of the Orange Free State (Afrikaans: Oranje-Vrystaat; Dutch: Oranje-Vrijstaat) was an independent Boer republic in southern Africa during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After the Second Anglo-Boer War (Great South African War), it was a British colony for a short period until 1910, when it became one of the four provinces of the Union of South Africa. In 1995, it became known as the Free State Province, one of the nine provinces of South Africa under the new dispensation. In Sesotho, the Province is known as Foreistata or Foreisetata.

## Location of The Free State in South Africa



### Free State Province Overview



## Municipal map of the Province

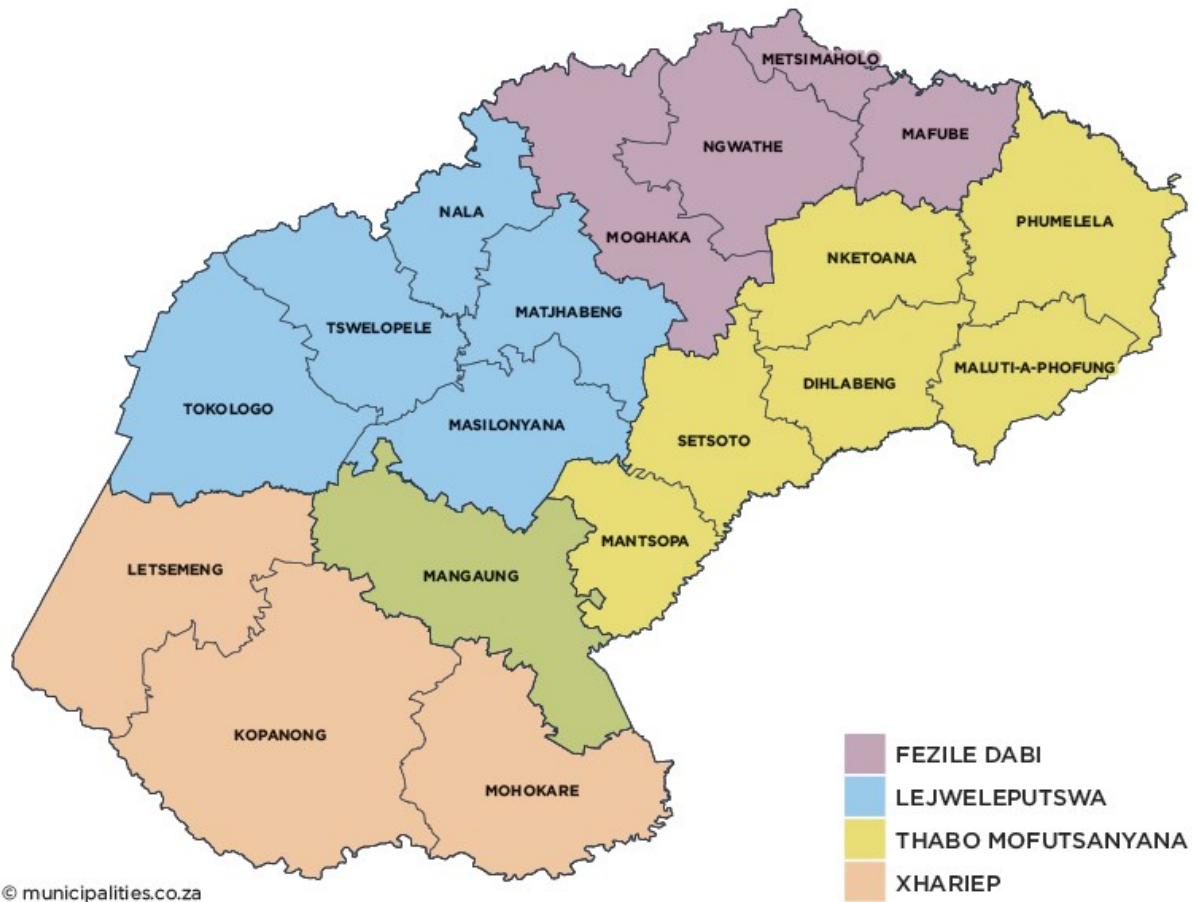


Image source: [www.municipalities.co.za](http://www.municipalities.co.za)

## Coat of Arms



**Motto: Katleho ka kopano**

English: 'Prosperity through unity.'

**The new coat of arms consists of the following elements:**

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

## Demographics

|                          |  |         |       |           |       |          |      |                 |      |      |      |         |      |
|--------------------------|--|---------|-------|-----------|-------|----------|------|-----------------|------|------|------|---------|------|
| <b>Land surface area</b> | 129,825km <sup>2</sup> (50,126 sq. mi)   |         |       |           |       |          |      |                 |      |      |      |         |      |
| <b>Highest elevation</b> | 3,291m (10,797 ft)   |         |       |           |       |          |      |                 |      |      |      |         |      |
| <b>Population</b>        | 2,745,590 (2011 census)<br>2,932,441 Estimate (2021)   |         |       |           |       |          |      |                 |      |      |      |         |      |
| <b>Languages</b>         | <table> <tr><td>Sotho</td><td>64.2%</td></tr> <tr><td>Afrikaans</td><td>12.7%</td></tr> <tr><td>Xhosa</td><td>7.5%</td></tr> <tr><td>Tswana</td><td>5.2%</td></tr> <tr><td>Zulu</td><td>4.4%</td></tr> <tr><td>English</td><td>2.9%</td></tr> </table> | Sotho   | 64.2% | Afrikaans | 12.7% | Xhosa    | 7.5% | Tswana          | 5.2% | Zulu | 4.4% | English | 2.9% |
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| Afrikaans                | 12.7%  |         |       |           |       |          |      |                 |      |      |      |         |      |
| Xhosa                    | 7.5%   |         |       |           |       |          |      |                 |      |      |      |         |      |
| Tswana                   | 5.2%   |         |       |           |       |          |      |                 |      |      |      |         |      |
| Zulu                     | 4.4%   |         |       |           |       |          |      |                 |      |      |      |         |      |
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| <b>Races</b>             | <table> <tr><td>African</td><td>88.7%</td></tr> <tr><td>White</td><td>8.9%</td></tr> <tr><td>Coloured</td><td>1.8%</td></tr> <tr><td>Indian or Asian</td><td>0.6%</td></tr> </table>   | African | 88.7% | White     | 8.9%  | Coloured | 1.8% | Indian or Asian | 0.6% |      |      |         |      |
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| Indian or Asian          | 0.6%   |         |       |           |       |          |      |                 |      |      |      |         |      |
| <b>Capital</b>           | Bloemfontein   |         |       |           |       |          |      |                 |      |      |      |         |      |
| <b>Largest city</b>      | Bloemfontein   |         |       |           |       |          |      |                 |      |      |      |         |      |

## Municipalities and districts





The Free State Province is divided into **one metropolitan municipality** and **four district municipalities**. The district municipalities are, in turn, divided into **19 local municipalities**:

### Metropolitan municipalities

#### Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality

### District municipalities












#### Fezile Dabi District

-  Mafube
-  Metsimaholo
-  Moqhaka
-  Ngwathe

#### Lejweleputswa District

-  Masilonyana
-  Matjhabeng
-  Nala
-  Tokologo
-  Tswelopele





#### Thabo Mofutsanyana District

-  Dihlabeng
-  Kopanong
-  Letsemeng
-  Maluti-a-Phofung
-  Mantsopa
-  Mohokare
-  Naledi
-  Nketoana
-  Phumelela
-  Setsoto
-  Xhariep District



## Cities and towns

**The Free State's major towns include:**

-  Bloemfontein and Botshabelo in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality
-  Welkom, Odendaalsrus and Virginia in Lejweleputswa
-  Bethlehem, Harrismith and Phuthaditjhaba in Thabo Mofutsanyana
-  Kroonstad, Sasolburg and Parys in Fezile Dabi

## Geographical features of the landscape

The Free State is situated on flat, boundless plains in the heart of South Africa. Most of the Province is about 1,000m above sea level, but the Drakensberg and Maluti Mountains foothills reach 2,000m in the east. The West stretches across savannah land and substantial mineral wealth, while the eastern highlands are dominated by mountain tops. To the south, it falls within the true Karoo semi-desert. The Free State lies in the heart of the Karoo Sequence of rocks, containing shales, mudstones, sandstones and the Drakensberg Basalt, forming the youngest capping rocks.

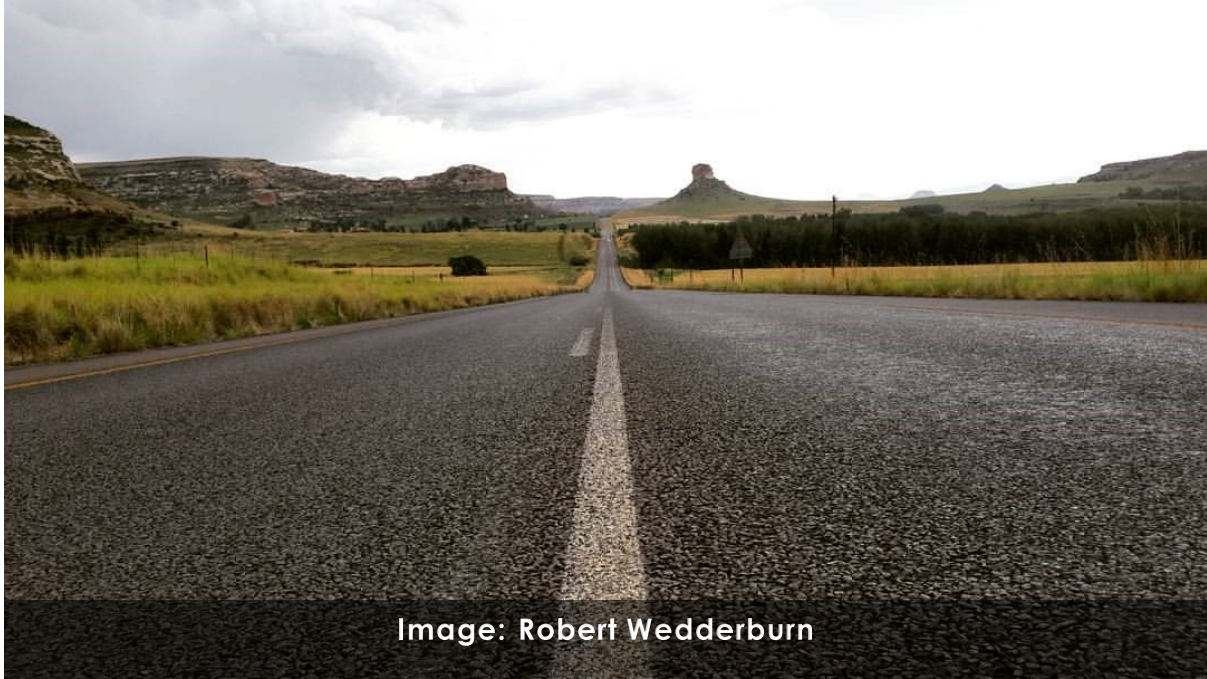


Image: Robert Wedderburn

### The main rivers and dams

#### Vaal River

#### Vaal Dam

#### Bloemhof Dam

Defines the border between the Free State and Gauteng and the one with North West.

#### Orange River

#### Gariep (Xhariep) Dam

Previously known as the Hendrik Verwoerd Dam. Defines the border between the Free State and the Eastern and Northern Cape.

## **Tributaries of the Vaal River**

**Renoster River**  
**Dam near Koppies**  
**Koppies**  
**Vals River**  
**Kroonstad**  
**The Sand River**

### **Allemanskraal Dam**

Ventersburg/Winburg area.

### **Vet River**

#### **Erferis Dam**

Close to Theunissen.

### **Modder River**

#### **Krugersdrift Dam**

#### **Rustfontein Dam**

Near Bloemfontein.

### **Botshabelo**

Flows along the Maselspoort.

### **Riet River**

#### **Kalkfontein Dam**

Near Koppie Dam.

## The major tributaries of the Orange River

### Caledon River

On the eastern border with Lesotho. It joins the Liebenbergs Vlei River to join the Wilge River (Clocolan, Clarens and Bethlehem).

### The Wilge River

It is the major river which feeds the Vaal Dam. It is supplemented by water from the Lesotho Highlands Project.



## Mountains

- Drakensberg
- Maluti

## Climate

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

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



Image: Robert Wedderburn



## Nature and conservation

### World Heritage Site

Vredefort meteorite impact crater (Vredefort dome)

### National Parks

Golden Gate Highlands National Park

### Ramsar Wetland Site

Seekoeivlei Nature Reserve

### Other interesting Nature Reserves

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



Golden Gate Highlands National Park. Image: Robert Wedderburn

## Economy

### Agriculture

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

**Wheat**

**Sorghum**

**Sunflowers**

### Soya

It is cultivated mainly in the Eastern Free State, where farmers specialise in seed production.

### Fruits

The Province produces about 100,000 tons of vegetables and 40,000 tons of fruit yearly.



Image: Robert Wedderburn

## Cherries

90% is produced in the Ficksburg district.

## Potatoes

40% of the country's potatoes are grown in the high-lying areas.

## Asparagus

- The main vegetable crop in the Province is Asparagus, both white and green varieties.
- The two largest asparagus-canning factories are also located in the Ficksburg district.
- The industry is expanding and becoming increasingly export-orientated.

## Floriculture

The Province exports some 1.2 million tons of cut flowers per year.

## Mining

The Free State contributes about 16% of South Africa's mineral output. The mining industry is the largest employer in the Province. Goldfields stretch for approximately 400km across Gauteng, North West, and the Free State and are collectively known as the 'Golden Arch'.

Free State Consolidated Goldfields is the largest gold-mining complex with an area of approximately 33,000ha. Harmony Gold Refinery (Free State) and Rand Refinery (Gauteng) are the only two gold refineries in the country that may market gold on behalf of the South African Reserve Bank.

## Gold

The main gold-mining districts are Odendaalsrus, Virginia and Welkom. Roughly 30% of South Africa's gold is derived from this region.

## Silver

The gold mines also supply a significant portion of the country's silver production.

## Uranium

Acquired as a by-product of gold mining.

## **Bituminous coal**

Mined in the Province and converted into petrochemicals at Sasolburg.

## **Diamonds**

High-quality diamonds are extracted from kimberlite pipes and fissures.









## **Bentonite**

The largest deposit in the country is found in the Koppies district.

## **Manufacturing**

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

## **Textiles**

-  Farm machinery and equipment.
-  Leather tanning and finishing.
-  Gold Jewellery.
-  Petrochemicals include fuels, waxes and polymers.
-  Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) - gas supply to Johannesburg.
-  Floriculture - The Province exports some 1,2 million tons of cut flowers annually.
-  Biofuel plants
-  NATREF = major inland refinery. Mainly aircraft fuel and diesel.



## Tourism

The prime tourist attraction in the Province is the Golden Gate Highlands National Park, located at the foothills of the Maluti Mountains in the northeastern Free State.



Image: Robert Wedderburn



## Infrastructure




The road network density of the Free State is the third-highest in the country and well signposted. Main roads are tarred, but some smaller country routes are connected by well-maintained gravel roads. Caution should be taken while driving on gravel roads. Bloemfontein has an airport in the east, about 10km from the city centre. There is also an airport at Harrismith.



Image: Robert Wedderburn

## Free State tourist routes

### National Roads

-  **N1:** Links Gauteng, the Western and Eastern Cape and cuts through the middle of the Free State.
-  **N3:** A major link between KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng via Harrismith.
-  **N5:** The national road between KwaZulu-Natal, Free State and Western Cape, also via Harrismith. **N6.**

### 'The Friendly N6'

Also known as 'the value for money' route. The route links Bloemfontein with East London in the Eastern Cape. It offers many attractions such as art galleries, community projects, the Drakensberg Mountains, natural hot springs and farm stays.

### Maluti Route

Scenic drive through the Highlands of the Free State and across the border to Lesotho and its magnificent Maluti Mountains. The route finally reaches the RAMSAR-accredited Seekoeivlei Nature Reserve at Memel.

### Goldfields Route

Explore the history of gold mining within the Lejweleputswa district.

### BBT Heritage Route

Explore the diverse cultural and political heritage of Bloemfontein, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu.

### Diamond and Wine Route

This follows in the diamond prospectors of the past and present. At Jagersfontein, the 760m human-made diamond hole rivals that of the better-known Big Hole of Kimberley for size. The Jacobsdal area offers visits to wine cellars.