

How safe is Cape Town?

Perhaps this is due in part to the medias portrayal of Cape Town (and South Africa in general) in previous years as a violent and dangerous place – something which has stuck in people’s minds and still makes them question the safety.

The reality is while crime does exist in Cape Town, as it does in every city in the world, we have found that if you act and behave like a sensible and responsible tourist, you are unlikely to run into any problems. A lot of how to stay safe in Cape Town comes down to common sense.

However, on the other hand, if you decide to ignore this advice and do a self-guided tour into a township then you are **very** likely to have some problems.

We found it to be a very similar experience as when we visited Rio De Janiero – another beautiful and coastal city. Rio also has its fair share of crime, especially in the favelas, the Brazilian equivalent of South Africa’s townships. Rio also has a fairly bad reputation, however still remains one of the most popular cities to visit in South America. We want people to have the same open attitude to visiting Cape Town!

That all being said, here are our top Cape Town safety tips to help you enjoy this incredible city without incident!

Cape Town Safety Tips – is Cape Town Safe?

1. Know which areas are for tourists

As a visitor, you should stick to the most touristy places. These areas are the V&A Waterfront, Camps Bay, Somerset Road in Sea Point and Kloof Street.

Long Street is also very popular with backpackers, but being in the CBD where people are known to have money, this area attracts a lot of homeless people asking for food/money or potentially trying to pickpocket you. Visit here, but perhaps do not stay here.

2. Beware of pickpockets

This unfortunately has come from an experience we had on Long Street and the problem was actually what I was wearing. Someone placed themselves between me and Ben and then bent over to tie his shoe which stopped me walking.

At the same time, someone else behind me swiftly took my iPhone from my pocket. Talk about teamwork! Without thinking I reacted and grabbed the guy up against the wall and he promptly returned my phone. However, this should have never happened in the first place.

I was wearing loose gym shorts so it was very easy to go into the loose pocket.

Either keep your phone/wallet in very tight jean pockets or get yourself a bum bag/fanny pack which makes swiping something much more difficult. Also, never ever keep your valuables in your back pocket – it surprises us every day to see people doing this.

We also recommend walking with your hands in your pockets and backpacks on your front if you can.

3. Avoid credit card fraud

Again, advice due to a personal experience we had shortly after we arrived.

To mitigate the risk of losing a lot of money if you are subject to credit card fraud, we highly recommend using a travel card. With a travel card you just load a certain amount of funds on to it and then use it as you would a credit card. This means that should anything happen, you are limited to losing only the amount available on the card. We have an STA Travel CashCard, and only ever have a few hundred dollars on the card at any one time.

It is also advised to never let someone take your card out of sight, whether in a restaurant or shop etc – stay with your card! For this reason, we prefer to withdraw cash for the week (keeping the excess in a safe where available), limiting the amount of times we use our card. The less times it’s used, the less chance of cloning. In general, the advice is to only withdraw cash inside malls (V&A for example) because these are always on camera (see point 8).

Even if you are subject to fraud, your bank should be able to identify, review and refund you for the

fraudulent transactions. The STA Travel CashCard Fraud Team were very helpful with this!

4. Walking around at night time

Quite simply, do not do it, especially on your own.

If you are going to restaurants or bars on an evening, take a taxi (bearing in mind point 5!). If you do not have data to order one, most places have wifi available and you could always ask to hotspot with someone to use their data.

5. Using taxis in Cape Town

We just told you not to walk around at night and instead use taxis, but this requires a caveat.

Not all 'taxis' are taxis, even those with a sign! To know that you are getting in an official and safe taxi we highly recommend using UBER. UBER is widely available and is very cheap for most journeys within the city. You know who is picking you up, the details of the car, you don't need cash and everything is tracked.

If not using UBER at least have a restaurant or hotel call you a specific taxi company they can recommend. Try to avoid 'flagging' a taxi in the street.

6. Is it safe to drive around Cape Town?

Yes, you can drive around Cape Town. In fact, it is a great idea to hire a car so you can easily visit all the nearby attractions and drive along the spectacular coastlines. Car hire is also very reasonably priced, especially if just for a few days.

To keep things safe, always have your doors locked and at traffic lights, windows up. There are often people at traffic lights begging. They seem harmless, but if you have your window down and a phone or bag on your lap it might not be there for long.

We also recommend you have a sat nav and your route planned out. It is not advised to stop and ask for directions – this can put you in a vulnerable position.

For those without a sat nav, a lot of people don't realise that even without data roaming, your iPhone GPS still works. Download maps.me for offline maps and your phone GPS will serve as a sat nav for free.

7. Parking your car in Cape Town

Try and use parking garages as much as possible.

If you do have to park in the street do not leave anything in plain sight. Either pack things away in the trunk or take them with you.

8. Using ATMs in Cape Town

The rule which you will see on many posters is this: 'Do not let anyone help you use the ATM'.

If someone tries to help or bothers you, just stop and find a different ATM. Like we said, if you stick to the ATMs in the V&A mall, this is your safest option. Alternatively, use a bank with a security guard present. There are a few of these around the waterfront.

Also make sure that no one appears to follow you after a transaction. If they do, go to the nearest shop, hotel or inside the bank.

9. Carrying valuables

Like any big city, try to limit the amount of cash or valuable items you are carrying. Also keep them out of plain sight so that you aren't accidentally 'advertising' them.

Don't forget, if travelling from places like Australia, US or Europe you will find South Africa very cheap so take less cash than you expect.

For extra safety use:

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- **'Anti-theft' style backpacks:** Most zips are positioned against your back, making them less accessible for pickpockets!
- **Money belt:** for that extra piece of mind, we recommend using a money belt
- **Fanny pack/Bum Bag:** This is just a bit more secure than a handbag or using your pockets. T

10. Drinking alcohol in Cape Town

With bottles of wine for less than \$10 in a fancy restaurant it's no surprise you can end up drunk very easily here!

Just be extra cautious as your defences are lowered when drinking – perhaps slow your normal pace of drinking while here, and limit the valuables you take with you.

11. Dealing with street beggars in Cape Town CBD

Whilst in Cape Town City Centre, you will at some point be approached by a beggar asking for food or money. This is especially common at traffic lights, whilst waiting to cross the street.

If you want to help, the best thing you can do is donate to a registered charity, which your hotel or accommodation can help you to find. Alternatively, if you really want to, go and buy some food. In fairness, most street beggars around Cape Town are not asking for cash, but asking you to buy them something to eat.

In the CBD area street beggars will sometimes follow you along the street for long distances persistently. This can be intimidating. Some people advise saying firmly 'no'. However, I find that once you say anything, they will continue. Just ignore them if they start being intimidating or find a CCID Public Safety Officer, who provides security in the city area, or go into a shop.

12. Emergency Numbers

www.capetown.travel provide a full list of emergency numbers. Save these to your phone:

- Emergencies from a mobile: 112
- Emergencies from a landline: 107
- South African Police Service: 10111
- Medical & Fire Emergencies: 021 535 1100
- Table Mountain NP Emergencies: 021 480 7700
- Sea & Mountain Rescue: 021 948 9900
- National Sea Rescue Institute: 082 911
- Baboon Monitors: 071 588 6540
- Shark Spotters: 078 174 4244
- Ambulance: 10177

Whilst this may seem like a long list of things to be aware of, do not let any of this deter you from travelling to Cape Town. Realistically, almost all of the above tips apply to most major cities in the world!

We honestly cannot speak highly enough of Cape Town as a destination. Please just be a responsible tourist, use these Cape Town safety tips and share them to make sure you have the best and safest time in Cape Town – you are going to fall in love with it!

Article by "The Globetrotter Guys" <http://theglobetrotterguys@outlook.com>