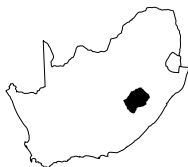


Lesotho



LESOTHO

Lesotho (le-soo-too) is called Southern Africa's 'kingdom in the sky' for good reason. This stunningly beautiful, mountainous country is nestled island-like in the middle of South Africa. It came into being during the tumultuous years of the early 19th century, when both the *difaqane* (forced migration) and Boer incursions into the hinterlands were at their height. Under the leadership of the legendary king Moshoeshoe the Great, the Basotho people sought sanctuary and strategic advantage amid the forbidding terrain of the Drakensberg and Maluti ranges. The small nation they forged has managed to resist more recent pressures as well, and continues to be an intriguing anomaly in a sea of modernity.

The only way to reach Lesotho is via South Africa, and it is a fascinating travel detour from its larger neighbour. The country offers superb mountain scenery, the opportunity to meet and stay with people living traditional lifestyles, endless hiking trails and the chance to explore remote areas on Basotho ponies. Throughout, you'll find Lesotho refreshingly free of the after-effects of apartheid, with proud, friendly people and a laid-back pace.

While infrastructure may not be on par with South Africa, Lesotho has adequate and enjoyable amenities, including a handful of comfortable hotels and lodges. With an ordinary rental car you can reach most areas. Adventure-seekers can use the good (albeit slow) public transport around much of the country, or can just head off on foot.

The 'lowland' areas (all of which are still above 1000m) offer some cultural fun: there's craft shopping around Teyateyaneng or you can follow in the footsteps of dinosaurs around Quthing and Leribe (Hlotse). Yet, it's in the highlands in the northeast and centre that Lesotho is at its most beautiful. Here, towering peaks climb over 3000m, riven by verdant valleys and tumbling streams, and hiking or pony trekking from village to village are the best ways of exploring.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Trekking on ponies around **Malealea** (p568) and **Semonkong** (p567)
- Heading up to **Sani Top** (p565) and absorbing the awesome vistas from Sani Pass
- Revelling in the splendid isolation of **Sehlabathebe National Park** (p572), **Ts'ehlanyane National Park** (p563) or **Bokong Nature Reserve** (p567)
- Hiking in the **northeastern** and **central highlands** (p563)
- Shopping for crafts in **Teyateyaneng** (p560), **Leribe** (p561) or **Maseru** (p558)



■ POPULATION: 2.1 MILLION

■ AREA: 30,355 SQ KM

HISTORY The Early Days

Lesotho is the homeland of the Basotho – Sotho-Tswana peoples who originally lived in small chiefdoms scattered around the highveld in present-day Free State. Cattle and cultivation were their economic mainstays, and trading was at the heart of daily life.

As the 19th century moved into full swing, this comparatively tranquil existence came under threat. The Voortrekkers and various white entrepreneurs began to encroach on Basotho grazing lands, which the Basotho themselves had already pushed to capacity. On top of this came the *difaqane* (see p35), which was just beginning to unleash its wave of destruction.

Yet, unlike neighbouring groups, many of whom were dispersed or decimated, the Basotho emerged from this period more united. This was largely due to the leadership of the brilliant Moshoeshoe the Great, a village chief who rallied his people and forged a powerful kingdom. To do this, Moshoeshoe first led his own villagers to the mountain stronghold of Butha-Buthe, where he established a base from which he was able to resist the early incursions of the *difaqane*. In 1824, to enhance his position, Moshoeshoe began a policy of assisting refugees of the *difaqane* in return for their help with his own defence. He moved his headquarters to the more easily defended hilltop perch of Thaba-Bosiu, from where he repulsed wave after wave of invaders.

By 1840 Moshoeshoe's rule was firmly entrenched. His people numbered about 40,000 and his power base was protected by groups who had settled on outlying lands and were partially under his authority. Ultimately, Moshoeshoe was able to bring these various peoples together as part of the loosely federated Basotho state, which, by the time of his death in 1870, had a population exceeding 150,000.

Moshoeshoe had also welcomed Christian missionaries into his territory. The first to arrive, in 1833, were from the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society. Moshoeshoe made one of them his adviser, and the sophisticated diplomacy that had marked his dealings with local chiefs now extended to his dealings with the Europeans. The missions, often situated in remote parts of the

kingdom, served as tangible symbols of his authority. In return for some Christianisation of Basotho customs, the missionaries were disposed to defend the rights of 'their' Basotho against a rising new threat: Boer and British expansion.

Defending the Territory

The Basotho spent much of the early and mid-19th century fending off Boer forays into their areas. In 1843 – in response to continuing Boer incursions – Moshoeshoe allied himself with the British Cape Colony government. While the resulting treaties defined his borders, they did little to stop squabbles with the Boers, who had established themselves in the fertile lowveld west of the Mokokare (Caledon) River. In 1858 tensions peaked with the outbreak of the Orange Free State-Basotho War. This was followed in 1865 by a second war between the Boers and the Basotho. After gaining an early victory, Moshoeshoe began to suffer setbacks, and was ultimately forced to sign away much of his western lowlands.

In 1868 Moshoeshoe again called on the British, this time bypassing the Cape Colony administration and heading straight to the imperial government in London. It had become obvious that no treaty between the Boers and the Basotho would hold for long, and the British viewed continual war between the Orange Free State and Basotholand as bad for their own interests. To resolve the situation, the British annexed Basotholand.

The decade after Moshoeshoe's death was marked by ongoing squabbles over succession, and increasing colonial infringements on Basotho autonomy. After briefly changing hands between the British imperial government and the Cape Colony, Basotholand again came under direct British control in 1884. One unexpected benefit of this was that, when the Union of South Africa was created in 1910, Basotholand was a British protectorate and was not included; had Cape Colony retained control, Lesotho would have become part of South Africa, and later a homeland under the apartheid regime.

Independence at Last

During the early 20th century, migrant labour to South Africa increased, and the Basotho gained greater autonomy under

LESOTHO



the British administration. The main local governing entity during this period was the Basotholand National Council, an advisory body to the colonial government. In the mid-1950s the council requested internal self-government, with elections to determine its members. Meanwhile, political parties were being formed, led by the Basotholand Congress Party (BCP), similar to South Africa's African National Congress) and the Basotholand National Party (BNP), a conservative group headed by Chief Leabua Jonathan.

Lesotho's first elections in 1960 were won by the BCP, which made full independence from Britain the first item on its agenda. Agreement was reached, with in-

dependence to come into effect in 1966. At the next elections, in 1965, the BCP lost to the BNP. Chief Jonathan became the first prime minister of the newly independent Kingdom of Lesotho, with King Moshoeshe II as nominal head of state.

Chief Jonathan's rule was unpopular, and in the 1970 election, the BCP regained power. Chief Jonathan responded by suspending the constitution, arresting and then expelling the king, and banning opposition parties. Lesotho effectively became a one-party state.

Chief Jonathan was deposed in a military coup in 1986, and Moshoeshe II restored as head of state. Yet following ongoing power disputes between the king and the

coup leader, Moshoeshe II was deposed in favour of his son, Prince Mohato Bergeng Seeisa (Letsie III). Elections in 1993 returned the BCP to government. In 1995 Letsie III abdicated in favour of his father, who again managed to bring some semblance of order to Lesotho. Less than a year after being reinstated, Moshoeshe II was killed when his 4WD plunged over a cliff in the Maluti Mountains. Letsie III was again made king. (As head of state, Letsie III does not exercise executive power. Under traditional law, he can be deposed by a majority vote of the College of Chiefs. The real power lies with the cabinet, headed by the prime minister, and with parliament. Parliament is bicameral, consisting of a 120-member elected national assembly and a non-elected senate, comprised of 22 chiefs and 11 nominated members.)

The BCP was split between those who wanted the then-prime minister, Ntsu Mokhehle, to remain as leader and those who opposed him. In response, Mokhehle formed the breakaway Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) and continued to govern, with the BCP now in the opposition. Mokhehle died in 1998, and Paka-litha Mosisili took over the leadership of the LCD. Later that year, the LCD won a landslide victory in elections that were declared reasonably fair by international observers, but were widely protested within Lesotho. Tensions between the public service and the government became acute, and the military was also split. In September 1998 the government called on its Southern African Development Community (SADC) treaty partners – Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe – to help it restore order in the country. Rebel elements of the Lesotho army resisted, which resulted in heavy fighting and widespread looting in Maseru. Elections – initially scheduled for 2000 – were finally held in May 2002. The LCD won, and Mosisili began his second five-year term as prime minister.

Current Events

Since 2002 Lesotho has enjoyed a period of peace, and parliamentary reform has progressed reasonably well, as has the general political process. Lesotho's literacy rate is comparatively high (about 85%), but nonetheless it ranks among the

poorer countries in the region and it has few natural resources other than water and diamonds. For most of the 20th century, Lesotho's main export was labour, with approximately 60% of males working in South Africa, primarily in the mining industry. Since the early 1990s, these numbers have dropped by almost half with the restructuring of the South African gold-mining industry, increasing mechanisation and the closure of marginal mines. While male migrant workers were being retrenched in large numbers, the Lesotho economy was being transformed through the rapid growth of the textile industry. Since then, thousands have lost their jobs due to stiff competition from China and changes to international agreements (see the boxed text, p562). Unemployment is now estimated at about 45%, with the domestic economy unable to take up the slack. Yet it is hoped that economic initiatives will soon inject some energy into the revival of the local business sector.

Overshadowing the political and economic issues is the spectre of HIV/AIDS. The infection rate (adult prevalence) is estimated at about 30% – one of the highest in the region and the world. Government, business, NGOs (Nongovernment Organisations) and community organisations are working to combat the situation, but scarce resources, lack of capacity and a continued high level of social stigma attached to the disease hinder their efforts.

The elections of 2007 may bring challenges of another kind. Questions being considered are whether to back the current prime minister for a third term, whether corruption is being tackled vigorously enough and whether the 'grass roots' is being neglected in favour of a more 'gentrified' party.

CLIMATE

Clear, cold winters, with frosts and snow in the highlands, await you in Lesotho, so pack warm clothing. In summer (late November to March), dramatic thunderstorms are common, as are all-enveloping clouds of thick mist. Temperatures at this time can rise to over 30°C in the valleys, though it's usually much cooler in the mountains, even dropping below freezing. Nearly all of Lesotho's rain falls between October and

April. Throughout the year, the weather is notoriously changeable.

Visits are possible at any time, with spring and autumn optimal. For more information about when to go, see p20.

NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

Sehlabathebe is Lesotho's most famous national park. While you won't encounter the Big Five (lion, leopard, buffalo, elephant and rhino) here, its high-altitude grasslands, lakes, bogs and otherworldly rock formations offer a wonderful wilderness experience and are ideal for hiking or just getting away from it all. Sehlabathebe is under the jurisdiction of the **Parks Office** (☎ 2232 3600) of the Ministry of Forestry & Land Reclamation, just off Raboshabane Rd in Maseru.

The country's other main conservation areas – Ts'ehlanyane National Park (p563), Bokong Nature Reserve (p567) and the Liphofung Cave Cultural Historical Site (p564) – are under the jurisdiction of the **Lesotho Highlands Development Authority Nature Reserves** (LHDA; ☎ 2246 0723, 2291 3206; www.lesothoparks.com), which handles all accommodation bookings. All have simple accommodation, established trails, helpful staff, are relatively easy to access and well worth visiting.

LANGUAGE

The official languages are South Sotho (Sesotho) and English. For some useful words and phrases in South Sotho, see the Language chapter (p651). For more on Sotho language and culture, see www.sesotho.web.za.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Several years ago, high unemployment rates and a weak economy resulted in a pronounced increase in crime – carjackings and muggings – mostly in Maseru. While such incidents have declined, travellers should not flaunt valuables and should be especially vigilant in Maseru, particularly at night.

If you're hiking without a guide, you might be hassled for money or 'gifts' by shepherds in remote areas, and there's a very slight risk of robbery.

Several lives are lost each year from lightning strikes; keep off high ground during an electrical storm and avoid camping in the open. Waterproof clothing is essential for hiking and pony trekking.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

It's possible to fly to Lesotho from South Africa, but most travellers enter by bus or private vehicle. For details, see p622. Once in Lesotho, there are good bus and minibus taxi networks that cover the country. See p634 for bus information and p640 for minibus taxi information. Note that minibus taxis do not normally operate to a schedule; they wait until the bus is full before departing.

For charter flights within Lesotho, the best contact is **Mission Aviation** (☎ 2232 5699).

MASERU

pop 175,000 / elevation 1600m

Maseru is the kind of place that grows on you. It sprawls across Lesotho's lower-lying western edge, rimmed by the Berea and

Qeme Plateaus. Occupied by the British in 1869 as an administrative post, the city was a relative backwater for some time, and those coming from Johannesburg (Jo'burg) today might think it still is. However, Maseru has rapidly expanded over the past few decades, and boasts a modest array of modern amenities. A major city rebuilding program has hidden many of the once-visible scars of the 1998 political unrest (see p551).

The city boasts a temperate climate, well-stocked shops, a decent selection of restaurants and accommodation, and personable, peppy people. Maseru is the perfect place to get one's bearings, sort out logistics and stock up on supplies before heading into the highlands.

Orientation

Maseru's main street is Kingsway, which was paved in 1947 for a visit by the British royals and long remained the capital's only tarmac road. It runs from the Maseru Bridge border crossing southeast through the centre of town to the Circle – a major traffic roundabout best identified by the cathedral spires on its eastern edge. At the Circle, Kingsway splits into Lesotho's two major traffic arteries: Main North Rd (for Teyateyaneng and points north) and Main South Rd (for Mohale's Hoek and points south). A bypass road rims the city to the south. About midway along on Kingsway is the conical Basotho Hat building, a good landmark.

Although Maseru has few sights, just walking around the town and getting a feel for Lesotho life can be enjoyable. If you're feeling more adventurous, head into the urban villages surrounding Maseru for a taste of local life.

MAPS

The **Department of Land, Surveys & Physical Planning** (Lerotholi Rd; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) sells a good 1:50,000 map of Maseru (M50), a 1:250,000 map of Lesotho (M50), plus 1:50,000 hiking maps covering the country (M35). Look for the brown building marked 'LSPP'. The tourist information office (right), on Kingsway, also sells a Lesotho map (M5).

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Basotho Hat (☎ 2232 2523; Kingsway; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) This craft shop has books on Lesotho.

Maseru Book Centre (Kingsway; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Near Nedbank.

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 2231 2501)

Fire Department (☎ 115)

Police (☎ 2231 9900)

INTERNET ACCESS

Data Kare (LNDC Centre, Kingsway; per hr M10; ☎ 8am-9pm) The best and cheapest place for Internet access.

Leo (Orpen Rd; per min M0.50; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) Behind the Basotho Hat building.

MEDICAL SERVICES

For anything serious, you'll need to go to South Africa. In an emergency, also try contacting your embassy (p610), as most keep lists of recommended practitioners.

Maseru Private Hospital (☎ 2231 3260) In Ha Thetsane, about 7km south of Maseru.

Queen Elizabeth II Hospital (☎ 2231 2501; Kingsway) Opposite Husters Pharmacy.

MONEY

The top-end hotels will do foreign exchange transactions (at poor rates). Otherwise try the following:

International Business Centre (Ground fl, Lesotho Bank Tower, Kingsway; ☎ 8.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat)

Nedbank (Kingsway) Does foreign exchange transactions Monday to Friday.

Standard Bank (Kingsway) Has an ATM.

POST

Post office (cnr Kingsway & Palace Rd) Has unreliable poste restante.

TELEPHONE

International phone calls are expensive; if possible, wait until you are in South Africa. Note: no telephone networks function in the highlands. Cellphone signals are extremely rare and can be picked up on a few mountain passes only. They should not be relied upon.

Public telephones can be found at the **public phone shop** (LNDC Centre, Kingsway).

TOURIST INFORMATION &

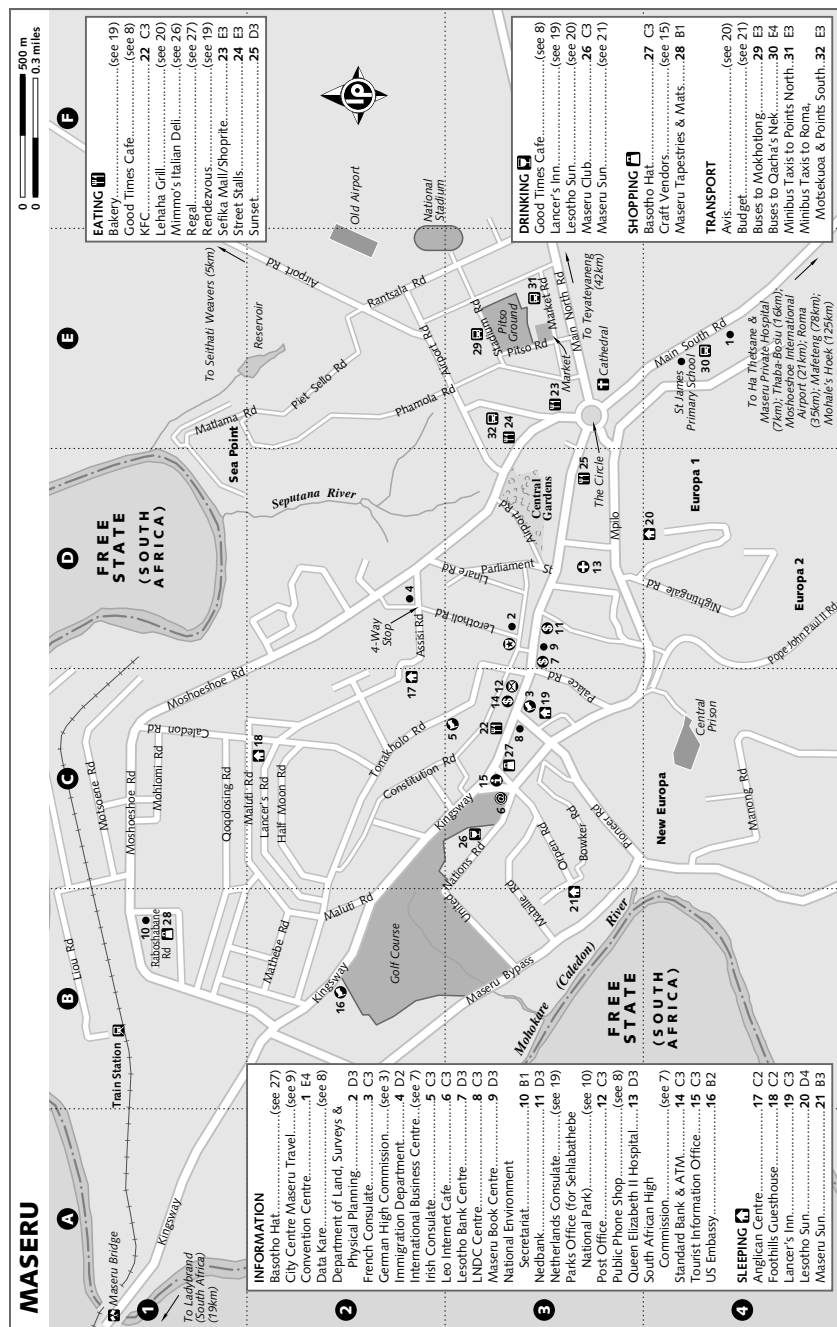
TRAVEL AGENCIES

City Centre Maseru Travel (☎ 2231 4536; Kingsway), located in the Book Centre building next to

LESOTHO SAMPLER

Lesotho is an adventure traveller's destination *par excellence*. Hire a car, or brush up on your pony- or public transport-riding skills, and set off into the country's more remote corners. Some possible routes:

- Enter Lesotho at Tele Bridge by Quthing, and make your way east via Mt Moorosi, Mphaki and Qacha's Nek to Sehlabathebe National Park.
- Get a taste of the mountainous 'lowlands' by entering at Qacha's Nek and heading west via Quthing and Mohale's Hoek to Malealea, then to Morija, Roma and up to Semonkong.
- Take in some of Southern Africa's most impressive scenery on a circuit from Butha-Buthe to Oxbow and Mokhotlong (with a possible detour to Sani Top), then back either via Thaba-Tseka and the Katse Dam, or to Maseru via Likalaneng and Mohale Dam.
- Travel in a loop from Maseru via Morija to Malealea, continue on pony to Semonkong and then make your way back to Maseru via Roma.



A GOOD BREAKFAST & A HOT SHOWER

Despite calling themselves 'bed & breakfasts', many B&Bs in Lesotho don't include breakfast in their prices. In this chapter, we've noted those places – hotels, lodges, B&Bs – that do. Otherwise, expect to pay about M35 to M55 per person for breakfast.

Also on the topic of amenities: a shower is a rare luxury in Lesotho. Many places – even some of the nicer hotels – only have baths, and the water (when available) is piping hot.

Nedbank, does regional and international flight bookings. They can also arrange tickets for Intercape and other long-distance buses. (Also visit Shoprite's 'Money Market' kiosk in LNDC Mall for Greyhound and Intercape bus tickets.)

The **tourist information office** (☎ 2231 2427; Kingsway; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat), managed by the Lesotho Tourism Development Corporation, is a helpful office that has lots of brochures, lists of tour guides, information on public transport and free Maseru city maps (if you're lucky).

Dangers & Annoyances

Maseru is reasonably safe, but walking around at night, especially off the main street, is not recommended. Bag-snatching and pickpocketing are the main risks during the day.

Tours

The **tourist information office** (☎ 2231 2427; Kingsway) keeps an updated list of tour operators, and many of the main lodges listed in this chapter arrange tours and activities.

A few South African operators run tours up Sani Pass and over the border into Lesotho; see p356 and p641.

Sleeping

Maseru has a decidedly modest range of accommodation, though you should be able to find something that will suit for a night or two. Alternatively, it is also possible to overnight in Thaba-Bosiu or Roma, both of which are nice and easy drives from the capital.

BUDGET

Anglican Centre (☎ 2232 2046; dm/tw with shared bathroom M50/100) This offers austere but clean rooms, and meals are available with advance notice. It's about 500m north of Kingsway on the bend where Assisi Rd becomes Lancer's Rd. If you get lost, ask for St James Church, which is next door.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Foothills Guesthouse (☎ 5870 6566; melvin@xsinet.co.za; 121 Maluti Rd; s/d with breakfast M295/450) A welcome addition to Maseru's sleeping options, this converted sandstone house has large and airy rooms with décor c 1960s, and a pleasant enclosed veranda for breakfasts. It's in a peaceful part of town, but may be a bit far on foot.

Lancer's Inn (☎ 2231 2114; lancers-inn@ilesoto.com; cnr Kingsway & Pioneer Rd; s/d/tr with breakfast M475/575/695; ☎) Business travellers flock to this central option for its pleasant colonial-era ambience and excellent restaurant, but the price is overinflated for what you get. It's behind the French consulate in the town centre.

Maseru Sun (☎ 2231 2434; maseru@sunint.co.za; 12 Orpen Rd; r M945; ☎) You're on a safe bet in these comfortable, modern rooms with a grassy outlook, although the slot machines might eat any extra pennies you have. Maseru Sun is just southwest of the junction of Kingsway and Pioneer Rd, and signposted. Often has weekend specials.

Lesoto Sun (☎ 2231 3111; lesosv@sunint.co.za; r M970; ☎) A predictable gamble is Lesotho's other Sun – perched on a quiet hillside with a great setting overlooking town. It boasts the ubiquitous casino, two restaurants and offers a typical modern motel experience. There are plans to upgrade. Ask about specials.

Eating

Happily, Maseru offers more variety for dining out than for accommodation, with several good restaurants.

Rendezvous (☎ 2231 2214; Lancer's Inn, Kingsway; mains M37-70; ☎ lunch & dinner) A fave among the expats and locals who goss in the garden café or have a tippie in the traditional chandeliered restaurant, complete with gingham napkins and large menu.

Mimmo's Italian Deli (☎ 2232 4979; Maseru Club, United Nations Rd; mains from M28; ☎ lunch & dinner)

Mimmo's setting in an old building with outdoor terrace is as pleasant as its pasta and pizza dishes.

Lehaha Grill (☎ 2231 3111; Lesotho Sun; meals from M55; ☎ dinner) This upscale place features crisp tablecloths, a three-course menu and à la carte selections. If nothing suits, Chinese food is usually served during the evening in the Sun's second restaurant next door. The luncheon buffet costs M92.

Regal (☎ 2231 3930; Level 1, Basotho Hat; mains M22-49; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Dripping with photographs, bright cushions, silk-covered bar stools and an Asian theme, this stylish place dishes up everything from Indian curries to Chinese noodles, as well as excellent vegetarian options.

Good Times Cafe (☎ 2231 7705; Level 1, LNDC Mall; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner M18-50) The funky red and blue suede sofas, stylish lights (with saxophone motif) and oh-so-shiny chrome trimmings make this 'it' for the local cool crowd. Friendly staff, TV screens and regular live music (including jazz) are an added bonus.

Sunset (☎ 6276 0030; Kingsway; mains M15-28; ☎ lunch & dinner) Popular among local business people, this pleasant, corporate-looking place, with its cream and brown tablecloths and piped music, offers the best-value and most authentic 'à la carte' dining experience in Maseru. It's above Fruit & Veg City.

On the eastern end of Kingsway, towards the minibus stations near Shoprite, are **street stalls** (meals about M8; ☎ lunch) selling grilled meat, curry and rice. For Western fast food, KFC is on Kingsway. Shoprite is the best option for self-caterers.

Next to Lancer's Inn is a good **bakery** (☎ 7am-8.30pm) with pies, cakes and other delicacies.

Drinking

Popular meeting spots include **Lancer's Inn** (☎ 2231 2114; lancers-inn@ilesot.com; cnr Kingsway & Pioneer Rd), **Maseru Club** (☎ 2232 6008; United Nations Rd) and the bar/slot-machine lounges at **Maseru Sun** (☎ 2231 2434; 12 Orpen Rd) and **Lesotho Sun** (☎ 2231 3111; lesoresv@sunint.co.za). It's worth checking out the recently opened **Good Times Cafe** (☎ 2231 7705; Level 1, LNDC Mall).

Shopping

Basotho Hat (☎ 2232 2523; Kingsway; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) This government-run craft shop

is the best place to start, although prices are generally higher than elsewhere in the country. If you plan on walking or pony trekking, the horsehair fly whisks sold here make good investments.

The **craft vendors** (Kingsway) in front of the tourist information office have a supply of woven Basotho hats and other souvenirs. For tapestries, try **Maseru Tapestries & Mats** (☎ 2231 1773; Raboshabane Rd), near the train station, and **Seithati Weavers** (☎ 2231 3975), about 7km from town along the airport road.

Getting There & Away

For getting to Maseru from South Africa, see p629.

There are three main transport stands to the northeast of the Circle: behind Shoprite/Sefika Mall for minibus taxis to Roma (M8), Motsekuoa (M13, for Malealea) and other points south; just off Main North Rd near Pitso Ground (take the turn-off by the KFC sign) for minibus taxis to points north; and, about a block away from here, reached via the same turn-off, for large buses to points south and north. Buses to Mokhotlong (M35) depart from next to Feida supermarket on Stadium Rd behind Pitso Ground, while those to Qacha's Nek (M96) depart from next to St James Primary and High Schools on Main Rd South.

For car rental agencies, **Avis** (☎ 2232 0087) is at Lesotho Sun and **Budget** (☎ 2231 6344) at Maseru Sun. Avis has a kiosk at the airport.

Getting Around TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Moshoeshe International Airport is 21km from town, off Main South Rd. Minibus taxis (from the transport stand at Shoprite/Sefika Mall) cost M5. A private taxi company charges around M50.

MINIBUS TAXI & TAXI

The standard minibus taxi fare around town is M2.50. Taxi companies include **Moonlite** (☎ 2231 2605), **Planet** (☎ 2231 7777) and **Luxury** (☎ 2232 6211). These can also be chartered for long-distance transport elsewhere in the country.

AROUND MASERU

Maseru's surrounding areas hold several attractions, all of which make easy day or overnight excursions from the capital.

They're covered here clockwise, from north to south.

Thaba-Bosiu

About 25km east of Maseru is the famed and flat-topped Thaba-Bosiu (Mountain at Night), where King Moshoeshe the Great established his mountain stronghold in 1824 (see p551). It's regarded as the birthplace of the Basotho nation, and, although quite an unassuming spot, is Lesotho's most important historical site.

The origins of its name are unclear. Some people say it may have been bestowed because the site was first occupied at night, while others believe that to intimidate the enemies, rumours were spread that Thaba-Bosiu, a hill in daylight, grew into an unconquerable mountain at night-time.

At the mountain's base is a **visitors information centre** (admission M5; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) with maps and an information pamphlet. An official guide will accompany you on the short walk to the top of the mountain, for which you should pay a tip.

From the summit, there are good views over the surrounding area, including to **Qiloane Hill**, which allegedly provided the inspiration for the Basotho hat. Also fascinating to see are the remains of fortifications, Moshoeshe's grave and parts of his original settlement.

Mmelesi Lodge (☎ 5250 0006; s/d M220/250) offers well-organised flowery rondavels (round huts with conical roofs), about 2km before the visitors information centre, and is the only accommodation available. It does a brisk local business with government workshops, and has a dining room.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibuses to Thaba-Bosiu (M8, 30 minutes) depart from Maseru at the transport stand at Shoprite/Sefika Mall. If you're driving, take the Mafeteng Rd for about 13km and turn left at the Roma turn-off; after about 6km take the signposted road left. Thaba-Bosiu is 10km further along.

Ha Baroana

Ha Baroana is one of Lesotho's more important and publicised rock-art sites. It's worth a visit if you have extra time, although neglect and vandalism have taken their toll.

To get here, take the Roma turn-off from the Mafeteng Rd; continue for about 8km to the Thaba-Tseka junction. Follow the northern fork (to Thaba-Tseka) about 12km to Nazareth village. Just before Nazareth, there's a signposted gravel track to the paintings. Follow this 3km to Ha Khotso village, turn right at a football field and continue 2.5km to a hilltop overlooking a gorge. A footpath zigzags down the hillside to the rock shelter with the paintings. Minibus taxis go as far as Nazareth.

Roma

Nestled amid sandstone cliffs about 35km southeast of Maseru, Roma was established as a mission town in the 1860s. Today it's Lesotho's centre of learning, with the country's only university, as well as several seminaries and secondary schools. The southern entry/exit to Roma takes you through a striking gorge landscape, and is best travelled during the morning or late afternoon when the lower sun lights the cliffs to full advantage.

The attractive **Trading Post Guest House** (☎ 2234 0202/67; www.tradingpost.co.za; camp sites per person M50, dm M80, rondavels per person M175, s/d with shared bathroom M150/300; ☎) is a legacy of Lesotho colonial history: it's a trading post that has been operated since 1903 by the Thorn family (locals still bring their grain daily to the mill), who also run the guesthouse. There's a choice of accommodation, including rondavels and the original sandstone homestead, with shared kitchen, set in a lush garden. A self-contained cottage sleeps six (minimum two) for M300. Breakfasts and dinners are available (M35/65). Pony trekking, hiking, 4WD trails and other action adventures can be arranged. There are even *minwane* (dinosaur footprints) nearby. Head to the western end of town and follow the signposts off the main (Semonkong) road from Maseru.

About 35km southeast along the same road is Ramabanta village, where the same owners run **Trading Post Adventures Guest House** (camp sites per person M50, rondavels per person M200, r per person M175) with self-catering facilities, and the chance to link up Roma, Ramabanta and other places in the area on overnight hikes and pony treks. Bookings are taken for Trading Post Adventures Guest House through the Trading Post Guest House.

The humble **Speakeasy Restaurant and Kaycees** (meals M30) serve basic fare.

Minibus taxis run throughout the day to/from Maseru (M8, 30 minutes). They depart Maseru from the stand next to Sefika Mall/Shoprite.

Morija

Morija is a tiny town with a big history, and the site of the first European mission in Lesotho. It is easy to get to, and a 'must see' for those interested in Lesotho's history and culture. Before coming to Morija, hunt out a copy of Tim Couzens' *Murder at Morija*, which attempts to get behind the 1920 poisoning of one of the country's early missionaries.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Morija Museum & Archives (☎ 2236 0308; www.morijafest.com; admission M6; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) The best museum in Lesotho, this impressive place holds well-presented ethnographical exhibits, archives from the early mission and scientific artefacts. Staff are knowledgeable and there's an excellent collection of books for sale, including those by the curator himself. The museum staff will guide you to nearby dinosaur footprints (for a small fee) and direct you to accommodation. There's even a small courtyard tea room.

Other places of interest include the good **Maeder House Crafts Centre** (☎ 2236 0487; 🕒 by appointment Sun), near the museum, and Lesotho's first **printing press**, on the same grounds. **Pony trekking** (M50 per hour and less for longer trips) and overnight **hikes** (M200 incl meals, with cost of guide negotiable) can be organised through the Morija Guest Houses – you must reserve one day in advance.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The popular **Morija Arts & Cultural Festival** (www.morijafest.com) is an annual event held in early October which showcases the diversity of Sotho culture through dance, music and theatre, and includes horse racing and *moraba-raba* (the African equivalent of chess) competitions. The festival began in 1999 as a means of reuniting the people of Lesotho after the turmoil created by the 1998 political upheaval, and to revive aspects of culture and boost tourism.

SLEEPING & EATING

Mophato Oa Morija (☎ 2236 0219; mophatooamo@leo.co.ls; dm M60) This ecumenical conference centre is sometimes willing to accommodate travellers, but it's best to book in advance. Meals can be arranged. Take the first right after the museum and wind your way back about 700m – ask locals to point the way.

Morija Guest House (☎ 6306 5093; mgh@leo.co.ls; r per person M180) It's hard to move from the deck of this comfortable and very private stone-and-thatch cottage – the views are as pleasant as the accommodation itself. There's a kitchen or meals can be arranged. Take the road up from the museum about 1.5km, turning right at the signpost.

Other smaller guesthouses managed together with this main guesthouse are also available. Backpackers arriving by public transport may be charged a lower fee.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibus taxis run throughout the day between Maseru and Morija (M10, 45 minutes, 40km).

NORTHERN LESOTHO

Northern Lesotho – the area from Maseru up to Butha-Buthe – is relatively densely populated, and dotted with a series of bustling lowland towns. The towns themselves offer little of 'typical tourist' interest to visitors, except for Teyateyaneng and Leribe (Hlotse), both of which have some good craft shopping. But the region shouldn't be ignored. It's an important entry or exit to/from South Africa and the main gateway to the spectacular northeastern highlands. If you're driving, it's worth allowing at least half a day or more to absorb the region's local flavours: the markets, welcoming locals and the unique geographical backdrop. If you're travelling on public transport, Teyateyaneng and Leribe are the best overnight stops.

Teyateyaneng

Teyateyaneng (Place of Quick Sands; usually known simply as 'TY') is the craft centre of Lesotho, and is worth a stop to buy tapestries or watch them being made.

Some of the best come from **Helang Basali Crafts** (☎ 2250 0382; 🕒 8am-5pm) at St Agnes Mission, about 2km before Teyateyaneng and signposted to the east of the Maseru road. Other good places (both open similar

BLANKET COVERAGE

The Basotho blanket is an important part of public, social and private life, not only as a practical article of clothing, but also as a symbol and status. So common is the blanket you'd be forgiven for thinking it's a centuries-old tradition. In fact, as recently as 1860 European traders presented King Moshoeshe I with a blanket. The Basotho people were so taken with it that they chose to disregard their animal hides in its favour and by the 1880s traders were overwhelmed with demands. The original blankets were manufactured from high-quality woven cloth in England and sold in Fraser's Stores (few stores survive today) and the manufacturers experimented with the designs and improved the quality. The blanket's popularity fluctuated throughout the 1900s, mainly influenced by the European's and missionaries' preferences. (It is said that when the Prince of Wales visited Lesotho in 1925, those with blankets were ordered to the back of the crowd.)

Today, however, the woollen blanket is an important practical and symbolic item for the Basotho (not to be confused with plain or synthetic blankets worn by those who can't afford the real article). A blanket provides insulation in the heat and the cold, is fireproof and a status symbol – each costs a hefty M500. Look out for maize cob (a symbol of fertility), a crown or military markings (a legacy of British imperialism) and a cabbage leaf (meaning prosperity). Young married women wear a blanket around their hips until their first child is conceived and young boys are presented with a blanket upon circumcision, symbolising their emergence from boyhood to manhood.

The solid lines on a blanket's edges are worn vertically – the Basotho believe that worn horizontally the blanket can stunt growth, wealth and development.

Less common, but still used in rural areas, is the Basotho hat, or *mokorotlo* or *moliangyeo*, with its distinctive conical shape and curious top adornment. The style of the hat is supposedly modelled on the shape of Qiloane Hill (p559), near Thaba-Bosiu.

hours) include Setsoto Design, near Blue Mountain Inn, and Hatooa Mose Mosali, just west of the main road at the town entrance. Elleloang Basali Weavers is about 4km to the north of TY. At most places you can watch the weavers at work.

Blue Mountain Inn (☎ 2250 0362; s/d M230/280) offers truly blue rooms with motel-like trimmings set in a shady compound. New rooms are being constructed – and will be the outlook for some unfortunate guests. It has a restaurant and is about 1km off the main road and signposted.

Minibus taxis run throughout the day between Teyateyaneng and Maseru (M12, 45 minutes, 35km). Chartering a taxi from Maseru costs about M130 one-way.

Maputsoe

This chaotic border town, 86km north of Maseru, is across the Mohokare (Caledon) River from the Free State town of Ficksburg, and has no appeal other than as a transit point.

The banging at **Sekekete Hotel** (☎ 2243 0789; s/d about M220/280) ain't the sound of bottles being slammed down on the hotel's bar; it's best to stay across the border at Ficksburg (see p390).

Maputsoe is a major transport junction, and for northbound transport from Maseru, you'll usually need to change vehicles here. Minibus taxis to both Maseru (M17, one hour), Butha-Buthe (M13, 45 minutes) and Leribe (M7, 30 minutes) run throughout the day from the Total petrol station.

Leribe (Hlotse)

Leribe (also known as Hlotse) is a busy regional market hub. It served as an administrative centre under the British, as witnessed by a few old buildings slowly decaying in the leafy streets. The main sign is the crumbling **Major Bell's Tower** near the market. It was built in 1879, and spent most of its career as a storehouse for government records.

The good **Leribe Craft Centre** (☎ 2240 0323; 🕒 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat), just off the main road at the northern end of town, sells a range of high-quality woollen goods (and excellent books on Lesotho) at reasonable prices.

Dinosaur footprints abound around Leribe. The most accessible set is a few kilometres south of town at Tsikoane village. Immediately after the Tsikoane Primary School,

take the small dirt road to the right towards some rocky outcrops. Follow it up to the church. Many children will vie to lead you the 1km slog up the mountainside to the *minwane*, in a series of caves. The prints are clearly visible on the rock ceiling.

About 7km north of Leribe are the Subeng River dinosaur footprints. At the signpost indicating the river, walk down about 250m to a concrete causeway. The worn footprints of at least three species of dinosaur are about 15m downstream on the right bank.

If you're heading into the highlands, Leribe is the last good place to stock up. A new Shoprite was due to open in February 2006.

SLEEPING & EATING

Leribe Hotel (☎ 2240 0559; Main St; s/d M180/250; meals from M25) The dining room's décor may be out of a *Fawlty Towers* set, but this 1970s-style place offers clean accommodation in the main building or in private rondavels. It has an invitingly green and leafy tea garden and serves meals. One of the country's best hotel options, it's located 100m uphill from the central junction.

Pelican Steakhouse & Bar (Main St; mains M15-20) As authentic a local hang-out as you can get, this place dishes out the daily dose of hearty mutton, pork and chicken curries from massive pots. It's opposite the Golden Rule Funeral House before the Leribe Hotel.

LESOTHO UNRAVELLED

In 1999 employment opportunities for Basotho people in Lesotho were looking good. Chinese and Taiwanese investors had flooded into the country to set up textile factories and take advantage of the cheap labour and hassle-free access that followed the creation of a US incentive, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). This gave textile exports from approved African countries duty-free access to the US market.

The textile industry soon became Lesotho's economic mainstay. By 2003, Lesotho was a major textile manufacturer, producing some 31% of the textiles exported to the US under the AGOA scheme. The textile industry employed 20,000 in 2002 and up to 56,000 by 2004 as investors took advantage of the scheme, and exports grew from US\$140 million to US\$456 million in 2004; that is, around 90% of Lesotho's export earnings.

However, things unravelled at the end of 2004. A falling US dollar and the end of WTO restrictions on Chinese imports to the US killed Lesotho's US market. Six factories closed overnight (many were rumoured to have left without paying wages) and thousands were left unemployed. Since then, the majority of remaining factories have closed, despite government efforts, including export incentives, to sustain them. Although Lesotho still has duty-free access to the US market, it is said that advanced technology in China limits Lesotho's opportunities.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibus taxis run throughout the day between Leribe and Maseru (M26, 1½ hours), usually with a change of vehicles at Maputsoe. There are also several vehicles daily between Leribe and Katse (M36, three hours), and between Leribe and Butha-Buthe (M8, 35 minutes), many originating further south.

Butha-Buthe

Lesotho's second-largest town, Butha-Buthe (Place of Lying Down) was named by King Moshoeshoe the Great because it was here that his people first retreated during the chaos of the *difaqane*. Its frontier-town scrappiness is redeemed by an attractive setting alongside the Hlotse River, with the beautiful Maluti Mountains as a backdrop.

SLEEPING & EATING

Ha Thabo Ramakatane Hostel (dm M30) Comments in the guestbook – 'magical', 'most favourite place' – urge a stay here as a must-do experience. The abode of the Ramakatane family (Mr Ramakatane is now 95) has few amenities and guests are treated to a true dip into a rural lifestyle: water from a well, gas cooking and candlelight (bring your own supplies). Access is best via 4WD or walking. It's 3.5km from Butha-Buthe in Ha Sechele village. Turn off the main road at the sign for St Paul's High School in central Butha-Buthe, go left up the lane immediately after the school, then take the

CULTURE BASOTHO-STYLE

Traditional Basotho culture is flourishing, and colourful celebrations marking milestones, such as birth, puberty, marriage and death, are a central part of village life. While hiking you may see the *lekolulo*, a flute-like instrument played by herd boys; the *thomo*, a stringed instrument played by women; and the *setolo-tolo*, a stringed instrument played with the mouth by men. Cattle hold an important position in daily life, both as sacrificial animals and as important symbols of wealth. Crop cultivation and weather are also central, and form the heart of many traditions.

The Basotho believe in a Supreme Being and place a great deal of emphasis on *balimo* (ancestors), who act as intermediaries between people and the capricious forces of nature and the spirit world. Evil is a constant danger, caused by *boloi* (witchcraft; witches can be either male or female) and *thkolosi* (small, maliciously playful beings, similar to the Xhosa's *tokoloshe*). If you're being bothered by these forces, head to the nearest *ngaka* – a learned man, part sorcerer and part doctor – who can combat them. Basotho are traditionally buried in a sitting position, facing the rising sun and ready to leap up when called.

next right. Ask for directions once you're on this road.

Crocodile Inn (☎ 2246 0223; Reserve Rd; s/d/tr from M198/231/335) This one can be a bit of a 'croc'. The simple but clean rooms often don't have water. The newer, nicer rondavels are out the back and are frequented for night kips or day rests (note, the latter is advertised). The restaurant here is Butha-Buthe's main dining establishment. The white hotel is about 500m off the main road (signposted to Butha-Buthe Hospital), at the southern end of town.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Many minibus taxis travel between Maseru and Butha-Buthe via Maputsoe (1½ hours), where you'll usually need to change vehicles. From Maputsoe to Butha-Buthe costs M13 and takes about 20 minutes. Both minibus taxis and a bus go to Mokhotlong. The minibus taxis costs M50, and the bus costs M35. Butha-Buthe is the last reliable place to buy petrol if you're heading north.

Ts'ehlanyane National Park

This LHDA-administered **national park** (admission per person/vehicle M15/5) protects a beautiful 5600-hectare patch of rugged wilderness, including one of Lesotho's only stands of indigenous forest. This underrated and underused place is about as far away from it all as you can get and is perfect for hiking.

For accommodation, there's a **guesthouse** (6-person M350), a **conference centre** (d & tr per person M60) at the park entrance and various **camp sites** (per person from M20). Unfortunately, the pleasant stone rondavels have been depleted

of their amenities but check on their status. Bookings can be made through LHDA (☎ 2246 0723, 2291 3206; www.lesothoparks.com). Bring your own food and cooking equipment.

In addition to day walks, there's a challenging 39km hiking trail from Ts'ehlanyane southwest to Bokong Nature Reserve (p567) through some of Lesotho's most dramatic terrain. Guides fees are M30 per day. **Pony trekking** (per half/full day M50/75) can be arranged through LHDA with advance notice.

If you're driving, take the signposted turn-off from the main road about 8km south of Butha-Buthe, from where it's 31km further on a gravel access road (easily negotiable in a 2WD). Occasional taxis run from Butha-Buthe to the park entrance, but mainly towards Khabo, on the access road, from where you'll need to walk or hitch.

NORTHEASTERN & CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

Northeast of Butha-Buthe, the road weaves up dramatically through spectacular mountains – part of the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg range – with rocky cliffs and rolling hills. South Africa does a good job of marketing its portion of the Drakensberg escarpment, but for raw beauty, it can't compare with the part in Lesotho, where the combination of snow (in winter), low population density and stunning highland panoramas is hard to beat. All the areas covered in this section are excellent for hiking, but you'll need to be fully equipped with a four-season sleeping bag, waterproof gear, topographical maps and a compass. Trout fishing is reputed to be topnotch.

Liphofung Cave Cultural Historical Site

Just beyond the village of 'Muela is the signposted turn-off for this small LHDA-administered site, which includes a cave with some San paintings and Stone-Age artefacts. King Moshoeshoe the Great is rumoured to have stopped here on his travels around Lesotho.

There is a **visitors centre** (adult/child M15/5; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4.30pm Sat & Sun), with unhelpful staff and a small shop selling local crafts. Accommodation is two simple stone four-person **rondavels** (per person M50, minimum 2) with kitchen facilities. Not that the latter gets used much (the sign says 'Day rest and overnight accommodation available'). **Camping** (M20) may also be permitted – check at the visitors centre. You'll need to bring your own food. Day hikes are possible and you can arrange **pony trekking** (M2 per hour) with advance notice.

Liphofung is an easy 1.5km walk down from the main road along a tarmac access ramp. Via public transport, take a taxi heading from Butha-Buthe towards Moteng, and get off at the Liphofung turn-off (M8, 25 minutes). If you stay overnight at Liphofung, the bus to Mokhotlong passes in the morning (ask for times).

Oxbow

Reached after crossing the dramatic Moteng Pass (2820m), Oxbow consists of a few huts and a couple of lodges nestled amid some wonderful mountain scenery, and is an ideal place to get away from the bustle while still enjoying amenities. The area regularly receives snow in winter, and

boasts a 1.5km ski slope. It's also popular with South African trout anglers and bird-watchers. Except for a small supply of basics at the shop at New Oxbow Lodge, there's nowhere to stock up.

Skiing is available through **Afri-Ski** (www.afriki.co.za), about 10km past Oxbow.

New Oxbow Lodge (☎ in South Africa 051-933 2247; www.oxbow.co.za; s/d with breakfast M310/545) is an incongruous chalet more at home in alpine Austria than on the banks of the Malibamat'so River. But the resort atmosphere, cosy bar and good restaurant draw the holiday-makers. Ski-hire, half-board arrangements and triples and quads are all available.

The bus between Maseru and Mokhotlong will drop you at Oxbow (M50, 4½ hours). Several minibus taxis run daily between Butha-Buthe and Oxbow (M25, 1½ hours). The route follows a series of hairpin turns up the pass, and can be treacherous in snow and ice.

Mokhotlong

From Oxbow, a good tarmac road winds its way over a series of 3200m-plus passes and through some superb high-altitude scenery before dropping down to Mokhotlong (Place of the Bald Ibis). The route was the original **Roof of Africa Rally** (www.roofofafrica.org.ls) course.

Mokhotlong is the main town in eastern Lesotho, but it is still very much an outpost, and has something of a Wild West feel to it. There's not much to do other than watch life go by, with the locals on their horses, sporting Basotho blankets. However, the Senqu (Orange) River – Lesotho's main waterway – has its source near Mokhotlong, and the town makes a good base for walks. There are a number of reasonably well-stocked shops; petrol and diesel are sometimes available.

SLEEPING & EATING

Molumong Guesthouse & Backpackers (☎ in South Africa 033-394 3072; molumong@worldonline.co.za; camp sites per person M45, dm/d M70/180) Most travellers head out of town to Molumong (pronounced 'moodoomong'), signposted about 15km southwest of Mokhotlong off the road to Thaba-Tseka. This rustic lodge, a former colonial trading post, is an integral part of the village and offers a basic (electricity-free) self-catering experience. Bring what-

ever food you'll need from Mokhotlong. The rooms are bright, as are the stars at this studded height. Pony trekking is available.

Grow (☎ 2292 0205; dm R50) This Lesotho-registered development program has an office just off the main road into Mokhotlong. It offers clean and basic dorms and a simple kitchen. It's happy to accept travellers if training groups aren't staying.

St James Lodge (☎ in South Africa 033-326 1601; stjamesguestlodge@yahoo.com; dm/d M75/95) This is the most recent lodge option in the area, housed in an old stone building on a working mission. It's self-catering so bring your own supplies, and offers pony trekking and scenic walks. It's 12km south of Mokhotlong on the road to Thaba-Tseka.

Senqu Hotel (☎ 2292 0330; s/d with shared bathroom M180/240, s/d M200/280) This place has lifted its standards since the recent construction of a new wing. Despite the older shabby rooms, the new rooms make it the pick of the motels (complete with mod cons and restaurant). It's at the western end of town along the main road.

A good shop in the town centre, next to the library, is Thia-Lala Butchery & Cafe, with takeaway sandwiches and a range of basics, including chilled juices.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are a few minibus taxis daily to/from Butha-Buthe (M55, six hours). A bus goes daily to/from Maseru, departing in each direction by about 8am (M70, eight hours) except on Sunday (one-way, Mokhotlong to Maseru only) and Saturday (one-way, Maseru to Mokhotlong only). There's also a daily minibus taxi from Mokhotlong to Sani Top, which continues on to Underberg (South Africa) via the Sani Pass. It departs from Mokhotlong daily at 6am (M65, five hours to Underberg). Minibus taxis to Linakaneng (on the Thaba-Tseka road) will drop you by Molumong Lodge. For transport from Molumong to Sani Pass, wait on the road that runs past the lodge, and change minibus taxis.

Sani Top

Sani Top sits atop the steep Sani Pass, the only dependable road into Lesotho through the Drakensberg range in KwaZulu-Natal. It offers stupendous views on clear days and unlimited hiking possibilities.

Thabana-Ntlenyana (3482m), Africa's highest peak south of Mt Kilimanjaro, is a popular, but long and arduous hike. The mountain's height was only calculated in 1955 and not confirmed by satellite technology until 30 years later. There's a path, but a guide would be handy. It's also possible to do the ascent on horseback.

Hodgson's Peaks (3258m) is a much easier hike 6km south, from where you can see into Sehlabathebe National Park and KwaZulu-Natal.

Sehlabathebe National Park offers a rugged three-day hike from Sani Top Chalet (below) south along the remote escarpment edge to Sehlabathebe National Park; only try this if you're well prepared, experienced and in a group of at least three people.

Other hikes in this area are outlined in the excellent booklet *A Backpackers' Guide to Lesotho* by Russell Suchet, available through the **Morija Museum** (☎ 2236 0308; www.morijafest.com) or **Sani Lodge** (☎ in South Africa 033-702 0330; www.sani-lodge.co.za) at Sani Pass.

SLEEPING & EATING

Sani Top Chalet (☎ in South Africa 033-702 1158; www.sanitopchalet.co.za; camp sites per person M50, dm M85, r with shared bathroom M300) On the edge of the escarpment at a lofty 2874m, this popular (monopolistic) place resembles an old-fashioned ski chalet and boasts the highest pub in Africa, with simple, cosy rooms and excellent meals. There's no lofty praise for the backpackers dorm – its condition has plummeted in recent years and although it features a wonderful fireplace, its draughty, stained room detracts from experiencing a real high. New rondavels are being constructed (let's hope for the budget traveller). In winter the snow is sometimes deep enough for skiing; pony trekking can be arranged with advance notice.

There are also several good hostels on the KwaZulu-Natal side of the pass; see p356.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

A minibus taxi runs daily from Mokhotlong via Sani Top down to Underberg (South Africa) and back (M65, five hours). Coming from the north, taxis from Butha-Buthe cost M53.

If you're driving, you'll need a 4WD to go up the pass; 2WD with clearance can make it down, though with difficulty. The

CAMPING CAPERS

If you choose to camp in Lesotho, it is advisable to always ask permission from the local chief of the nearby village. This is not only an important courtesy, but with a chief's permission you are less likely to have problems (remember that all land is accounted for, so you are on someone's 'property' at all times). It is possible that the chief will invite you to pitch your tent near his or her home, or in a safe area. You should offer or expect to pay a small fee for the camping privilege.

South African border crossing is open 8am to 4pm daily; the Lesotho side stays open until 5pm to let the last vehicles through. Hitching is best on weekends.

Hostels on the KwaZulu-Natal side arrange transport up the pass, and various agencies in Himeville and Underberg (the nearest South African towns) arrange tours – see p355 and p354.

Thaba-Tseka

Thaba-Tseka is a remote town on the western edge of the Central Range, over the sometimes-tricky Mokhoabong Pass. It was established in 1980 as a centre for the mountain district, and is a scrappy place serving mostly as a convenient transport junction for travel north to Katse or west to Maseru.

The **Farmer Training Centre** (☎ 2290 0294; dm/r M100/50) has the usual: a basic room with few trimmings, as well as a shared guesthouse. It's on the street behind the tower. The most colourful thing about Thaba-Tseka's main hotel, **Mountain Star Hotel** (☎ 2290 0415; s/d M140/170), is the public lounge's bright red sofa and the 'Adam' and 'Eve' public loo signs. Otherwise, you're in for a dull, if adequate stay. The Lilala Butchery and General Cafe is a clean place with a good selection of sandwiches, drinks and frozen foods.

Three buses run daily between Maseru and Thaba-Tseka (M34, seven hours), departing from Maseru between about 8am and 9.30am. Minibuses also go as far as Sehonghong (M22, two hours); from here you'd need to try your luck for a lift. From

Thaba-Tseka to Mokhotlong, get a minibus taxi to Linakaneng (M22, two hours), and from there another to Mokhotlong (M14, two hours). Several minibus taxis travel daily along the unsealed, but good, road from Thaba-Tseka via Katse (M16), and on to Leribe (M32) and Maseru (M50, five hours).

Mohale Dam

Built across the Senqunyane River, the impressive 145m-high rock-fill Mohale Dam was completed in 2004 as the second phase of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. There are commanding views of the lake and massive mountains beyond. You can drive as far as the Mohale Tunnel through which water can flow for 32km between Mohale and Katse Dams.

Basotho Pony Trekking Centre

About 85km west of Thaba-Tseka, on the top of God Help Me Pass, is the **Basotho Pony Trekking Centre** (☎ 2231 2318). It's a fairly no-frills and DIY experience compared to other pony-trekking places, but it is one of the most easily accessible from Maseru. Reports are that it's foundered a little of late; it's managed by the Ministry of Agriculture and, at the time of research, was up for privatisation. Visit the **Maseru Tourist Information Office** (☎ 2231 2427; Kingsway; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat) for an update before booking.

Katse

Tiny Katse's main claim to fame is as the former purpose-built base for the Lesotho

Highlands Water Project and the site of Africa's highest dam (185m). Katse Dam's lake is serene, ringed by steep, green hill-sides; even if you're not impressed by engineering feats, the area makes for a relaxing pause. Fishing is allowed from the sides; permits (M10) are on sale at the Bokong Nature Reserve or the information office.

There's a **visitors centre** (admission M6), with a video about the dam, tours of the dam (9am and 2pm) and a dam viewpoint. Exposed and windy camping is also on offer here. The centre is about 2km east of the Katse village junction, along the main road.

Katse Lodge (☎ 2291 0202; dm M145, s/d incl breakfast M240/430), at the far end of the suburban-like Katse village beyond the barrier gate, resembles a hospital – in looks but not nature. You're better off sleeping in the 'dorm' accommodation with clean twin rooms and massive shared bathrooms (ask about this as it's not always offered, dammit). To get here, follow the signs to Katse village.

Signposted off the main road in Pitseng village, **Aloes Guest House** (☎ 2700 5626; s/d M150/180) provides a local 'cushy' base for exploring Katse or Bokong Nature Reserve. Situated in front of an old sandstone trading post, the rooms and rondavels have a stylish African touch and look out over a lush garden to the mountains. Perfect for catching up on the postcards.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The 122km road between Leribe and Katse is excellent, although steep and winding, and slick in the rain. Allow at least two hours for driving, longer if going by public transport.

Minibus taxis go daily from Leribe to Katse (M37, three to five hours), with some continuing on to Thaba-Tseka (M51). In Katse, public transport stops near the Katse village junction.

Hikers may be interested in the 'stick boat' (rowing boat) that ferries locals across the dam to three villages – Ha Sepinare, Ha Theko and Ha Lihalahaleng (M5).

Bokong Nature Reserve

Bokong has perhaps the most dramatic setting of the three LHDA reserves, with stunning vistas over the Lepaqa Valley from the **visitors centre** (adult/child M5/3; ☎ 8am-5pm), various short walks and a good, rugged two-

to three-day hike to Ts'ehlanyane National Park (p563). Bearded vultures, rock shelters and valleyhead fens (wetland areas) are features here. You can gush about the impressive waterfall, located near both the visitors centre and where you can **camp** (per person M20). You can also stay overnight in a very basic four-person **hut** (per person M40) – bring your own food, sleeping bag, mattress and stove. **Guides** (per person M20) are available, and **pony trekking** (per half/full day M50/75) can be arranged. The reserve sits at just over 3000m and gets cold at night, so come prepared. Bookings must be made through **LHDA** (☎ 2246 0723, 2291 3206; www.lesothoparks.com).

Bokong lies roughly midway between Katse and Leribe at the top of Mafika-Lisiu Pass (3090m). Minibus taxis from Leribe will drop you at the visitors centre (M22, 1½ hours); when leaving, you may need to wait a while before one with space passes by.

Semonkong

Semonkong (Place of Smoke) is a one-horse town in the serene and lofty Thaba Putsoa range. It's the perfect base to hit the pony trails, hike or abseil; **Maletsunyane Falls** (204m) are a 1½-hour walk or a minute's abseil away. The falls are at their most awesome in summer – especially from the bottom of the gorge – where there are **camp sites** (per person M20). **Ketane Falls** (122m) are an exciting day's ride (30km) from Semonkong by a spectacular gorge.

The peaceful and recommended **Semonkong Lodge** (☎ in South Africa 051-933 3106; www.placeofsmoke.co.ls; camp sites per person M40, dm/s/d M80/230/380), near the Maletsunyane River, is one of *the* places to stay; its good range of accommodation includes camping and rondavels. For those who aren't content just soaking up the atmosphere or the excellent food and refreshments at the restaurant and bar, a hike or pony trek are always on offer, and (as you'll hear) the world's longest commercially operated single-drop abseil (204m) down the Maletsunyane Falls. The lodge is signposted from the town centre.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Semonkong is about 120km southeast of Maseru, past Roma. The final 70km are gravel, though in reasonable condition (negotiable with 2WD). Allow three to four hours from Maseru. Buses between Maseru

LESOTHO HIGHLANDS WATER PROJECT

The Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) is an ambitious scheme developed jointly by Lesotho and South Africa to harness Lesotho's abundant water resources to provide water to a large tract of Southern Africa and hydropower to Lesotho. The project, being implemented in stages until 2020, will result in five major dams (two of which are completed – the Katse and Mohale), many smaller ones and approximately 200km of tunnels.

Immediate effects of this development include vastly improved roads and telecommunications in the interior of the country, benefiting the residents of many remote villages.

However, there are detrimental effects as well. These include flooding of significant portions of Lesotho's already scarce arable land and potential silting problems. Relocation difficulties occur as locals settle into other villages. Billboards in each village warning of AIDS hint at other risks caused by easier contact with the outside world now that the road network has been improved. Also disturbing is that several multinational companies involved in the project's construction have been prosecuted for corruption. For more background on the water project see www.lhwp.org.ls.

and Semonkong (M25) leave from either town in the morning, arriving in late afternoon. The road dead-ends at Semonkong; an excellent alternative to retracing your steps is to hike south to Christ the King Mission (see p571) on the Quthing-Qacha's Nek road.

SOUTHERN LESOTHO

Southern Lesotho – from Mafeteng and Malealea southwards, across to Sehlabathebe National Park in the southeast – is less developed than the northwest between Maseru and Butha-Buthe and equally (if not more) spectacular. The massive mountain ranges, awesome valleys, rivers (including the Senqu River) and villages have an enticing off-the-beaten-track feel. The tarmac roads cease east of Qacha's Nek, and public transport connections take more time than in the north, but the rewards are all the greater.

Malealea

Shortly before reaching Malealea is the Gates of Paradise Pass. A plaque announces 'Wayfarer – Pause and look upon a gateway

of Paradise'. This says it all. The breathtaking mountainous surrounds and this tiny village is many travellers' introduction to Lesotho life, and is the ideal place to learn about local customs, gather information and start exploring the country.

The area has been occupied for centuries, as shown by the many **San rock paintings** in the vicinity. Today, the heart of the village is Malealea Lodge (see opposite), which offers a smorgasbord of cultural and outdoor activities, fittingly promoted as 'Lesotho in a nutshell'. 'Don't leave Lesotho without...' would also be appropriate.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Pony Trekking

Most of the treasures of this area are reachable by **pony treks** (per person per trek M160-750, overnight M260-330). Particular gems include: Ribaneng Waterfall (two days, one night); Ribaneng and Ketane Waterfalls (four days, three nights); and Semonkong (five to six days). Bring food, a sleeping bag, rainwear, sunscreen, warm clothing, a flashlight and water purification tablets. Accommodation is in **Basotho village huts** (per person M50).

PONY TREKKING & HIKING

Pony trekking is one of Lesotho's top drawcards. It's done on sure-footed Basotho ponies, the result of crossbreeding between short Javanese horses and European full mounts. King Moshoeshoe the Great is recorded as having ridden a Basotho pony in 1830. Since that time, these animals have become an integral part of life in the highlands, and the preferred mode of transport for many villagers.

Advance booking is recommended, and no prior riding experience is necessary. Whatever your experience level, expect to be sore after a day in the saddle. For overnight treks, you'll need to bring food (stock up in Maseru), a sleeping bag and warm, waterproof clothing. The following places can organise treks:

- Malealea Lodge (opposite)
- Semonkong Lodge (p567)
- LHDA conservation areas: Ts'ehlanyane National Park (p563), Bokong Nature Reserve (p567) and the Liphofung Cave Cultural Historical Site (p564).

Hiking rivals pony trekking as the best way to explore Lesotho. Plan a day in Maseru to buy topographical maps and stock up on food and supplies. Any specialist hiking supplies, including a compass, should be brought from South Africa. Once on the trail, respect the cairns that mark graves. However, a mound of stones near a trail, especially between two hills, should be added to by passing travellers, who ensure their good luck by spitting on a stone and throwing it onto the pile.

Several lodges have worked out trail networks in their areas, including Malealea and Semonkong. The owner of Fuleng Guest House (p571) is also helpful with hikes. For more hiking possibilities, see the Sani Top section (p565).

Hiking

Malealea Lodge (below) has maps for hikes and can arrange pack ponies for your gear. Stunning destinations include: Botso'ela Waterfall (two hours return); Pitseng Gorge (six hours return, bring swimwear); Pitseng Plateau (one hour return); and along the Makhaleng River. The walks include visits to surrounding villages and **San art** sites. Overnight and longer jaunts are also possible.

Other Activities

Village visits provide a stimulating insight into the local people and their customs. The tiny museum, housed in a traditional Basotho hut, is as interesting for the owner/guide as it is for its exhibits. You can visit a **sangoma** (only for the genuinely interested) and visit Mr Musi's reclaimed donga (see right). Malealea Lodge can also point you to some good, scenic drives suitable for both 2WD and 4WD vehicles.

SLEEPING & EATING

Malealea Lodge (📍 in South Africa 051-436 6766, 082-552 4215; www.malealea.co.ls, www.malealea.com; camp sites per person M50, backpacker huts with shared bathroom per person M80, r per person M100-200) The hub of local life, Malealea Lodge provides an extraordinary entrée into the 'Kingdom in the Sky' and its cultural riches. The lodge began life in 1905 as a trading post, established by teacher, diamond miner and soldier Mervyn Smith. From 1986 the hospitable and highly respected Mick and Di Jones (aka 'Mrs Malealea') ran the store, before transforming it into accommodation and impressively integrating it with the surrounding community. In 2003 it was the overall winner in the prestigious Imvelo responsible tourism awards for Southern Africa; a proportion of tourist revenue and donations goes directly to supporting projects in the area. Almost every night the local choir performs at the lodge.

The wealth of accommodation options range from camp sites and two-person 'forest', or backpacker, huts (those with linen M100) in a pretty wooded setting away from the lodge, to simple, cosy rooms and rondavels.

The lodge also offers a bar, hearty meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner M40/50/70) and self-catering facilities. A village shop stocks basic goods.

DEALING WITH DONGAS

Throughout Lesotho you may spot massive gullies or ravines stemming from the tops of hills and snaking all the way to the bottom of a valley. Known as dongas, these eroded areas developed primarily from the use of steel ploughs and an increase in arable farming during the latter part of the 19th century. The unstable duplex soils were quickly disturbed by the heavy summer storms. Increasingly, local people are reclaiming the dongas by building rock dams (or terraces) to capture silt and detritus. As the area above the dam wall or terrace fills, another dam is built lower down, until the gully is refilled with fertile soils, grasses or stabilising tree species. You can visit a successful donga reclamation at the Musi family farm at Malealea (see left).

There's no phone at the lodge (just a two-way radio) so enquiries must be made through South Africa. September to November are the busy months.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Two Sprinter minibus taxis connect Maseru and Malealea, departing Maseru at around 11.30am and 4.30pm, and Malealea at 6am and 2pm (M40, 2½ hours, 83km). Otherwise, catch a minibus taxi from near Shoprite/Sefika Mall to the junction town of Motsekuoa (M13, two hours), from where there are frequent connections to Malealea (M10, 30 minutes).

If you're driving, head south from Maseru on Mafeteng Rd (Main Rd South) for 52km to Motsekuoa. Here, look for the Malealea Lodge sign and the collection of minibus taxis. Turn left (east) onto a tarmac road. Ten kilometres further on take the right fork and continue another 15km. When you reach the signposted turn-off to Malealea, head 7km along an unsealed road to the lodge.

It's also possible to approach Malealea from the south, via Mpharane and Mase-mouse, but the road is rough and most drivers travel via Motsekuoa.

Mafeteng

Mafeteng (Place of Lefeta's People) is named after an early magistrate, Emile Rolland,

who was known to the local Basotho as Lefeta (One Who Passes By). Little has changed; you're best to move on. That said, the town is an important bus and minibus taxi interchange, a border junction (it's 22km to Wepener in Free State) and a possible stocking-up point before heading south. The town centre has a small statue commemorating soldiers of the Cape Mounted Rifles who fell in the Gun War of 1880.

Golden Hotel (☎ 2270 0566; s/d M175/240) is a small brick establishment with as much personality as a robot, but with adequate rooms and meals. It's at the northern edge of town along the main road.

Straight out of the '60s TV sitcom *Lost in Space*, polygon-shaped **Mafeteng Hotel** (☎ 2270 0236; s/d from M200/250) is a blast from the past. Its features include bedheads with radio control knobs, peach interiors and the funkiest-shaped pool this side of the Drakensbergs. It's signposted from the main road at the southern end of town. There's a garden, restaurant and disco to bring you back to earth.

Frequent minibus taxis connect Mafeteng with Maseru (M15, 1½ hours) and Mohale's Hoek (M9, 30 minutes). For Quthing, change at Mohale's Hoek.

Mohale's Hoek

Mohale's Hoek takes its name from the younger brother of King Moshoeshoe the Great, Mohale, who in 1884 gave this land to the British for administrative purposes. The town's brush with royalty continued more recently when Britain's Prince Harry spent time helping in an orphanage in a nearby village. The town centre is agreeable enough, and a better spot to overnight than Mafeteng.

Monateng Lodge (☎ 2278 5337; s/d M170/200) lacks something – security and the 'it' factor. The rowdy male-frequented bar offers meals. **Hotel Mount Maluti** (☎ 2278 5224; mmh@leo.co.ls; s/d with breakfast M257/380), built in 1950, is an appealing place that has established gardens and lawns, comfortable rooms and a good restaurant. It was due to change management in January 2006. It's signposted off the main road.

Regular minibus taxis depart for Quthing (M12, 45 minutes) and throughout the day to Mafeteng (M9, 30 minutes). There are also several minibus taxis daily to Maseru (M25, 2½ hours) and a bus (M20).

Quthing

Quthing, the southernmost major town in Lesotho, is also known as Moyeni (Place of the Wind). It was established in 1877, abandoned during the Gun War of 1880 and then rebuilt at the present site.

Activity centres around Lower Quthing spread out along the main road. Up on the hill, overlooking the Senqu (Orange) River gorge, is Upper Quthing, the former colonial administrative centre, with a post office, hospital, police station, hotel and some good views. There are minibus taxis between Lower and Upper Quthing.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Five kilometres west of Quthing is the intriguing **Masitise Cave House Museum** (☎ 5879 4167; admission free, donation appreciated), part of an old mission that was built directly into a San rock shelter in 1866 by Reverend David-Frédéric Ellenberger, a Swiss who was among the first missionaries to Lesotho. With the help of Morija Museum, the cave house was converted into a small museum, with interesting displays on local culture and history. There's a cast of a dinosaur footprint in the ceiling and San paintings nearby. To get here, take the signposted turn-off for Masitise Primary School and follow the road about 1.5km back past the small church. The caretaker's house (for the key to the cave house) is just behind, and the museum about five minutes further on foot. Accommodation is available on a B&B basis in the house of the caretaker (herself a pastor at the church) or the very rustic (read unrenovated) rondavels. Ring in advance to arrange local meals (breakfast/lunch/dinner M25/40/40).

Quthing's other claim to fame is a proliferation of **dinosaur footprints** in the surrounding area. The most easily accessible are just off the main road to Mt Moorosi; watch for the small, pink building to your left. These are believed to be 180 million years old.

Between Quthing and Masitise, and visible from the main road, is **Villa Maria Mission**, with a striking, twin-spired sandstone church. About 10km southeast of town near Qomoqomong is a collection of **San paintings**. Several minibus taxis ply this route daily; once in Qomoqomong, ask at the General Dealer's store to arrange a guide for the 20-minute walk to the paintings.

The road from Quthing to Qacha's Nek is one of Lesotho's most stunning drives, taking you along the winding Senqu (Orange) River gorge and through some striking canyon scenery before climbing up onto the escarpment. If you're equipped, the whole area is ideal for hiking.

En route is the village of **Mt Moorosi**, named after a Basotho chieftain who, in 1879, stuck it out for eight months against the British on his fortified mountain until he was killed; the pretty **Mphaki** village, a possible base for hiking; and **Christ the King Mission**, with wide views over the Senqu (Orange) River valley. From the mission, it's a good two- to three-day hike north to Semonkong (p567).

SLEEPING & EATING

Fuleng Guest House (☎ 2275 0260; r per person from M80) Perched on a hill, this is the place for excellent-value rooms and rondavels-with-a-view plus a friendly local experience. Keen to promote tourism, the owner arranges activities and excursions. It's signposted from the main road just before the bend to Upper Quthing.

Mountain Side Hotel (☎ 2275 0257; s/d M210/285) This faded place has dark (if spacious) rooms and a decent restaurant. Ask for a room in the main building; those at the back are very cramped. It's about 100m down the dirt lane leading off the main road to the left, where the hill begins to climb to Upper Quthing.

For an inexpensive meal, head to the well-stocked, no-name shop selling grilled chicken, omelettes and other fast food in Lower Quthing, just before Fuleng Guest House.

In Mphaki, there's the attractive blue-stone **Farmers' Training Centre** (dm M50) with clean rondavels and dorms and a kitchen (meals per day M50), and a few small shops nearby.

Moorosi Chalets (☎ in South Africa 051-436 6766; chalet per person from M80, with bath per person from M100) The folks from Malealea (in partnership with the Quthing Wildlife Development Trust) offer a new initiative – basic rondavel accommodation, trout fishing, visits to 'unseen' Bushman paintings and other activities. Incorporated into your visit, you can experience a Basotho village stay in one of two villages where local hosts

have constructed basic, but very comfortable, guest rondavels (per person M50). The fee goes directly to the village for equipment and supplies. The chalets are 6km from Mt Moorosi village; take the turn-off to Ha Moqalo 2km out of the village in the direction of Qacha's Nek.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Minibuses ply the route between Quthing and Qacha's Nek (M51, three hours) or a bus does the same trip, leaving Quthing at about 9am (M35, five hours). Several minibus taxis go to Maseru (M96, 3½ hours). The transport stand is situated in Lower Quthing. The Quthing–Qacha's Nek road is tarmac the entire way despite what many maps indicate.

Qacha's Nek

Originally a mission station, Qacha's Nek was founded in 1888 near the pass (1980m) of the same name. Its more recent claim to fame was as host of King Letsie III's 42nd birthday in 2005. This pleasant place has an attractive church and a variety of colonial-era sandstone buildings. Nearby are stands of California redwood trees, some over 25m high.

SLEEPING & EATING

Anna's B&B (☎ 2295 0374; annasb&b@leo.co.ls; s/M100-150, d/M180-280) On the main road, diagonally opposite the Farmers' Training Centre, it has clean, pleasant rooms in the new wing, and some less appealing ones with a shared bathroom in the old wing.

Letloepe Lodge (☎ 2295 0383; www.letloepelodge.co.ls; dm/s/d with breakfast M125/280/400) Letloepe means 'palace just below the clouds' and this is certainly the bastion of well-equipped rondavels with all the frills (including the frilliest, fanciest toilet seat covers and bed covers in Southern Africa) and a serene outlook. It's at the top of town on the hill. To enter, turn into the cream gate (the lodge's back wall faces the road).

Hotel Nthatuoa (☎ 2295 0260; s/d with breakfast M250/300) The most happenin' thing about this place is the plush red carpeted 'dining' room; the simple rooms' prices are classified by 'blocks' depending on their status (probably to cater for the government workshops). It's signposted along the main road at the northern edge of town.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Regular minibus taxis go from Qacha's Nek and Maseru via Quthing (M96, six hours). There's also a daily bus between Maseru and Qacha's Nek departing from Maseru between 5am and 6am (M66, nine hours), and a bus from Qacha's Nek to Sehlabathebe National Park departing from Qacha's Nek around noon (M30, five hours).

Sehlabathebe National Park

Lesotho's first national park, proclaimed in 1970, is remote, rugged and beautiful, and getting there is always a worthwhile adventure, especially if you're into wilderness, seclusion and fishing. The rolling grasslands, wildflowers and silence provide a sense of complete isolation, which is the case, apart from the prolific birdlife (including the bearded vulture) and the odd rhebok. Hiking (and horse riding from Sani Top or the Drakensbergs) is the main way to explore the waterfalls and surrounds, and angling is possible in the park's dams and rivers.

You'll need to bring all your food, and be well prepared for the elements. This is a summer-rainfall area, and thick mist, potentially hazardous to hikers, is common. Winters are clear but cold at night, with occasional light snowfalls.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping is permitted throughout the park, though there are no facilities besides plenty of water.

Sehlabathebe Park Lodge (☎ bookings 2232 3600; camp sites per person M30, r per person M80) This is the only option to stay in the park with facilities, and is an excellent (albeit secluded) one. Built in the 1970s for the prime minister of the time (it's been suggested he loved trout fishing, which may explain the park's existence), this time-warped lodge makes for a groovy stay. It's set on a remote flat grassland, and looks onto hills and ponds. Bring all your own food, plus extra petrol or diesel – there's none available at the park. The lodge takes up to 12 people, and has bedding and a fully equipped kitchen. It is 12km into the park, and 4WD vehicles are required if driving. Due to its isolation, it's not recommended for lone travellers. Sehlabathebe is currently under the jurisdiction

of the **National Environment Secretariat** (☎ 2231 1767 or 2232 6075; New Postal Office Building, 6th Floor, Kingsway, Maseru), but management seems to change regularly.

If you're travelling by public transport, the buses reach Sehlabathebe in the evening, which means you'll need to over-night in Mavuka village near the park gate. The clean and modern **Range Management Education Centre** (dm M35), 2km down the road to the left after the Mavuka Primary School, has dorm beds, but at the time of research had no water or gas. Alternatively, a last resort (but by no means a luxury one) is the **Mabotle Hotel** (d M70) in Mavuka itself. Despite the dusty and shabby setting, the rondavels have clean linoleum floors, 'new' bedheads (the plastic covering hasn't been removed) and spotless bathrooms. There is a reason: few people stay and there is no water.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There's an airstrip at Paolosi, about 3km south of Mavuka, for charter flights.

A daily bus connects Qacha's Nek and Sehlabathebe, departing from Qacha's Nek at around noon and Sehlabathebe at 5.30am (M30, five hours). The bus terminates in Mavuka village, near the park gate. From here, it's about 12km further on foot to the lodge. If you're driving, the main route into the park is via Quthing and Qacha's Nek. The road from Qacha's Nek is unpaved but in reasonable condition, and negotiable at most times of the year in 2WD. You can arrange to leave your vehicle at the police station in Paolosi village while you're in the park.

Probably the simplest way into the park is to hike the 10km up the escarpment from Bushman's Nek in KwaZulu-Natal. From Bushman's Nek to the Nkonkoana Gate border crossing takes about six hours. Horses can also be arranged through **Khotso Trails** (☎ in South Africa 033-701 1502; www.khotsotrails.co.za) in Underberg.

The road between Sehlabathebe and Sehonghong is for 4WDs only. Even then, these roads can be affected by storms and landslides. Always ask locals if the roads are passable – signs are seldom erected; they rely on the 'bush telegraph'.

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