

Limpopo



The name Limpopo carries with it the mark of legends, lore and mystery. It is the infamous Crook's Corner where ivory traders and gunrunners hid from the law. And it was here, in the 'Valley of the Olifants', that 19th-century big game hunters spun yarns about enormous elephant herds. This is also a royal land, the scene of the vanished kingdom at Mapungubwe and the Rain Queen who still rules in the Venda area.

Modern Limpopo sits at a key crossroads between Botswana, Zimbabwe, Kruger National Park and Gauteng, and is oft considered a doormat into more exotic destinations. But driving along the busy N1 highway that connects these places gives little impression of what gems lie off the beaten path.

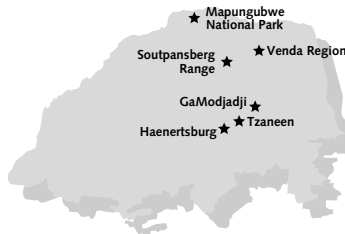
Heading north from Johannesburg (Jo'burg), southwest Limpopo (the Bushveld) undulates into scrubby hills that are home to several wildlife parks, lodges and resorts, including the hot springs at Bela-Bela. Big Five spotters will be better off heading north to the spectacular Mapungubwe National Park, a World Heritage Site that gives Kruger a run for its money.

East of the N1, the dry landscape gives way to the tropical fruit farms of the Letaba Valley, the cycad forests that surround the realm of the mystical Rain Queen, and the intriguing traditional homeland of the Venda people.

The area south of here, the Valley of the Olifants, is perhaps the most inviting of all. Plantations, relaxed country towns and some pretty valleys peppered with waterfalls make for great exploring, especially for DIY travellers with their own bike or car. Just east of here, at Phalaborwa, you can play golf on a spectacular course inhabited by giraffes, monkeys, elephants and the like, before heading into glorious Kruger National Park.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Soaking up the prehistory in **Mapungubwe National Park** (p500)
- Hiking through the lush green peaks of the **Soutpansberg Range** (p498)
- Saddling up the horses for a ride through the hills of **Haenertsburg** (p504)
- Munching through the mangoes in the fruit-growing centre of **Tzaneen** (p505)
- Skirting around the sacred sites of the mysterious **Venda Region** (p503)
- Getting drenched with the Rain Queen in **GaModjadji** (p507)



■ POPULATION: 5.5 MILLION

■ AREA: 123,910 SQ KM

HISTORY

After the battlefields of KwaZulu-Natal and the anti-apartheid struggle of Soweto, it is easy to overlook Limpopo's history. But the province has a rich past that spans millions of years. Makapan's Caves, near Mokopane, has offered up an archaeological record stretching back to protohuman times (including human tools from more than 500,000 years ago), while the area that is now Mapungubwe National Park was once the heart of one of Africa's most technologically advanced civilisations, holding sway over an area of 30,000 sq km and enjoying its heyday in the 8th and 9th centuries.

The Voortrekkers made this region home in the mid-19th century, establishing their base in Pietersburg (now Polokwane) in 1886. Conflict with the local Ndebele people marked a period of resistance against the settlers.

Around the turn of the 20th century, eastern Limpopo, near the borders with Mozambique and Zimbabwe, earned a reputation as a haven for ivory hunters, gunrunners and other outlaws – so much so that it was dubbed 'Crook's Corner'.

In recognition of its distinctly African origins, many of the region's towns have been renamed in recent years and the name of the province itself was changed to Limpopo at the turn of the 21st century.

Limpopo's economy is fuelled by mining and agriculture, with tourism making slow inroads around Hoedspruit. While this may sound familiar, Limpopo does face unique challenges in South Africa, not the least of which is its porous border through which illegal migrants head across from Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Limpopo, which has one of the highest poverty rates in the country, is also a hot spot of racial tension: in 2005 alone some 35 farms were attacked, leading to the deaths of 13 white farmers.

CLIMATE

In general, Limpopo is hot and dry and gets steadily hotter as you head north. The high peaks of the Soutpansberg Range provide cooler, damper conditions and the rolling hills of the Letaba Valley and Venda regions also get more than their fair share of mist and drizzle.

NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES

The **Limpopo Tourism and Parks Board** (☎ 015-290 7300; www.limpopotourism.org.za; cnr Kerk & Grobler Sts; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri), in Polokwane, provides information on most of the region's parks and reserves. The highlight is Mapungubwe National Park (p500), close to the Zimbabwe border. However, Limpopo is also home to numerous private wildlife reserves, the best of which are contiguous with Kruger National Park and covered in that chapter (see p485).

LANGUAGE

English and Afrikaans are widely spoken, but Afrikaans remains the language of choice in most areas.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

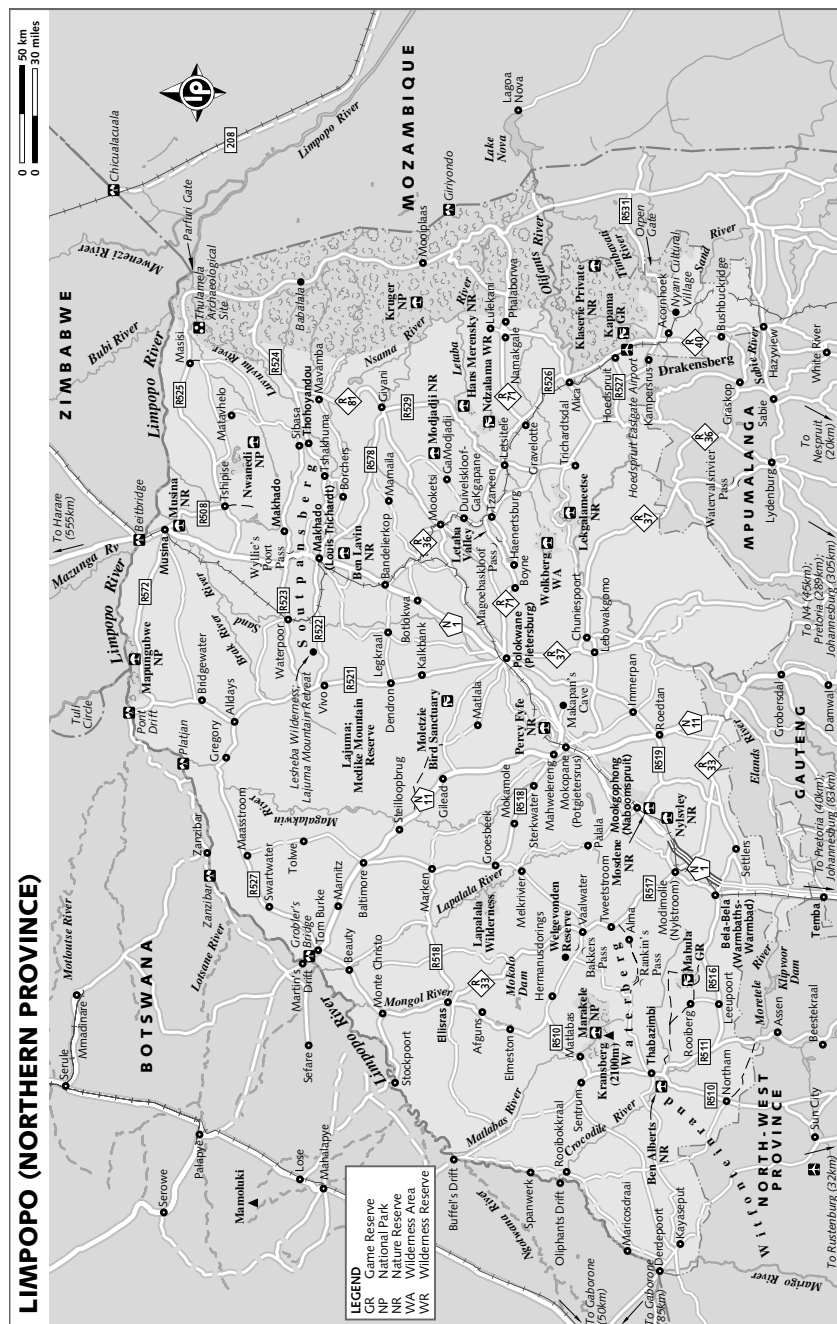
Limpopo is bisected by the excellent N1 highway (a toll road as far as Polokwane), which runs from Jo'burg and Pretoria to the Zimbabwe border at Beitbridge. Many of the province's large towns are on this artery and most are connected to Jo'burg and Pretoria via the **Translux** (www.translux.co.za) and **Greyhound** (www.greyhound.co.za) buses that run this way en route to Bulawayo and Harare. The **Boseveld** train runs an almost identical route, but more slowly. Long-distance buses also link the regional capital, Polokwane, with destinations along Rte 71, including Tzaneen and Phalaborwa, on the edge of the Kruger National Park. Other destinations can be hard to access without a car, but minibus taxis do link most parts of the province.

Hiring a car is the best way to see Limpopo (most roads are good), but if you want to save some miles, you can also fly from Jo'burg to Polokwane, Phalaborwa or Hoedspruit (near Kruger's Orpen Gate) and hire a car there.

See p632 and individual Getting There & Away sections for more details.

CAPRICORN

The Capricorn region includes little more than Polokwane (Pietersburg), the provincial capital. The tropic of Capricorn crosses the N1 halfway between Polokwane and Makhado (Louis Trichardt), although the monument marking the spot is a little neglected.



POLOKWANE (PIETERSBURG)

☎ 015 / pop 140,000

A rather agreeably sedate cluster of suburban streets surrounding a bustling commercial centre, Polokwane was founded in 1886 by Voortrekkers seeking to escape the usual cocktail of tropical disease and 'hostile natives'. Much of this conflict now seems to have dissipated and if you are wandering through the backstreets of South Africa's safest provincial capital these days, the biggest risk seems to be getting soaked by an over-zealous garden sprinkler.

Information EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 015-290 6000; cnr Schoeman & Bodenstein Sts)

INTERNET

Atlantic Internet (☎ 015-295 9203; Shop 13, Standard Bank Bldg, Hans van Rensburg St; per hr R35; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Pietersburg Hospital (☎ 015-287 5000; cnr Hospital & Dorp Sts) For medical attention.

MONEY

There are plenty of banks throughout the town.
ABSA (☎ 015-290 2166; 70 Hans van Rensburg St) Has an ATM and change facilities.

POST

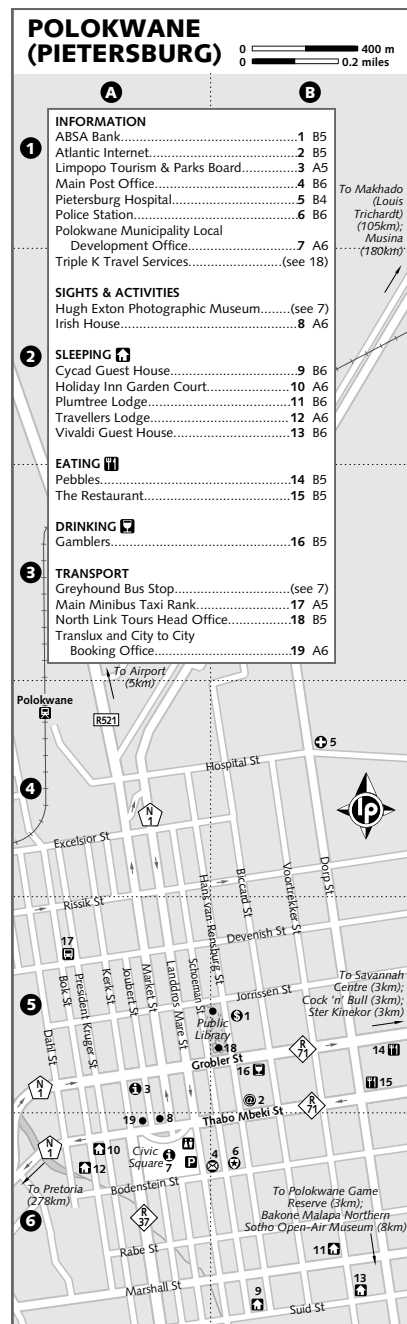
Main post office (☎ 015-291 3200; cnr Bodenstein & Landdros Mare Sts; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Limpopo Tourism & Parks Board (☎ 015-290 7300; www.golimpopo.com; cnr Kerk & Grobler Sts; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Covers the whole province and offers the useful *Limpopo Explorer* map and the *Know Limpopo Guide*.
Polokwane Municipality Local Development Office (☎ 015-290 2010; www.polokwane.org.za; Civic Sq, Landdros Mare St; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) Has limited town information.

WARNING

Both malaria and bilharzia are prevalent in Limpopo, mainly in the east near Kruger National Park. For more information, see p647.



POLOKWANE (PIETERSBURG)

	A	B
INFORMATION		
1	ABSA Bank.....	1 B5
	Atlantic Internet.....	2 B5
	Limpopo Tourism & Parks Board.....	3 A5
	Main Post Office.....	4 B6
	Pietersburg Hospital.....	5 B4
	Police Station.....	6 B6
	Polokwane Municipality Local Development Office.....	7 A6
	Triple K Travel Services.....	(see 18)
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		
	Hugh Exton Photographic Museum.....	(see 7)
	Irish House.....	8 A6
SLEEPING 🛏		
2	Cycad Guest House.....	9 B6
	Holiday Inn Garden Court.....	10 A6
	Plumtree Lodge.....	11 B6
	Travellers Lodge.....	12 A6
	Vivaldi Guest House.....	13 B6
EATING 🍴		
	Pebbles.....	14 B5
	The Restaurant.....	15 B5
DRINKING 🍷		
	Gamblers.....	16 B5
TRANSPORT		
3	Greyhound Bus Stop.....	(see 7)
	Main Minibus Taxi Rank.....	17 A5
	North Link Tours Head Office.....	18 B5
	Translux and City to City Booking Office.....	19 A6



TRAVEL AGENCIES

Triple K Travel Services (☎ 015-291 5748; info@triplektravel.co.za; Shop 7, Library Gardens, cnr Grobler and Schoeman Sts; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) Offers bus and flight bookings.

Sights & Activities

Polokwane Game Reserve (☎ 015-290 2331; adult/child/vehicle R12/8/20; ☎ 7am-4.30pm) is one of the largest municipal wildlife reserves in the country, with 21 wildlife species including zebras, giraffes and white rhinos, plus a 20km hiking trail. It is south of the town centre in Union Park.

The **Bakone Malapa Northern Sotho Open-Air Museum** (☎ 015-295 2432; adult/child R3/1.50; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-3.30pm), 9km southeast of Polokwane on Rte 37 to Chuniespoort, is devoted to northern Sotho culture and includes an authentic 'living' village where

locals produce handicrafts. There are archaeological remains and paintings dating back to AD 1000, plus evidence of Ndebele iron and copper smelting.

The **Hugh Exton Photographic Museum** (☎ 015-290 2186; Civic Sq; admission free; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri) documents the first 50 years of the city's history with 23,000 glass slides. Nearby is the beautiful Victorian-era **Irish House** (cnr Thabo Mbeki & Market Sts).

Sleeping

As is the case in much of Limpopo, accommodation options are concentrated mainly in the midrange bracket. Those wanting some luxury will be better off at an up-market guesthouse, while budget travellers will struggle.

Travellers Lodge (☎ 015-291 5511; incatrav@worldonline.co.za; 43 Bok St; s/d R275/295; ☎) Despite the

name, this smart, self-catering place doesn't cater to the backpacker market. If you want to whip up your own meals, however, this peaceful place is an excellent choice.

Vivaldi Guest House (☎ 015-295 6162; vivaldi@mweb.co.za; 2 Voortrekker St; s/d with breakfast R300/390; ☎) Surrounded by a garden filled with rare cycads and with a soundtrack provided by a brace of talking parrots, this tip-top hide-away offers friendly welcomes and oodles of home comforts.

Cycad Guest House (☎ 015-291 2181; www.bbgroup.co.za/cycad/index.html; cnr Schoeman & Suid Sts; s/d with breakfast R330/420; ☎) Best filed in the drawer marked 'motel-style', this glossy, modern place falls on the practical side of the functional/cosy divide, earning its gold stars for cleanliness and slick service.

Plumtree Lodge (☎ 015-295 6153; www.plumtree.co.za; 138 Marshall St; s/d with breakfast R425/535; ☎) The crowds vote with their feet at this busy little place, where rooms are in twee bungalows and all the couch potato creature comforts come as standard. They also have free wi-fi access for laptop users.

Polokwane Game Reserve (☎ 015-290 2331) South of town, the reserve (opposite) has camping (R100 per site) and two-bed chalets (R220).

Holiday Inn Garden Court (☎ 015-291 2030; hicpolokwane@southern.sun.com; Thabo Mbeki St; s/d with breakfast R500/760; ☎) For the smartest, business-style beds in town.

Eating & Drinking

You can find all the usual takeaways in Library Gardens, but the Savannah Centre on Grobler St offers the widest selection of steak-based eats.

The Restaurant (☎ 015-291 1918; 50 Dorp St; mains R40-60; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) It's not the most complex name, but The Restaurant does have a nice variety of dishes, including beef and chicken curries, salads and seafood. The African art adds colour to the historic house.

Pebbles (☎ 015-295 6999; 39 Grobler St; mains R40-60; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2.15pm Sun) Set inside a beautiful historical house, Pebbles has a nice patio where you can enjoy a salad, steak or a veggie dish. There's also an attached pub.

Cock 'n' Bull (☎ 015-296 0961; Savannah Centre, Rte 71; mains R30-70; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) This pub-style offering serves up steaks the size

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Many town names in Limpopo, including the name of the province itself, have been changed in recent years. Throughout the chapter we use the new name then give the old name in brackets. Unfortunately, while all names have been changed on the official record, some road signs and many local residents have yet to catch up. As a result, travel can be confusing at times.

of a springbok's thighs in yee-har surrounds. There's big-screen sport and ice-cold beer to wash away the indigestion, and outdoor seating for those who prefer their meat al fresco.

Gamblers (☎ 015-291 1890; 1st fl, Palm Centre, Grobler St) This saloon-style drinking den keeps the beer flowing until the last person's standing. At weekends, there's plenty of action involving booze, singing and banter.

Entertainment

Ster Kinekor (☎ 086-300 222; Savannah Centre, Rte 71) Catch all the latest Hollywood flicks at this cinema.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

SAAirlink (☎ 015-288 0166; www.saairlink.co.za), with offices at the airport, flies daily to/from Jo'burg (R820 to R1160 one way). **Polokwane airport** (☎ 015-288 0122) is 5km north of town.

BUS

Translux (☎ 015-295 5548; www.translux.co.za; cnr Joubert & Thabo Mbeki Sts) runs services to Pretoria (R140, 3½ hours), Jo'burg (R140, 4½ hours) and Lusaka (R350, 24 hours). It also runs the cheaper City to City buses, which serve a number of smaller towns.

Greyhound (☎ 011-276 8500; www.greyhound.co.za) links Polokwane with Jo'burg (R165, five hours) and Harare (R280, 12 hours). There isn't an office in town, but you can book through Triple K Travel Services (opposite). Buses stop on Civic Sq.

North Link Tours (☎ 015-291 1867; 13 Library Gardens, Hans Van Rensburg St) runs daily (10am) buses between Polokwane and Jo'burg. They stop at Mokopane (R45, 40 minutes), Mookgophong (R40, 1¼ hours), Pretoria (R100,

THE VENDA & NDEBELE PEOPLES

Limpopo is home to a rich ethnic tapestry. The main ethnic group in the area, the Venda people, have obscure origins although it's believed that they migrated across the Limpopo River sometime in the early 18th century to settle in the Soutpansberg area. When they arrived they called their new home 'Venda' or 'Pleasant Land'.

The Boers came into contact with the Venda at the end of the 18th century and noted their extensive use of stone to build walls. The Venda were skilled in leather and beadwork, and were distinguished for their grain vessels that doubled as artwork hung from their huts.

Traditional Venda society shows respect for the very young and the very old – the young having recently been with ancestors and the old about to join their ancestors. The Venda king (*kgosi*) is considered a living ancestor and must be approached on hands and knees.

Women enjoy high status within Venda society and can inherit property from their father if there is no male heir. Rituals cannot be performed unless the oldest daughter of a family is present. One of the most important Venda rituals is the snake (*domba*) dance, which serves as a coming of age ritual for young women.

A sub-group, the Lemba regard themselves as the nobility of the Venda. The Lemba have long perplexed scholars as they seem to have had contact with Islam. However, they themselves claim to be one of the lost tribes of Israel. Traditionally they keep kosher, wear head coverings and observe the Sabbath. Recent DNA testing even shows a genetic quality similar to Jews elsewhere.

Another ethnic group, the Ndebele, entered the region from KwaZulu-Natal at least 100 years earlier. The structure of their authority was similar to the Zulu, with several tiers of governance. A headman (*ikozi*) oversaw each community.

Ndebele, who today number around 600,000, are renowned for their beadwork, which goes into making rich tapestries, toys, wall decorations, baskets, bags and clothing. You can see examples of their work at www.thebeadsite.com/ub-nbart.htm. Traditionally, women wear copper and brass rings around their arms and neck, symbolising faithfulness to their husband.

Inevitably, the Venda and Ndebele peoples came into violent contact with their neighbours – the Boers, Swazis, Pedi and Tonga. It was the Boers who emerged victorious and annexed the Venda land into the Transvaal. During apartheid, both groups were forced onto 'homelands' that were given nominal self-rule.

The Thohoyandou Arts & Culture Centre (p502) is a good place to acquaint yourself with Limpopo's ethnic groups.

3½ hours) and Jo'burg (R120, 4½ hours). Buses depart from outside Library Gardens.

MINIBUS TAXI

The main minibus taxi rank is on the corner of President Kruger and Devenish Sts. Destinations and fares from Polokwane include Thohoyandou (R30, 2½ hours), Makhadu (R20, 1¼ hours) and Jo'burg (R105, five hours).

TRAIN

The **Bosveld** (☎ 086-000 8888) passes through Polokwane daily (except Saturday) en route between Jo'burg and Musina. Fares include: Jo'burg (1st/2nd class R110/75, eight hours), Makhadu (1st/2nd class R70/40, four hours) and Musina (1st/2nd class R100/70, 7¼ hours).

BUSHVELD

The Bushveld region occupies the south-western section of the province and is flat, dry and the most typical of South African savanna. It includes a string of towns along the N1, including Mokopane (Potgietersrus), Mookgophong (Naboomspruit) and Modimolle (Nylstroom), as well as the holiday resort of Bela-Bela (Warmbaths). West of the N1, the bushveld turns into the rolling mountains and scenic valleys of the Waterberg Range.

MOKOPANE (POTGIETERSRUS) & AROUND

☎ 015 / pop 120,000

This conservative town (they all seem to be up this way), 227km north of Pretoria, was settled early by Voortrekkers, not without resistance from the people already living there. Things are quieter now, and the town is an important base of operations for platinum and diamond mining. Fruit farms are another part of the economy – the largest citrus farm in the southern hemisphere, the Zedebiela Citrus estate, is nearby.

The **Mokopane Tourism Association** (☎ 015-491 8458; www.mogalakwena.org.za; 97 Thabo Mbeki Dr; ☎ 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is on Rte 101 and has plenty of local information.

You can get online at **Post Net** (☎ 015-491 1317; Crossing Mall, Thabo Mbeki Dr; per 15 min R10; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat).

Sights

The **Arend Dieperink Museum** (☎ 015-491 9735; adult/student/child R3/1/1; ☎ 7.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri), at the back of the Publicity Association, tells the story of the local people's resistance to the Voortrekkers.

Makapan's Caves (☎ 015-491 8458; adult/student R25/15), 23km northeast of town, is a palaeontological site of world significance, and has yielded bones of an early human, known as *Australopithecus africanus*, radiocarbon-dated to be three million years old. The Cave of Hearths records human development from the early Stone Age through to the Iron Age. In 1854, the caves were also the site of chief Makapan's resistance to the advancing Voortrekkers. You must pre-book visits at the Mokopane Tourism Association.

The **Game Breeding Centre** (☎ 015-491 4314; Thabo Mbeki Dr; adult/child R15/8; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm Sat & Sun), on Rte 101, is a breeding centre for the National Zoo in Pretoria and has a wide variety of native and exotic animals. You can drive through the reserve.

Sleeping & Eating

Thabaphaswa (☎ 015-491 4882, 012-346 3550; thabaphaswa@absamail.co.za; camp sites per person R40; hut per person bare/furnished R85/110; ☎ ☎) If you don't mind roughing it a little, this unique property offers accommodation in climber's huts. The huts are small, but there are nearby patios with braai pits, plus open-air showers. If this sounds a little basic, there is also a furnished chalet for two people (R300). The area offers good rock-climbing routes, but you'll need all your own equipment. To get there, take the Percy Fyfe Rd from Mokopane. After 12km, turn at the 'Thabaphaswa Hiking and Mountains Bike Trail' sign. It's 2.1km to the gate and then another 1.3km to the homestead.

Game Breeding Centre (☎ 015-491 4314; Thabo Mbeki Dr; per person R120; ☎) Possibly the best deal in town, the Game Breeding Centre has four large rooms in its guesthouse, each with private bathroom. You also have the pleasure of watching breeding pairs of monkeys go about their daily affairs.

Koos Se Tonteldoos (☎ 015-491 4317, 082-979 0833; kobusmeyer@hotmail.com; 31 Thabo Mbeki Dr; s/d R180/250; ☎) Certainly not your usual guesthouse, this place has rooms wedged into the back of an antique shop. Just be sure to keep your door closed lest the customers

pop in and start buying up the bric-a-brac in your room. On the plus side, there's a kitchen for self-caterers and a braai in the yard out the back.

Protea Hotel – The Park (☎ 015-491 3101; www.proteahotels.com; Thabo Mbeki Dr; s/d with breakfast R400/550; ☎ ☎ ☎) This business-style option is part of a chain of hotels scattered all over this part of the country. This branch offers the plushiest digs in town.

Oaks Pub & Grill (☎ 015-491 4355; Hooge St; mains R25-65; ☎ lunch & dinner) Adjoining Lonely Oak Hotel, this dark diner offers lively, bar-style eats (read: steaks and seafood) until midnight.

Getting There & Away

Translux (☎ 015-491 8457; www.translux.co.za; Thabo Mbeki Dr), next to the Wimpy restaurant, has buses to Polokwane (R45, one hour) and Jo'burg (R125, three hours).

Northern Link (☎ 015-491 4124; Thabo Mbeki Dr) buses run to Polokwane (R45, one hour) and Jo'burg (R105, three hours). You can buy tickets from Oasis Lodge Hotel on the main road through town – they stop here too.

Polokwane to Mokopane costs about R20 in a minibus taxi.

MOOKGOPHONG (NABOOMSPRUIT) & AROUND

☎ 014 / pop 12,000

Still plain old 'Naboom' to its Afrikaner residents, this innocuous little town sits at the hub of a rich agricultural area. Conservative, small-town attitudes prevail, but the local, home-distilled brandy (*mampoer*) injects a little life come the weekend.

The 3000-hectare **Nylsvley Nature Reserve** (☎ 014-743 1074; adult/child/vehicle R10/5/20; ☎ ☎ 6am-6pm), 20km south of Naboom, is one of the country's best places to see birds (there are a listed 426 species) and has a basic **camp site** (☎ 014-743 1074; camp sites R50). For the reserve, head 13km south on the N1 and turn east on to the road to Boekenhout for 8km.

Giraffes, kudus and zebras stroll through the grounds of **Inyathi Game Lodge** (☎ 014-743 2762; www.inyathigamelodge.co.za; tented camp sites/cottages per person R120/150; ☎). There are four-bed cottages and tented camps (without bedding) at this well-equipped lodge. Oh, and a pub too. It's 10km from Mookgophong.

For accommodation, try **Die Frei Gastehuis** (☎ 014-743 2981; guesthouse@mjvn.co.za; 80 Vierde St;

per person with breakfast R200). It has a tropical garden and a big terrace for cocktail sipping. Head up Louis Trichardt St, turn right at the post office, keep going and it's on the left.

Getting There & Away

Translux (☎ 015-491 8457; www.translux.co.za) and **North Link Tours** (☎ 015-291 1867) buses stop in town; the fare to Polokwane is R80/40 (1¼ hours) respectively. Minibus taxis run to Mokopane (R15, 30 minutes).

MODIMOLLE (NYLSTROOM)

☎ 014 / pop 20,000

Modimolle (Place of the Spirits), a small town in cattle country, was named Nylstroom by Voortrekkers who thought they'd found the source of the Nile. After all, the river here seemed to fit the biblical description of the Nile: it was a river, it was in Africa and it had papyrus reeds growing along the banks.

Modimolle Info & Tourism (☎ 014-717 1818; www.modimolletourism.net; 31 Nelson Mandela Dr; ☎ ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) provides information and arranges tours. It's 1.3km east of Rte 101, along Nelson Mandela Dr.

Avuxeni Motel & Caravan Park (☎ 014-717 4005; www.avuxeni.com; camp sites R80, s/d R420/620; ☎ ☎), 3km north of Modimolle on Rte 101 to Mookgophong, has everything for the weary Voortrekker wishing to rest, water the horses, oil the wagon wheels and play putt-putt. You can camp, or stay in the attached motel.

Shangri-La (☎ 014-718 1600; www.shangri-la.co.za; s/d R450/620; ☎ ☎), 10km from the Kranskop tollgate, has thatched rondavels in a magnificent bush setting – it's perfect for escaping the hustle and bustle of the cities for a few days. This lodge is off Rte 33 on the Eersbwoond road.

BELA-BELA (WARMBATHS)

☎ 014 / pop 37,200

The small, soporific town of Bela-Bela (Warmbaths) has grown on the back of the hot springs discovered by the Tswana in the early 19th century. Around 22,000L of the warm stuff bubbles out of the earth every hour and there's no shortage of folk from the big cities to soak it up.

Bela-Bela Community Tourism Association (☎ 014-736 3694; www.belabelatourism.co.za; the Waterfront, Old Pretoria Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat)

is in the Waterfront development, on the main road into town.

The **hydro spa** (☎ 014-736 2200; www.aventura.co.za; Voortrekker St; adult/child R60/50, 5-10pm adult & child R40; ☎ 7am-4pm & 5-10pm) at the Aventura Resort is said to be the second biggest of its kind in the world and certainly sits at the centre of the Bela-Bela universe. Admission is cheaper in the evening.

Thaba Kwena Crocodile Farm (☎ 014-736 5059; tkwena@lantic.net; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) is home to more than 10,000 crocodiles. These beasts are bred for their meat, which is served in restaurants worldwide. It's located about 8km north of Bela-Bela.

Sleeping & Eating

Aventura Spa Warmbaths (☎ 014-736 2200; www.aventura.co.za; Voortrekker St; camp sites per person R50, plus per tent R80, r with breakfast R800, 2-/4-bed chalet R590/900; ☎ ☎) Swimming-pool smells pervade every nook and cranny, but the town's headline resort offers comfortable rooms, camping, and self-contained chalets. Watersports are also on offer.

De Draai Gastehuis (☎ 014-736 4379, 082-820 0673; per person with breakfast R200) Located 10km north of town, this place offers comfortable, private rooms. It's not a very exciting place but there aren't many options around in this range. If you are coming from the south, turn right at the first set of traffic lights after the bridge (opposite the cinema) and keep going.

Elephant Springs Hotel (☎ 014-736 2101; www.avuxeni.com; 31 Sutter Rd; s/d with breakfast R455/670; ☎ ☎ ☎) A quick stroll from the spa, this is a typical resort-style hotel with plenty of colour, but not a whole lot of atmosphere.

O'Hagans (☎ 014-736 5068; Old Pretoria Rd; mains R30-60; ☎ 10am-10pm; ☎ ☎) Bring on the green paint and the Dublin car-boot-sale bric-a-brac. This Irish theme pub offers tasty food and decent beer. It's at the Waterfront, near the Tourism Association.

Dros (☎ 014-736 5223; cnr Marx & Potgieter Sts; mains R40-70; ☎ ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎ ☎) One of the most popular restaurants in town, Dros offers your standard steak and seafood menu in stone and wrought iron surrounds. In summer, chill out on the patio where a lovely mist keeps things cool.

Getting There & Away

Translux (☎ 015-295 5548; www.translux.co.za) buses run through Bela-Bela en route between

Jo'burg (R100, two hours) and Polokwane (R95, 2½ hours).

Minibus taxis run from behind the cinema on the corner of Marx and Potgieter Sts to towns in the area, including Modimolle (R15, 20 minutes).

THE WATERBERG

The 150km-long Waterberg range, which makes up part of the Bushveld region, stretches from Thabazimbi in Limpopo's southwest up to the Lapalala River. It is a wild and inspirational place, with *sourveld* (a type of grassland) and bushveld etched by rivers.

Horse Riding Tours

The rolling terrain of the Waterberg Range is ideal for exploring on horseback, and several operators and lodges that can set you up with a steed. Each one charges around R180 to R250 for a two- to three-hour ride. Each of the following is located close to Vaalwater:

Equus Horse Safaris (☎ 014-721 0063; www.equus.co.za) Day rides only and no accommodation. Accepts cash payment only.

Horizon Horseback Adventures (☎ 014-755 4003; www.ridinginafrica.com) Offers the greatest variety of options, including an eight-day horse safari in the Dinaka Wildlife Reserve.

M'Solosolo (☎ 014-755 4106; msolosolo@telkomsa.net) A hunting lodge that also has horse riding.

Thabazimbi

☎ 014 / pop 10,300

Thabazimbi (Mountain of Iron) is 129km north of Rustenburg on Rte 510. Nearby is the imposing Kransberg (2100m), the highest peak of the Waterberg.

Ben Alberts Nature Reserve (☎ 014-777 1670; admission R15; ☎ 6am-6pm), about 7km south of town, has an abundance of wildlife and good wildlife-viewing vantage points. Accommodation in the reserve is in chalets (R170 for two people).

Marakele National Park

This rather isolated **national park** (☎ 014-777 1745; www.sanparks.org/parks/marakele; adult/child R60/30; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) is in the heart of the Waterberg's spectacular mountain country. Elephants, rhinos and many other large wildlife species, apart from lions, are now resident, with many having been relocated

from Kruger National Park. The birdlife is prolific and includes the largest colony of the endangered Cape vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*) in the world (currently 800 breeding pairs).

The park can be reached from Thabazimbi by sealed road, but in the park itself, the roads deteriorate markedly and a 4WD is needed to access some of the best trails. From the north, there is a rough access road 6km past Vaalwater, over the spectacular Bakkers Pass.

The **booking office** (☎ from 8am) is on the Thabazimbi-Alma road, 3km (on a limestone road) from where this road intersects with the Matlabas-Rooiberg road; entry is on the left and is signposted.

There is four-bed tented accommodation in the **Tlopi Tent Camp** (d R565, extras per person R104), located 17km from reception. These furnished tents, on the banks of the Matlabas River, have a bathroom, and kitchen with refrigerator and stove. There are communal barbecue facilities.

The park also offers some **tent sites** (2-person site R110, extras per person R38) at Bontle camping site.

Vaalwater

☎ 014 / pop 1100

A reasonable place to base yourself for exploration trips into the Waterberg, tiny Vaalwater is strung along Rte 33, around 60km northwest of Modimolle.

The Black Momba Centre has a Spar supermarket and the **Waterberg Tourism office** (☎ 014-755 3535; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), which can arrange tours and has Internet access (R40 per hour).

The only backpackers in this area, friendly **Zeederberg Cottage & Backpackers** (☎ 082-332 7088; www.zeederbergs.co.za; camp sites R30, dm/s/d R60/200/300; ☎ ☎), is just off Rte 33, about 2km past Vaalwater (coming from Modimolle), behind the Spar supermarket. It is conveniently situated halfway between Lapalala and Marakele.

Big Five Restaurant (☎ 014-755 3567; ☎ ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner), on the highway in Vaalwater, is a good bet for pizza, pasta and burgers. In the evening it will be the only eating place open.

The refreshing **Bush Stop Café** (☎ 014-755 3508; Black Momba Centre; ☎ ☎ breakfast & lunch) serves organic products, vegetarian dishes, salads

and sandwiches. They also have a second-hand bookshop.

Lapalala Wilderness

The grunting hippos, sweaty blue wildebeests and tank-like rhinos of **Lapalala Wilderness** (☎ 014-755 4395; lapalala@parksgroup.co.za; ☎ 7am-6pm) can keep visitors enthralled for several days. This 25,600-hectare wilderness area also sports zebra and twenty species of antelope, not to mention more than 270 species of birds. Unfortunately, unless you stay here, you can only come as a day visitor.

Ask the rangers to point out the unusual termite mounds built under layers in the sandstone. It appears that ants have managed to lift the sandstone slabs and build beneath them, earning them the name 'Arnold Schwarzenegger ants'. Lapalala is famed for its history of conservation: thousands of children, often the disadvantaged, have gone through wilderness conservation courses.

Small self-catering bush camps are scattered through the wilderness; accommodation ranges from R180 to R220 per person. There are cooking facilities but you must bring your own supplies. There are mid-week specials; book in advance as Lapalala is popular.

The **Rhino Cultural Museum** (☎ 014-755 4428; adult/child R5/2; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun), by the Melkrivier school, offers a detailed insight into all things rhinoceros. The lone black rhino kept here is fed daily at 4pm (admission adult/child R20/10).

Lapalala Wilderness is north of Modimolle, in the heart of the Waterberg. From Modimolle take Rte 33 to Vaalwater and from there head in the direction of Melkrivier. Take the turn-off to Melkrivier school 40km from Vaalwater, and continue for 25km to Lapalala.

SOUTPANSBERG

The Soutpansberg region incorporates the most northern part of South Africa, scraping southern Zimbabwe. The rainforest of the Soutpansberg is strikingly lush compared with the hot, dry lowveld to the north. The N1 towns of Makhado (Louis Trichardt) and Musina are here, as is the ancient Venda region to the east.

MAKHADO (LOUIS TRICHARDT)

☎ 015 / pop 90,000

Scruffy Makhado is a little hard on the eyes – a stark contrast to the verdant countryside that surrounds it. Treat the town as a springboard to some worthwhile country lodges, nature reserves and hiking trails in the nearby mountains.

Information

ABSA (cnr Songozwi Rd & Krogh Sts) Has an ATM and exchange facilities.

PCS Computers (☎ 015-516 4122; 84 Krogh St; per 30min R12; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Internet access.

Police station (☎ 015-519 4300; Krogh St)

Soutpansberg Tourist Office (☎ 015-516 0040; www.tourismsoutpansberg.co.za; Songozwi Rd ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Activities

The spectacular mountains are the major drawcard here, boasting an extraordinary diversity of flora and fauna, including 615 of South Africa's 900 bird species. For a reliable tour operator, contact **Face Africa** (☎ 015-516 2076; faceafrica@mweb.co.za; per day R1200, maximum 4 people) or **Travel Africa Trails** (☎ 082-959 0102; africa@lantic.net; per day R1400, maximum 4 people).

Sleeping

There are several options in Makhado itself, but the best way to soak up the Soutpansberg is to stay in the hills above town – ask the tourist office for a map.

Makhado Municipal Caravan Park (☎ 015-519 3025; www.caravanparks.co.za/makhado; Grobler St; camp sites per person R45) A central camping option.

Louis Trichardt Lodge (☎ 015-516 2222; www.ltt lodge.co.za; Hlanganani St; s/d R200/270; ☎) This welcoming place on the main road has some basic rooms, kitchenettes and a braai area.

Mountain View Hotel (☎ 015-517 7031; www.mountainviewhotel.co.za; s/d with breakfast R275/385) This resort-style place, on the road to Musina, has clipped gardens, charming staff and the (often empty) Merry Monk pub. The rooms, however, are a little dowdy.

Ultimate Guest House (☎ 015-517 7005; ultimategh@lantic.net; s/d with breakfast R310/410; ☎) With buckets of quirky character and colourful, individually styled rooms, this beautifully remote place prides itself on its convivial at-

mosphere and good nature. It's 10km from the centre – turn left 100m after Mountain View, head 1.6km along the dirt track and it'll be on your right.

Eating

Cafe d'Art (☎ 015-516 5760; 129 Krogh St; mains R20-50; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Whether kicking back in the garden listening to the chirruping crickets or sitting inside among the African paintings and pottery, this is a top spot for lazy breakfasts, lunches and light dinners.

Ricky's Takeaway (☎ 015-516 0414; 36 Baobab St; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) This place gets absolutely packed with people trying to get hold of locally famous sausages, burgers and sandwiches.

Elephant & Castle (☎ 072-895 6541; mains R20-35; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎) If you're heading south, save your appetite for this cosy inn, 13km out of town on the N1.

Getting There & Away

The **Louis Trichardt Travel Agency** (☎ 015-516 5042; ☎ 8am-1pm & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat), down an alley off Burger St (opposite Bradlows), is the local agent for Greyhound and Translux buses. Most buses linking Makhado with Jo'burg (R180, 5½ hours) and Harare (R375, 11 hours) stop by the Caltex petrol station on the corner of the N1 and Baobab St.

The train station is at the southwestern end of Kruger St. The **Bosveld** (☎ 086-000 8888) stops here and links Makhado with Jo'burg (1st/2nd class R150/105, 11 hours) and Musina (1st/2nd class R70/40, 3½ hours).

The minibus taxi rank is in the Shoprite supermarket car park off Burger St, a block northeast of Songozwi Rd. Destinations and fares from Makhado include Thohoyandou (R20, 1½ hours), Polokwane (R20, 1¼ hours) and Musina (R30, 1½ hours).

AROUND MAKHADO
Soutpansberg Hiking Trails

The two-day 20.5km **Hanglip Trail** includes a climb up a 1719m peak; it begins at Hanglip forest station. Take precautions against malaria, bilharzia and ticks. Overnight accommodation is in huts and there's a trail fee of R40 per person per day, which includes a good walking map. Contact the **Soutpansberg**

Tourist Office (opposite) for more information and details of how to make reservations.

Perched in the clouds, **Lesheba Wilderness** (☎ 015-593 0076; www.lesheba.co.za; rondavel R250, r with full-board per person R850; ☎) is an excellent hideaway based on a Venda-style village, recreated with the help of acclaimed Venda artist, Noria Mabasa. Surrounded by wildlife, including rare brown hyenas and leopards, and with greenery supplied by 340 tree species, the resort offers self-catering accommodation in rondavels, or a full-board option in bedrooms with cosy fireplaces and outdoor showers. It's 36km west of Makhado on Rte 522.

Lajuma Mountain Retreat (☎ 015-593 0352; www.lajuma.com; bungalow/lodge per person R130/150) is 7km off Rte 522 between Makhado and Vivo on the flanks of Letjuma (Soutpansberg's highest peak). This beautiful region is a hiker's paradise and there are archaeological sites, rare animals and a host of outdoor activities. A number of sites have self-catering accommodation, from basic bungalows to a more opulent lodge. Call ahead to check road conditions.

Ben Lavin Nature Reserve

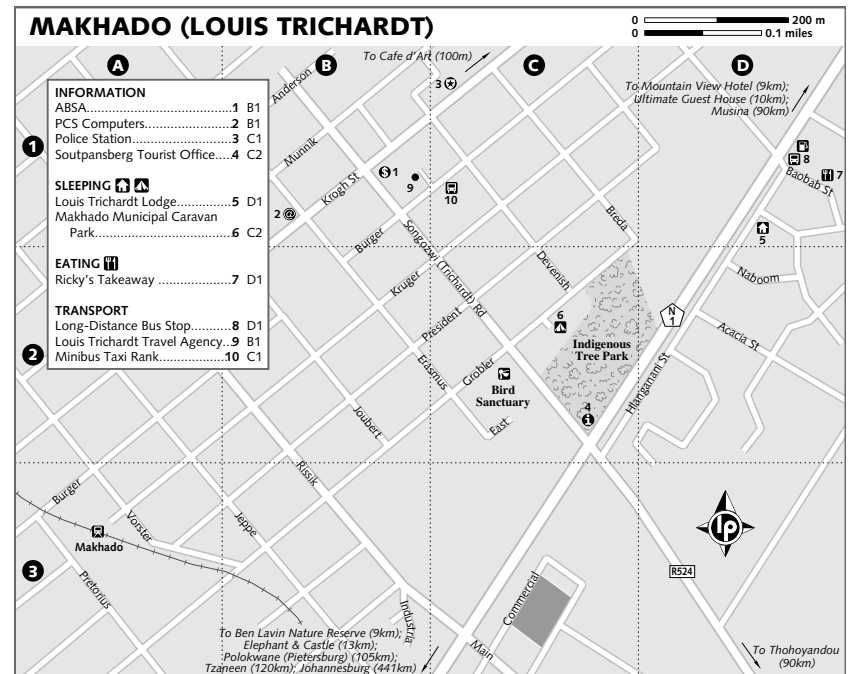
Although somewhat neglected, this **reserve** (☎ 015-516 4534; www.satis.co.za/benlavin; adult/child R30/10; ☎ 6am-6pm) is still worth visiting for its walking and mountain bike trails. The reserve contains 240 bird species, as well as giraffes, zebras and jackals. A range of **accommodation** (camp sites per person R40; d hut R215, per extra person R68; d lodge R265, per extra person R80) is available.

Take the N1 south from Makhado for about 10km, then take the Fort Edward turn-off to the left. After about 3km, you'll see the entrance gate on your left.

MUSINA

☎ 015 / pop 20,000

The closest town to the Zimbabwe border, Musina is a hot, dusty settlement with a frontier feel to it. The town grew around the copper mines, which operated from 1905 until the early 1990s. Just as important is the still-active DeBeers Venetia diamond mine, the second largest in the southern hemisphere. Away from the mines the town centre is a sleepy place, but there are moves



to promote Musina as a regional centre in its own right, along with nearby tourist attractions such as the excellent Mapungubwe National Park.

Information

ABSA (☎ 015-534 0746; 6 National Rd) Has change facilities and an ATM. It is on the N1 as it passes through the centre of town.

Computer Shop Internet Café (☎ 015-534 1206; Palm Centre; per hr R20; ☎ 8.15am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

Limpopo Travel (☎ 015-534 2220; limpopotrav@lantic.net; National Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) Can help with all travel bookings. It's near the KFC.

Musina Tourism (☎ 015-534 3500; www.golimpopo.com; National Rd; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) In a thatched hut on the way into town on the N1 from Polokwane.

Sights

Giant baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) trees characterise the region and it is on the road south of here that you will see some of the grandest – the largest in the country, near Sagole, is 3000 years old! Legend has it that the gods inverted the trees, which used to roam unhindered, so that their roots faced skywards.

Musina Nature Reserve (☎ 015-534 3235; adult/car R5/7; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri), 5km south of the town off the N1, was established to protect the baobabs. There are animals such as nyalas and kudus. You can camp in permanent tents (R40 per person), all with reed-enclosed *lapa* areas, or stay in one of the chalets (R120 per person).

Sleeping & Eating

Limpopo River Lodge (☎ 015-534 0204; riverlodge@limpopo.co.za; 6 National Rd; s R125-160, d R200-280; ☎) Inspiration didn't play a role in the planning of this place, and the décor is rather flaky, but the rooms are fine and mercifully cheap for Limpopo.

Ihala Country Lodge (☎ 015-534 3220; www.places.co.za/html/2175.html; Rte 572; s/d R315/415; ☎) This pleasant lodge has some very nice self-catering units, surrounded by plenty of bush-style hush and big, open spaces. It is 8km from Musina on Rte 572, on the way to Mapungubwe.

Dongola Ranch (☎ 015-533 1948; www.dongola.co.za; s/d R315/415; ☎) Considered one of Limpopo's better private wildlife reserves, Dongola Ranch has a rich variety of wildlife

species, including white rhinos, giraffes, leopards and hyenas. It's on the road to Mapungubwe, about 45km out of Musina.

Buffalo Ridge Spur (☎ 015-534 1127; National Rd; mains R30-60; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎) Corporate cowboy attitude and large platters of steak and ribs feature prominently at this chain restaurant, located near the tourist office.

Getting There & Away

The Zimbabwean border at Beitbridge, 14km north of Musina, is open 24 hours. If you are coming from Zimbabwe, there is a large taxi rank on the South African side of the border, 1km from the crossing itself. For detailed information on crossing the border into Zimbabwe, see p628.

BUS

Translux (☎ 015-295 5548; www.translux.co.za) buses on the Jo'burg-Harare route stop at the Limpopo River Lodge (left). Jo'burg costs R190 (7½ hours) and Harare costs R250 (10 hours).

MINIBUS TAXI

If you're coming from Zimbabwe and want to take a minibus taxi further south than Musina, catch one at the border as there are many more there than in Musina. Destinations and fares from Musina include Makhado (R30, 1½ hours), Polokwane (R40, 2½ hours) and Jo'burg (R100, 7½ hours). Taxis between the border and Musina cost R15 (20 minutes).

TRAIN

The daily (except Saturday) **Bosvelder** (☎ 086-000 8888) terminates at Musina. It travels (very slowly) to Jo'burg (1st/2nd class R185/125, 14 hours) via Makhado and Polokwane.

MAPUNGUBWE NATIONAL PARK

The call of the wild is perhaps nowhere louder than in Limpopo's newest attraction, the **Mapungubwe National Park** (☎ 015-534 2014; www.sanparks.org/parks/mapungubwe; adult/child R60/30; ☎ 6am-6pm). Opened up to the public in September 2004, this spectacular park covers 28,000 hectares of hot African landscape. Mapungubwe incorporates many of South Africa's most significant Iron and Stone Age sites within the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (a Unesco World Heritage Site)

and boasts populations of all of the Big Five, with almost unparalleled opportunities for wildlife-spotting. Mapungubwe will only improve if plans to incorporate it into an 800,000-hectare Trans-Frontier Conservation Area that will stretch into Botswana and Zimbabwe come to fruition.

The park is as much about history as wildlife. In April 1933, while digging on Mapungubwe Hill, researchers uncovered an 11th-century grave site containing ornaments, jewellery, bowls and amulets, much of it covered in gold. The most spectacular of these Iron Age pieces was a small gold plated rhino. Apartheid, however, kept this discovery under wraps, as the old government attempted to suppress any historical information that would have proven cultural sophistication.

The hill offers an excellent insight into Zimbabwe civilisation and many of the artefacts can be seen in an on-site museum. Short walks (R30) and fully-catered, three-day trails (R1800) to the major sites are already available.

At the Leokwe Rest Camp you can camp (R70), or stay in opulent, two-bed chalets (R400; ☎).

The park is at the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo rivers, north of the Musina to Pontdrift road. It's a 60km drive from Musina on Rte 572.

VENDA REGION

Perhaps the most enigmatic section of the Soutpansberg region, this is the traditional homeland of the Venda people, who moved to the area from modern-day Zimbabwe at the start of the 18th century. Long neglected under the apartheid regime, the Venda region is a world away from the South Africa of uptown Jo'burg; here even a short diversion from the freeway takes you through an Africa of mist-clad hilltops, dusty streets and mud huts. A land where myth and legend continue to play a major role in everyday life, Venda is peppered with lakes and forests that are of great religious significance, and the region continues to support a thriving artistic heritage.

Thohoyandou & Sibasa

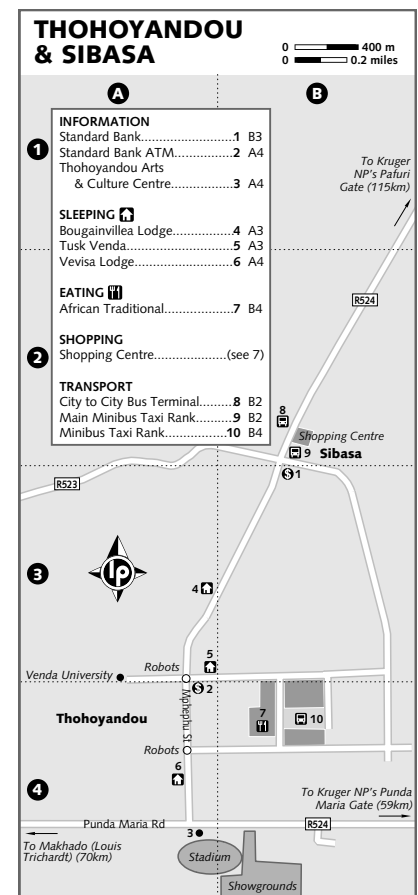
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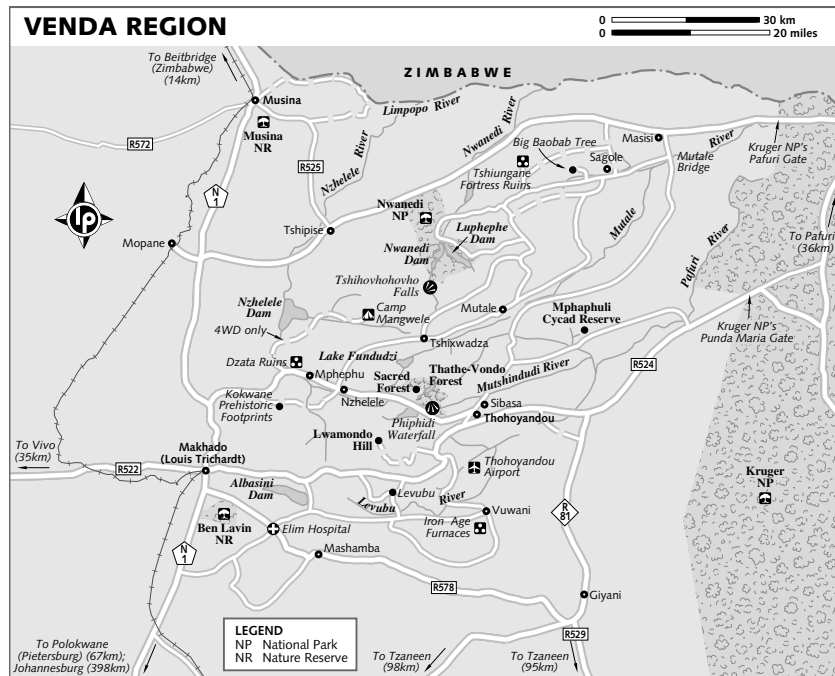
Created as the capital of the apartheid-era Venda Homeland, the city of Thohoyan-

dou (Elephant Head) blends some impressively functional town-planning with a healthy dose of African chaos – matching a looming shopping centre and adjacent casino resort with all the push-and-shove of the busy backstreet marketplace. The adjacent town of Sibasa is a few kilometres north. Most public transport leaves from Sibasa.

Thohoyandou is an easy 65km drive to Kruger's Punda Maria Gate, and a good entry/exit point if you plan to explore the park's far north.

Standard Bank (Mphephu St), on the main road through Thohoyandou, has ATMs. Tours to nearby sights, including Lake Fundudzi, can be arranged by a local guide, **Beth Mashawana**





(☎ 072-401 1832; day trip for 4 from R350), as well as through **Thohoyandou Arts & Culture Centre** (☎ 082-401 9756; Punda Maria Rd, Thohoyandou; 🕒 6am-6pm). As well as selling crafts (some good, some not so good) from around the region, manager Mashudu Dima also organises full-day tours (R350, minimum three people) that include transport, village visits and a trip to Lake Fundudzi. Those interested in the arts should ask to meet Noria Mabasa, one of the region's best-known female artists, who sculpts traditional figures in clay and wood.

SLEEPING & EATING

Bougainvillea Lodge (☎ 015-962 4064; www.bougainvillalodge.com; Mphephu St; s/d with breakfast R250/330) As promised by the name, there is plenty of blooming bougainvillea here – and plenty of smiles too.

Vevisa Lodge (☎ 015-962 5252; vevisa@iafrica.com; 758 Mphephu St; s/d with breakfast R295/330) This place opts for mock-traditional décor, with fake mud walls and thatched roofs, and has clean rooms.

Tusk Venda (☎ 015-962 4600; www.tusk-resorts.co.za; Mphephu St; s/d with breakfast R515/710; 🚗 🚽 🚿)

A little slice of Vegas in the heart of Venda, this casino resort looks rather incongruous among the local hustle and bustle. It offers plenty of trimmings and plenty of ways to fritter away a penny or two.

All the usual fast-food establishments are represented in the shopping centre. **African Traditional** (buffet R30; 🕒 breakfast, lunch & dinner), in the heart of the centre, offers something a little different, including a good selection of local favourites: chicken heart, chicken gizzard and lamb stew.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

City to City (☎ 015-295 5548; www.translux.co.za) buses run from a terminal just up Rte 524 from the centre of Sibasa. They leave every morning at 8.30am for Jo'burg (R100, 8½ hours) and Pretoria (R100, 7½ hours).

The main minibus taxi rank is in Sibasa, on the corner of the road from Thohoyandou. Destinations and fares include Makhado (R20, 1½ hours) and Jo'burg (R100, nine hours).

In Thohoyandou, minibus taxis congregate in the car park of the shopping centre

near the Tusk Venda. The fare to Sibasa is R3.50.

Nwanedi National Park

The dry northern side of the Soutpansberg provides an extremely scenic backdrop to **Nwanedi National Park** (☎ 015-539 0723; adult/vehicle R10/15; 🕒 6am-6pm), although it's a contrast to the Venda's lush landscapes. The vegetation is mainly mopani and mixed woodland and the major walk in the park is to the scenic **Tshihovohovho Falls**. You can hire canoes for R50.

The park has **camp sites** (per person R20, plus per tent R50), and four-person **rondavels** (R350). Basic supplies are available and there's a fully licensed restaurant.

You can reach Nwanedi park from Thohoyandou, entering at the Nwanedi gate; though the road is scenic there is a good chance of getting lost, and there are several kilometres of rough dirt road. It is simpler to come via Tshipise and enter from the west. Tshipise is the nearest place you're able to buy fuel.

Nwanedi also makes a good combination with northern Kruger National Park. A possible itinerary is to head from Thohoyandou to Kruger's Punda Maria Gate, exit Kruger via the park's northernmost Pafuri Gate, then continue on to Nwanedi and Tshipise.

Lake Fundudzi & Around

This lake is a sacred site, as its water is believed to have come from the great sea that covered the earth before land was created. The python god, who holds an important place in the rites of the Venda's matriarchal culture, lives here.

The lake is 35km northwest of Thohoyandou, but you can't visit it without permission from the lake's custodians, the Netshiavha tribe. The easiest way to get permission is to have a tour organised from Thohoyandou or Makhado. Remember that when you approach the lake you must do so with proper respect; turn your back to it, bend over, and view it from between your legs. And try not to look silly doing it.

Near the lake is **Thathe-Vondo Forest** (admission free; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat & Sun), with a (usually) drivable dirt track leading to a section of Holy Forest (13km) and a pleasant viewpoint (17km), with vistas over Lake Fundudzi.

SLEEPING

Camp Mangwele (☎ 072-631 6670; camp sites per person R40) North of Lake Fundudzi, this camping ground is situated within the rugged country of the Soutpansberg, and is accessible only by a 4WD with high ground clearance. There are hot showers, braai facilities and firewood; many activities, including

SAVING LAKE FUNDUDZI

The importance of Lake Fundudzi cannot be underestimated. The traditional custodians of the lake, the Netshiavha (People of the Pool), consider it a holy place for the burial of their dead.

For scientists, the lake is also special as it's one of South Africa's few natural freshwater lakes. Its creation, they believe, came 20,000 years ago when a rock slide blocked the path of a river, causing the lake to rise behind it.

Recent years, however, have seen quite an unholy degradation of the lake. By the late 1990s, almost half of the catchment land around the lake – virgin forest and grassland – had been cut down to make way for tree and fruit plantations. This led to erosion, deterioration in water quality and loss of plant and animal species.

Access to the lake has long been a privilege granted by the Netshiavha. This was undermined in the mid-1990s when a road was constructed right down to the edge of the lake, giving open access to anyone with a vehicle. Soon picnickers arrived and rubbish began piling up on the lake shore. The current chief of the Netshiavha suggests that the loss of traditional tribal values has contributed to the degradation of the lake.

In recent years the chief launched a campaign to protect the lake. The Netshiavha, as well as neighbouring tribes, have implemented new laws to limit land use around the lake and mitigate the effects of tourism. Long-term management strategies are being hashed out with government bodies, the Mondli Wetlands Project (www.wetland.org.za) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

rock climbing and mountain biking, are within range of the camp. There is also an on-site **tour guide** (☎ 082-768 8801).

To get to Camp Mangwele, head first to Makhado (not the former Louis Trichardt, but the smaller town to the north). Some 2km northeast of Makhado, turn north towards Musekwa. Follow this road for 21.7km, then turn right (east) and follow the road towards Tshixwadza. After 9km there is a sign indicating Mangwele Pothole (slightly worrying in itself); follow this road south for 1km until you reach the camp.

VALLEY OF THE OLIFANTS

These days, the Valley of the Olifants is devoid of any pachyderms, though it can still lend a feeling of the exotic. The region is culturally very rich, being the traditional home of the Tsonga-Shangaan and Lobedu peoples. It is also popular for a north-south traverse through Kruger National Park or a visit to one of the many private wildlife reserves in the Hoedspruit area (p485). The main town of Tzaneen, and the pretty village of Haenertsburg, in the Letaba Valley, make pleasant bases for trips into the scenic Modjadji and Magoebaskloof areas.

LETABA VALLEY

The Letaba Valley is east of Polokwane, between two chunks of the former Lebowa Homeland. The valley is subtropical and lush, with tea plantations and crops of tropical fruits below, and forested hills above.

At Haenertsburg the road splits in two, with the Rte 71 reaching Tzaneen via the steep Magoebaskloof Pass, while the Rte 528 runs along the more gentle George's Valley. Rte 71 is arguably the better drive, and there are plenty of places where you can get out and go for short hikes signposted from the road (see Magoebaskloof Pass, opposite).

Haenertsburg

☎ 015 / pop 300

Tucked into green peaks reminiscent of the Scottish Highlands, sedate little Haenertsburg offers an oasis of rural hush for those wanting to escape from it all. Established during the 1887 gold rush, the vil-

lage appears to have kept a little aside for a rainy day, retaining an affluent, suburban atmosphere.

INFORMATION

Magoebaskloof Tourist Association (☎ 015-276 4972; www.magoebaskloof.com; Rissik St; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat & Sun) has plenty of information and offers **Internet access** (per min R1). At the time of research there were no ATMs in town. Doubtless this will change but be prepared anyway.

ACTIVITIES

There are several good hiking trails near Haenertsburg, including the 11km **Louis Changuion Trail**, which has spectacular views.

Haenertsburg is also well endowed with operators offering outdoorsy activities.

Filly's Way (☎ 082-294 8349; michelle@slm.co.za), 2km west of town on Rte 71, offers one-hour (R110), half-day (R380) and two-day (R1950) horse trail rides.

Thaba-Metsi (☎ 083-866 1546; thabametsi@mweb.co.za) runs adventure trips in the area, including quad biking, kloofing (canyoning), rafting and mountain biking.

The **Growth Centre** (☎ 015-276 2712, 072-277 4809), 6km east of town on Rte 71 towards Tzaneen, offers holistic health remedies, reflexology and meditation. It is signposted on the road as Stanford Lake Lodge.

SLEEPING & EATING

Bali Will Will (☎ 015-276 2212; glmccomb@absamail.co.za; camp sites per person R40, s/d with breakfast R200/370; 🍷 🍷) This pleasant farmhouse offers several beautifully furnished guestrooms. There is also an adjacent cottage (per person R130) with more space. It's 2.4km out of town (follow the signs from Rte 71), but staff will pick you up from the village if you phone ahead.

Livingstone Place (☎ 015-276 5020, 082-892 5326; www.livingstoneplace.co.za; per person R150) These fairytale twee, Swiss-style chalets, 1km from town on Rte 71, are great value for keen self-caterers.

Magoebaskloof Hotel (☎ 015-276 5400; www.magoebaskloof.co.za; Rte 71; s/d with breakfast R495/690; 🍷 🍷) This business-standard place boasts monkeys, top views, plenty of trimmings and a Dutch-style pub for post-activity rehydration. It is 10km out of town, on Rte 71 towards Tzaneen.

Red Plate (☎ 083-305 2852; light meals R20-50; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Next to the Tourist Association, this café has a zen quality about it, though its menu veers more towards the run-of-the-mill sandwich and pasta crowd.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Beyer's Bus Service (☎ 015-307 5959, 082-434 3449) stops at Picasso's restaurant on Rte 71 on Friday and Sunday en route between Pretoria and Tzaneen. Fares from Haenertsburg include Tzaneen (R80, 30 minutes), Polokwane (R80, 40 minutes) and Pretoria (R180, 5½ hours).

Magoebaskloof Pass

The Magoebaskloof is the escarpment on the edge of the highveld, and the road here drops quickly down to Tzaneen and the lowveld, passing through plantations and large tracts of thick indigenous forest.

The high summer rainfall means there are a number of waterfalls in the area, including **Debengeni Falls** in the De Hoek State Forest. To get here, turn west off Rte 71 at Bruphy Sawmills.

Two recommended walking trails are the two-day, 21km **Debengeni Falls Trail** and the three-day, 40km **Dokolewa Waterfall Trail**. Overnight stays for the Dokolewa Waterfall Trail are in huts near waterfalls and streams. To book huts on these trails, contact **Komatiland Forestry Association** (☎ 012-481 3615; ecotour@safcol.co.za).

The Wheelbarrow (☎ 015-305-3039; www.tzaneen.com/thewheelbarrow; meals R30-60; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) is a great place to break up the road trip between Haenertsburg and Tzaneen. You can get good country breakfasts plus locally produced jams and juices. An avocado festival is held here in July. It's on the bottom stretch of Rte 71, near the junction with Rte 36.

TZANEEN & AROUND

☎ 015 / pop 81,000

At the hub of a rich fruit-growing area, Tzaneen, the largest town near the Letaba Valley and the second-largest in Limpopo, is perhaps best known for its avocados and mangoes – be sure to try some. Surrounded by lush, subtropical hills, this is a pleasant spot with plenty of quiet corners. At the heart of this region, it also makes a convenient base for exploring the Valley of the Olifants.

Information

ABSA (Danie Joubert St) Has an ATM and exchange facilities.

First National Bank (Danie Joubert St) ATM and exchange facilities.

Limpopo Parks & Tourism Board (☎ 015-307 3582; www.tzaneeninfo.com; Rte 71; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri)

On the Rte 71 towards Phalaborwa, it has plenty of useful information on the region. A craft centre is also located here.

Post Net (☎ 083-639 9685; Ground fl, Tzaneen Crossing Mall; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat; per hr R20) Offers Internet access.

Post office (Lannie Lane) Behind Danie Joubert St.

Tzaneen Hospital (☎ 015-307 4475; Hospital St) Southeast of the centre.

Sights & Activities

Tzaneen Museum (☎ 015-307 5258; Agatha St; donation welcome; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) has an interesting collection of Tsonga cultural artefacts including a Rain Queen ceremonial drum, and looks back at 2000 years of tribal pottery and art.

There are plenty of chances to bike, climb or hike in the nearby mountains. For adventure trips, call Thaba-Metsi (opposite).

Sleeping

Satvik Backpackers Village (☎ 015-307 3920; satvik@pixie.co.za; George's Valley Rd; camp sites R40, dm/d R70/180) Less technicolour tacky than many backpackers, Satvik offers a more rustic blend of budget accommodation, with a farm setting and beds in old workers' cottages.

Half Human Backpackers (☎ 015-304 3230; halfhumanback@telkomsa.co.za; George's Valley Rd; camp sites R40, dm/s/d R70/120/180) Out in the bush, this backpackers was just getting underway when we visited. They have a bar and accommodation in small rondavels that circle a braai area. It's 20km east of Tzaneen on the road to Phalaborwa.

Arborkark Lodge (☎ 015-307 1831; arborkark@mweb.co.za; cnr Soetdoring & Geelhout Sts; s/d with breakfast R220/250; 🍷 🍷) This motel-style offering has a laundromat, a pub, a good restaurant and functional rooms. It's quite a way from the centre, but staff will collect you if you call ahead.

Fairview River Lodge (☎ 015-307 2679; www.fairviewlodge.co.za; s/d with breakfast R350/510; 🍷 🍷 🍷) One of the town's swankiest options, this thatched, four-star place has some very comfortable self-catering chalets and a leafy tropical garden. If you ask, there are also some basic rooms for R200.

Eating

The dining scene is painfully ordinary.

Casa Blanca (☎ 015-307 2792; 9 Danie Joubert St; mains R30-60; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🍷) Casa Blanca is a popular restaurant with a mishmash of Italian food, grill and seafood. It also offers a few vegetarian dishes.

High Grove Lodge (☎ 015-307 7242; highgrove@tzaneen.co.za; Agatha Rd; mains R40-60; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) Probably the classiest place in town, it serves decent steaks, salads and a continental breakfast. It's also an upmarket hotel (single/double rooms R370/450) with 18 rooms and a pub.

Butterfield Bread (Danie Joubert St; 🍴 breakfast & lunch) This reliable bakery chain is a good spot for fresh bread and tasty treats.

Tino's Pizzeria (☎ 015-307 1893; Agatha St; mains R25-45; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🍷) This place has been around for a while now and the pizzas are still good.

Addison's (☎ 015-307 6261; cnr Soetdoring & Geelhout Sts; mains R25-60; 🍴 lunch & dinner; 🍷) In Arborpark Lodge, this is a lively little eatery, with a decent pub in which to wash your food down afterwards.

Getting There & Away

North Link Tours buses stop at the rear of the Letaba Boulevard shopping centre. They run to Jo'burg (R160, six hours) four days a week. You can book tickets at the **Caltex petrol station** (☎ 015-305 2424; Danie Joubert St).

Translux buses run to Pretoria (R140, 4½ hours), Jo'burg (R140, 5½ hours) and Phalaborwa (R100, one hour). Book tickets at the Limpopo Parks & Tourism Board (p505).

Most minibus taxis depart from a rank behind the Tzaneen Mall. Destinations and fares from Tzaneen include Duivelskloof (R7, 15 minutes) and Haenertsburg (R20, 30 minutes).

Duivelskloof

☎ 015 / pop 25,000

This small town is in the wooded hills north of Tzaneen. The name refers to the devilishly hard time the early European settlers had getting their wagons up and down the hills. Nearby is the large, black community of GaKgapane. On the road to GaKgapane, look out for the **Giant Baobab Tree** (☎ 015-309-9030; Sunland Nursery), which is probably the only tree in the world to have a bar inside of it. Tea, scones and beer are served to a maximum of 15 people at a time.

Tourist information is available from the **municipality** (☎ 015-309 9246; Botha St; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri).

Hotel Imp Inn (☎ 015-309 9253; Botha St; s/d R240/390) is a colonial-style villa housing a rather spartan hotel. It's a decent central option, though you'll find better-value in Tzaneen.

Minibus taxis depart from near the Spar on Botha St. The fare to Tzaneen is R6 (15 minutes).

Ndzalama Wildlife Reserve

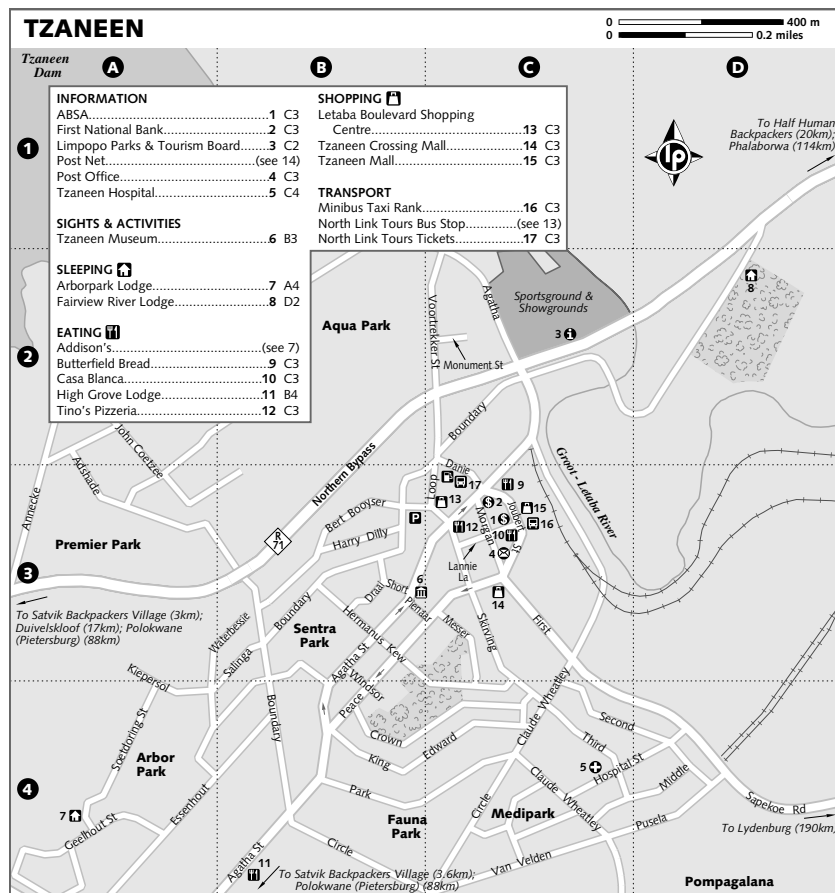
Based on Ndzalama, a spectacular, phallic rock formation, this **reserve** (☎ 015-307 3065; ndzalama@pixie.co.za; 🕒 8.30am-6pm), near Letsetile, is host to four of the Big Five (everything but buffalo is represented). No day visitors are allowed into the reserve (you have to stay at least one night).

Self-catering **accommodation** (2-bed chalet from R400) is available. You must book in advance.

To get to the reserve from Tzaneen or Phalaborwa, take Rte 71. The southern turn-off is 9km north of Gravelotte; turn right and follow the dirt road for 12km to the reserve. The northern turn-off is 28km east of Tzaneen; at this turn-off, go left. After 16km, turn right. The reserve is 4km further on.

Modjadji Nature Reserve

Covering just 305 hectares, **Modjadji Nature Reserve** (☎ 082-393 5551; adult/vehicle R10/20; 🕒 7.30am-6pm) protects forests of the ancient Modjadji cycad. In the summer mists, this place and the surrounding Vulovedu Mountains take on an ethereal atmosphere. The reserve has accommodation in **rondavels** (per person R125).



MODJADJI, THE RAIN QUEEN

In Africa it is unusual for a woman to be sovereign of a tribe, but the Rain Queen is an exception. The queen resides in the town of GaModjadji in the Bolebodu district near Duivelskloof. Every year, around November, the queen presides over a festival held to celebrate the coming of the rains. The *indunas* (tribal headmen) select people to dance, to call for rain, and to perform traditional rituals, including male and female initiation ceremonies. After the ceremony, the rain falls. The absence of rain is usually attributed to some event such as the destruction of a sacred place – a situation resolved only with further ritual.

Henry Rider Haggard's novel, *She*, is based on the story of the original Modjadji, a 16th-century refugee princess.

In June 2001, Rain Queen, Modjadji V, died in Polokwane (Pietersburg). However, in an unfortunate turn of events, her immediate heir, Princess Makheala, had died three days earlier and it wasn't until April 2003 that the 25-year-old Princess Mmakobo Modjadji was crowned Modjadji VI. It was raining on the day of the ceremony, which was taken to be a good omen. She now lives the same secluded lifestyle practiced by her predecessors – her older brother conducts administrative duties. According to custom, she will never marry, but will bear children by members of the royal family.

The road to Modjadji is pretty rough and even if you make it you won't be allowed to visit the Rain Queen. She is confined to her royal kraal and only has contact with her attendants. However, you are allowed to visit the village and can enjoy the Modjadji cycad forest, which has braai facilities and a picnic area.

Take the GaKgapane turn-off from Rte 36 about 10km north of Duivelskloof; the turn-off to the reserve is a further 18km.

PHALABORWA

☎ 015 / pop 109,000

Phalaborwa is a neatly tended stretch of well-watered suburbia – the ‘Beware Hippos’ signs seem rather out of place – with a group of guesthouses and hotels thriving on the back of the town’s proximity to the Kruger National Park. Phalaborwa means ‘Better than the South’, and was so called because Nguni tribes returned here after a foray to the south.

Phalaborwa makes an ideal starting point if you’re intending to explore central and northern Kruger. For people with limited time in South Africa, it is possible to visit Kruger by flying from Jo’burg to Phalaborwa, hiring a car for touring the park and then returning the car at Phalaborwa airport before returning by air to Jo’burg.

Phalaborwa is also a new gateway to Mozambique as it’s now possible to drive across Kruger and into Mozambique at the **Giriyondo border gate** (p627; ☎ 013-735 8919). This route is only for 4WD vehicles.

Information

Bollanoto Tourism Centre (☎ 015-781 5987; www.phalaborwa.co.za; cnr Hendrick van Eck & Pres Steyn Sts; ☎ 7am-4pm Mon-Fri) Has a community art shop and a tourist desk.

Net-o-Mania (☎ 015-781 7812; Shop 2, Phalaborwa Mall, Nelson Mandela St; per hr R25; ☎ 8.50am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Internet access.

Sights & Activities

You can tour the nearby **copper mine** (☎ 015-780 2911; admission free), said to boast the largest man-made hole in Africa, at 9am on Friday, but you must phone in advance.

The **Leka Gape organisation** (☎ 015-783 0770; www.lekagape.de) is an NGO working on community development projects in Lulekani, a township around 13km north of Phalaborwa. A tour of the township includes a visit to a workshop where handcrafts are produced. Tours are organised through Basambilu Lodge (see right).

The **Hans Merensky Estate** (☎ 015-781 3931; www.hansmerensky.com; Club Rd; 9/18-hole round R150/250), just south of Phalaborwa, has an 18-hole championship golf course with a difference:

here you have to hold your shot while wild-life, elephants included, crosses the fairways. Be careful – the wildlife is ‘wild’.

Mad Safari Tours (☎ 072-536 0667; www.madsafari.com; Airport) runs trips into Kruger, Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

Sleeping

There are scores of places to stay in Phalaborwa; many of the best are just out of town in the bush.

BUDGET

Daan & Zena’s (☎ 015-781 6049; www.daanzena.co.za; 15 Birkenhead St; camp sites per person R45, dm/s/d from R80/125/200; ☎ ☎ ☎) Bridging the gap between backpackers and B&B, this place is brought to life by lashings of colourful paint and a friendly atmosphere. It’s a tad crumbly, but it’s a good spot if you’re looking for a comfy bed and a youthful vibe.

Elephant Walk (☎ 015-781 5860; www.elewalk.com; 30 Anna Scheepers Ave; camp sites R50, dm/s/d with shared bathroom R75/140/200, d with private bathroom R300) Close enough to Kruger to hear the lions roar, this is a great spot to plan your foray into the park. The owners will pick you up from the centre of town and offer an excellent range of reasonably priced tours and activities. The en-suite doubles are glossier.

Basambilu Lodge (☎ 015-783 0467; www.basambilu.com; 348 Akanani St, Lulekani; dm/d from R70/250; ☎ ☎) Located in the township of Lulekani (13km north of Phalaborwa), this backpackers includes a swimming pool, rondavels and open-air kitchen. There is also a lapa where locals and tourists get acquainted over beers. The management can organise tours around the area and in the township itself.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

African Lily Lodge (☎ 015-781 3805; www.africanlily.co.za; 35 Palm Ave; s/d/q/tr R250/350/460/500, s/d unit R100/150; ☎ ☎) Smack in the centre of town, the African Lily (owned by the same folks who run Daan & Zena’s) is a functional sort of place good for families. Out back, there is the option of staying inside portable units that are cheap but baking hot in summer and generally unappealing year-round.

Masorini Lodge (☎ 015-781 3579; www.masorini.co.za; s/d R295/450) Out in the sticks, this atmospheric place has self-catering accommodation in thatched A-frames. As you

enter town from Tzaneen, turn left (north) on Spekboom St and keep going for 8km.

Sefapane Lodge (☎ 015-780 6700; www.sefapane.co.za; cnr Koper & Esenhout Sts; s/d with breakfast R400/700; ☎ ☎) Sefapane has plenty of safari-park styling, a sunken bar, one of the town’s best eateries and a whiff of genuine exclusivity. Accommodation is in rondavels. The restaurant here has a good mix of ethnic dishes, including some Moroccan food and *potjiekos*.

Phuzu Moya (☎ 015-793 1971; www.phuzamoya.co.za; s/d with full-board & wildlife drives R1825/2500; ☎ ☎) This seriously stylish place only takes 24 guests at a time – and they are soon swallowed up by the surrounding 2800 hectares of private wildlife reserve. It is about an hour out of town on the S30 between Mica and Rte 36. Head south from Phalaborwa on the Lydenburg road.

Eating

The Phalaborwa Mall, on Nelson Mandela St, has the usual food chains. For posh eats, the restaurant at Sefapane Lodge is excellent.

La Grotto (☎ 015-781 7241; 38 Palm Ave; mains R25-50; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; ☎ ☎) This place keeps locals happy with a good-value menu of salads, seafood, burgers and beer. It’s close to the African Lily Lodge.

Buffalo Pub & Grill (☎ 015-781 0829; 1 Lekkerbreek St; mains R30-70; ☎ lunch & dinner; ☎ ☎) This place is more tourist-orientated than La Grotto,

with a nice terrace for alfresco dining and African trimmings aplenty.

Getting There & Away

AIR

SAAirlink (☎ 015-781 5823; www.sairlink.co.za), with an office at the airport, flies daily to Jo’burg (R1300). The **airport** (☎ 015-781 5823) is 2km north of town.

BUS

Sure Turn Key Travel (☎ 015-781 7761; Shop 42, Phalaborwa Mall, Nelson Mandela St; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) is the local agent for Translux and City to City buses. Translux services travel via Polokwane and connect Phalaborwa with Tzaneen (R100, one hour), Polokwane (R100, 2½ hours), Makhado (R170, four hours), Pretoria (R165, six hours) and Jo’burg (R170, seven hours). City to City buses travel to Jo’burg (R135, 9½ hours) via Middleburg, and are cheaper but slower. Sure Turn Key also has an office at the airport (☎ 015-781 2498).

CAR

Hiring a car is often the cheapest way of seeing Kruger Park. **Avis** (☎ 015-781 3169; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat, 4-6pm Sun), **Imperial** (☎ 015-781 0376; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat, 4-6pm Sun) and **Budget** (☎ 015-781 5404; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-1pm Sat, 4-6pm Sun) all have offices at the airport.

THE MIGHTY MARULA

The silhouette of a Marula tree at dusk is one of the more evocative images of the African bush, but the real value of this mighty tree is what comes out of it.

In summer, the female marula sags under the weight of its pale yellow fruit. Chacna baboons love the stuff and you can see them by the road chomping on this vitamin-rich delicacy. Elephants, also big marula fans, spend their days ramming into the trunk of the tree to knock to the fruit to the ground. Their somewhat obsessive behaviour has led to the marula being dubbed the ‘Elephant Tree’.

The marula fruit is considered an aphrodisiac by local custom, but recently it has grown in value as an alcoholic beverage. Amarula cream liqueur debuted in 1989 and is now available in 70 countries worldwide.

To produce this beverage, the fruit is fermented, distilled and then matured in oak casks for around two years. It is then blended with cream and bottled. Harvesting of the fruit is done between January and March. During the rest of the year, Amarula keeps fruit pickers busy with community-based work projects, such as brick making and fence mending.

The best way to enjoy a glass of Amarula cream is to visit the company lapa located next to its factory. You can make a booking at the lapa by ringing ☎ 015-781-7766 or checking their website (www.amarula.com). The lapa and the processing plant are 10km south of Phalaborwa on the road to Hoedspruit.

MINIBUS TAXI

There aren't many minibus taxis in this area, and most run from the township of Namakgale (R5, 20 minutes). From here, you can catch connections to Tzaneen (R35, 1½ hours).

HOEDSPRUIT & AROUND

☎ 015 / pop 11,000

There's not a whole lot in Hoedspruit but 250 neat houses and a large Air Force base – which is scaling down. It is, however, within striking distance of Kruger's Orpen Gate (67km), and makes a convenient launching point for exploring the central and northern sections of the park. It's also one of the main access towns for Timbavati and several of the other private wildlife reserves bordering western Kruger (see p485), with good air connections to/from Jo'burg.

Information & Tours

The **Tourist Information Centre** (☎ 015-793 1110; www.1africasafaris.com; Kamogelo Centre, Main Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri) is on Rte 527, next to the Wimpy fast-food outlet. There is an **ABSA** (Main Rd) ATM nearby, plus Internet access at **MJ's Photographic** (☎ 015-793 3700; per hr R40; ☎ 8am-4.30 Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat).

McFarlane Safaris (☎ 015-793 3000; www.mcfarlane safaris.co.za; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), by the Total petrol station on Rte 40, runs up-market safaris in and around Kruger. **Off Beat Safaris** (☎ 015-793 2422; www.offbeatsafaris.co.za) runs horse safaris (R150 for two hours) from a nearby farm.

Sleeping & Eating

Loerie Guesthouse (☎ 015-793 3990; www.loerie guesthouse.com; 85 Jakkals St; s/d R265/395; 📶) Specialises in warm welcomes and home cooking (breakfast R45, dinner R70). It is signposted off Main Rd.

Otters Den (☎ 015-795 5488; www.ottersden.co.za; full board per person R570; 📶) Located around 20km west of Hoedspruit, this small, rustic camp contains four chalets built on stilts, overlooking the Blyde River. The hosts can organise all manner of tours, including hot-air ballooning and white-water rafting.

Ngena Deli (☎ 015-793 0452; Kamogelo Tourist Centre; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Wed, 8am-8pm Thu-Fri, 8am-2.30pm Sat) Homemade bread, local jams and hot and cold sandwiches are available at this deli near the Tourist Information Centre.

Getting There & Away

SA Express (☎ 015-793 3681) flies daily out of **Hoedspruit Eastgate airport** (☎ 015-793 3681) to Jo'burg (R1200 one-way). The airport is 7km from Hoedspruit.

You can hire a car with **Avis** (☎ 015-793 2014) at the airport.

There is a minibus taxi rank near the train station, with services to Phalaborwa (R25, 1½ hours). **Translux** (www.translux.com) runs daily bus to Jo'burg (R160).

Acornhoek

The township of Acornhoek, located near Kruger National Park's Orpen Gate, is a worthwhile detour to visit the successful **Mapusha Weavers Cooperative** (☎ 072-469-7060; www.mapusha.org).

The co-op, founded in 1972, produces excellent quality carpets and tapestries in its workshop next to a Catholic Mission. You can watch the women work, take home some of their products or go on a tour of the township with one of the co-op members. The standard tour (R100) includes lunch plus a visit to the *shebeen* (where you can sample some of the local brew), and a meeting with the village *sangoma* (traditional healer).

To get there, travel south on Rte 40 from Hoedspruit. After 26km take a left at the junction for Acornhoek. After 4.3km, turn right onto a dirt road marked 'Dingleydale'. After 1.8km you will see the Catholic Mission on your right.

Nyani Cultural Village

Home of the descendants of former local chief Kapama, **Nyani Cultural Village** (☎ 083-512 4865; Guernsey Rd; admission R50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri) offers an interesting insight into how traditional Shangaan families live. The village recreates all aspects of tribal culture, and chief Axon Khosa is happy to explain traditional medicines and aspects of Tsonga life. Admission includes a one-hour tour and lunch (R35) is available. There's also evening tours (including dinner and dancing) for R150. If you want to eat, book ahead.

To reach the village, travel south on Rte 40 for 28km and turn onto Rte 531, which is the same road that leads to Kruger Park's Orpen Gate. After 12km you will see the signposted turnoff to the village.

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