

OVERVIEW OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Capital	Cape Town		
Principal languages	Afrikaans 58% English 20% Xhosa 19,1%		
Population	4.3 million		
Area (km ²)	129 386	% of total	10,6%
GGP* at 1994 prices	R81,800 million	% of total GDP**	14,21%



*GGP (gross geographical product) = GDP of a region
** GDP (gross domestic product)

The Western Cape is situated on the south-western tip of the African continent. It is a region of folded mountains, well-watered valleys, wide beaches and breathtaking scenery. The cold Atlantic Ocean along the west coast is a rich fishing area, while the warmer Indian Ocean skirts its southern beaches.



Visitors to the Western Cape can land at Cape Town International Airport or disembark at the Port of Cape Town in the shadow of Table Mountain. A network of roads also leads to Cape Town, the capital of this province.

Other important towns in the province include Vredenburg-Saldanha, an important harbour for iron exports and the fishing industry; Worcester and Stellenbosch in the heart of the winelands; George, renowned for indigenous timber and vegetable produce; Oudtshoorn, known for its ostrich products, and Beaufort West on the dry, sheep-farming plains of the Great Karoo.

The Western Cape boasts one of the six accepted floral kingdoms of the world. Although the smallest of them all, the Western Cape Floral Kingdom, locally called *fynbos*, contains more plant species than the whole of Europe. This is also the home of the world-famous protea and heather.



The Knysna-Tsitsikamma region has the country's biggest indigenous forests. This is a fairyland of age-old forest giants, ferns and colourful birdlife. Products of the forests include furniture made from the indigenous yellowwood, stinkwood and white pear, and are sought-after pieces. The tourism sector is perceived as the most important growth force in the Western Cape.

The People

More than four million people live in the Western Cape on 129 370 km² of land of whom the greatest number are Afrikaans-speaking. Other main languages are English and Xhosa.

The Western Cape has the highest adult education level in the country, with only 6.7% of people aged 20 years or older having undergone no schooling. The province has a strong network of higher educational institutions.

Agriculture and Marine Fishery

The Western Cape is rich in agriculture and fisheries. The sheltered valleys between the mountains provide ideal conditions for a harvest of top-grade fruits, such as apples, table grapes, olives, peaches and oranges. In the eastern part of the Western Cape region, a great variety of vegetables is cultivated.



The province can be divided into three climatic regions. The area around the Peninsula and the Boland is a winter-rainfall region with sunny, dry summers. Towards George along the south coast, the climate gradually changes to year-round rainfall, while inland, towards the Great Karoo, the climate changes to summer rainfall.

The Western Cape is known as one of the world's finest grape-growing regions. Many of its wines have received the highest accolades at international wine shows. The Little Karoo region around Oudtshoorn, besides being famous for its Cango Caves, is the centre of the ostrich-farming industry in South Africa. Fine leatherware, ostrich feathers and meat are exported from here to destinations across the world. The Swartland district around Malmesbury and the Overberg at Caledon are the bread baskets of the country.

The inland Karoo region around Beaufort West and the Bredasdorp district produce wool and mutton, as well as pedigree merino breeding stock. Other animal products include broiler chicken, eggs, dairy products, beef and pork, while racehorse-breeding is another important industry.



The west coast of the province is washed by the cold Benguela Current. The plankton-rich current is considered to be one of the world's richest fishing grounds. This resource is protected against over-fishing by foreign vessels by means of a 200-km commercial fishing zone and a strict quota system. It is for the exclusive use utilisation of local inhabitants, and creates jobs for about 27 000 people who are directly dependent on the fishing industry.



The province is well-known for its wide variety of sea-foods offered at restaurants dotted along the coastline. Snoek, Cape lobster, abalone, calamari, octopus, oysters and mussels are among the most sought after piscatorial delights.

Industry

The Western Cape makes the third-highest contribution to the country's GDP. An exciting development for the province and South Africa is the emergence of the first information communication technology cluster.

The head offices of all but one of South Africa's petroleum companies are located in Cape Town. The city also houses the head offices of many of the country's insurance giants and national retail chains. With over 170 000 people employed in the clothing and textile industry, it is the single most significant industrial source of employment in the Western Cape. The biggest segment of South Africa's printing and publishing industry is also situated in Cape Town.



The official unemployment figure for the province, 18.4%, is substantially lower than that of most other parts of the country.

While Epping, Parow, Retreat and Montagu Gardens have been the core industrial areas in the past, new developments are arising in the Saldanha-Vredenburg areas a spin-off by the vast Saldanha Steel project. The West Coast Investment Initiative, which forms part of the government's Spatial Development Initiative (SDI) programme was launched on 25 February 1998.