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Sometimes it can be quite surprising where one ends up when looking for information on the web. Recently, my sister-in-law redecorated her home and wanted a beaded Ndebele hat to add to her collection of ethnic headgear. She already has two bright red Zulu hats and had kept a space, especially for the Ndebele hat. No local shop or vendor was able to supply the hat and so I offered to search the Internet to locate one for her. Armed with a description of what the hat looked like, I booted up [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and typed in the keywords *Ndebele* and *hat*. A minute or so later, I had found 2 510 sites featuring these keywords. As I accessed site after site, I found hats aplenty, but alas, no beaded Ndebele hat. What I did find, however, was that I kept being sidetracked to other interesting sites that had me reading about the culture, history, traditions and crafts of the various ethnic groups that make up this Rainbow Nation of ours.

## PEOPLE OF THE RAINBOW NATION

With 11 official languages and people of every hue, cultural background and origin, South Africa is truly a nation of many cultures. From the Khoisan, who inhabited southern Africa for many thousands of years to the ethnic African groups, who migrated south; people of European origin; the Griquas, Nama and Coloured; Cape Malays; Indians and Asians - all found a home here in South Africa.

## THE KHOI-SAN

The Bushmen (San) are Southern Africa's original inhabitants. They organised their society into small groups, subsisting by hunting and gathering. Examples of their rock art can be seen in caves throughout southern Africa.

I found some really interesting sites providing information about the earliest inhabitants of South Africa.

[www.big7travels.com](http://www.big7travels.com): Click on the link *More about South Africa*, then *Cultural Information* to access an interesting article about the Khoisan, their history and culture.

[www.thinkquest.org/library/index](http://www.thinkquest.org/library/index): Follow the links, *Social sciences* [www.rhino.org.za/kamberg\\_rockart](http://www.rhino.org.za/kamberg_rockart) and [www.drakensberg-tourism.com/bushman-rock-art](http://www.drakensberg-tourism.com/bushman-rock-art).

While you are reading up on the Bushmen, you might like to find out something about the Nama and the Griqua. [www.museums.org.za](http://www.museums.org.za): Click on *search* and then type in the keyword *Nama*. Scroll through the links to find a link to an article entitled *Pastoralists in southern Africa* and *Matjieshuis*. These two articles provide an historical perspective of the Nama, their dwellings, clothing and the ornaments they wear. On the site [www.gwb.com.au/gwb/strachan/griqua](http://www.gwb.com.au/gwb/strachan/griqua), read about the origins of the Griqua.

## ETHNIC SOUTH AFRICANS

There are four major ethnic groups among the black peoples of South Africa, namely the Nguni, Sotho, Shangaan-Tsonga and Venda. General information about the makeup of these groups can be obtained at [www.Africa-ata.org/sa\\_peoples](http://www.Africa-ata.org/sa_peoples) and [www.countrystudies.us/south-africa](http://www.countrystudies.us/south-africa).

## NGUNI

The Nguni can be divided into three sub-groups - the Northern Nguni, made up of the Zulu and Swazi; the Southern Nguni, comprising the Xhosa, Thembu and Mpondo; and the Ndebele.

### *The Zulu*

The Zulus, the largest ethnic group in South Africa, are possibly best known due to the exploits of Shaka. He devised the Bull's Horn battle formation, which he put to great effect in defeating his opponents. By the early 1820s, Shaka had defeated all the clans in the area, to create the Zulu Kingdom, which covered most of southeast South Africa.

There are a great number of web sites, which provide information regarding the history, customs, traditions and crafts of the Zulus.

[www.nguni.com/culture](http://www.nguni.com/culture): Under the *Virtual Africa - People* link, click on *Zulu*. There you'll find a well-illustrated article on Zulu history, as well as an article on Zulu society.

[www.thinkquest.org/library/index](http://www.thinkquest.org/library/index): Use the keyword *Zulu* to search the library for an interesting article on Zulu life and culture. The article has links to all aspects of Zulu life and culture including dress, the homestead, customs, folklore and healing. [minotaur.marques.co.za/clients/zulu](http://minotaur.marques.co.za/clients/zulu): On this site there are a number of links related to traditional Zulu beadwork.

### *The Swazi*

The Swazi, like the Zulu, form part of the Northern Nguni. Their culture is rich in traditions and ceremonies frequently take place to mark special occasions. The Ncwala, or first fruit ceremony and the Umhlanga, or reed dance are two of the most important Swazi ceremonies.

Information on Swazi culture and traditions can be found at [www.mintour.gov.sz/culturalvillage/top](http://www.mintour.gov.sz/culturalvillage/top): A virtual tour through the cultural village; [www.visitswazi.com/tour/culture](http://www.visitswazi.com/tour/culture): The traditional Swazi homestead and Swazi rituals; [www.welcometoswaziland.com/culture](http://www.welcometoswaziland.com/culture): Short bites of information about the choosing of the Swazi king, the Ncwala ceremony, Umhlanga reed dance and family life; and [www.instant-essays.com/anthropology/social-organization](http://www.instant-essays.com/anthropology/social-organization):

A short essay about the social organisation of the Swazis.

### The Xhosa

The Xhosa are the second largest ethnic group in South Africa, with their traditional homelands in the Eastern Cape. They have a vibrant social heritage. To the Xhosa, cattle are not just of economic value, but also play an important function in religious and social ceremonies.

[www.nguni.com/culture](http://www.nguni.com/culture): Under the *Virtual Africa - People* link, click on *Xhosa*. You will find articles about the history of the Xhosa and Xhosa society. There is also a link to a biography on Nelson Mandela.

[www.thinkquest.org/library/index](http://www.thinkquest.org/library/index): Use the keyword *Xhosa* to search the library for an article entitled *Xhosa tradition & history*.

[webs.wofford.edu/mandlovenb](http://webs.wofford.edu/mandlovenb): Click on the link to *Fulbright South Africa*, then on *Curriculum Project* and then select *Xhosa history & culture* under *Places and culture*. This site also contains other interesting links, which you might want to investigate, such as the Xhosa cattle killing of 1856-57.

### The Ndebele

Colourfully-painted houses are perhaps what we most commonly associate with the Ndebele people. What also identifies Ndebele women from their counterparts are their clothing and jewellery, which can weigh as much as 25 kilogram.

[www.nguni.com/culture/virtualafrica/ndebele](http://www.nguni.com/culture/virtualafrica/ndebele): There are links to articles on Ndebele history and Ndebele society, as well as photographs of the mural art on Ndebele houses and clothing worn by Ndebele women.

[www.Milwaukee.k12.wi.us](http://www.Milwaukee.k12.wi.us): Type in the keyword *Ndebele*, then select the link to *South Africa*, to find an article on Ndebele mural art.

[www.uxl.eiu.edu/~cfrb/paintedhouses](http://www.uxl.eiu.edu/~cfrb/paintedhouses): The article entitled *Metaphors and meanings of house: African painted house traditions*, discusses the traditions of painted houses amongst various peoples of Africa, including the Ndebele and Basotho.

[www.museums.org.za/sam/resource/arch/ndebele](http://www.museums.org.za/sam/resource/arch/ndebele): *The art of Ndebele beadwork* describes various items of beaded garments worn by the Ndebele. Unfortunately this article is not illustrated. However, go to

[www.icon.co.za/~filizana/ndebele](http://www.icon.co.za/~filizana/ndebele) for illustrations of traditional beadwork.

## SOTHO

The Sotho group is made up of the Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho and Tswana.

The Pedi, or Northern Sotho, settled in the area between the Vaal and Limpopo rivers in what are now the provinces of Limpopo and Mpumalanga. The Southern Sotho reside mainly in the Kingdom of Lesotho and the surrounding areas, while the Tswana people are associated with the country of Botswana, but can also be found in the northeastern part of South Africa.

[www.nguni.com/culture/virtualafrica/sotho](http://www.nguni.com/culture/virtualafrica/sotho), [countrystudies.us/south-africa/47](http://countrystudies.us/south-africa/47) and [www.imb.org/southern-africa/peoplegroups/tswana](http://www.imb.org/southern-africa/peoplegroups/tswana) will provide information on these peoples and their history.

[www.country-data.com](http://www.country-data.com): Click on *South Africa*, then scroll down and click on the *Tswana* link for a short article on the Tswana.

[www.botswanaembassy.or.jp/culture/index1](http://www.botswanaembassy.or.jp/culture/index1): There are links to *People of Botswana*, *Traditional government and social order*, *Beliefs, Values and practices*, *Art and crafts* and *Food and selected dishes*.

## SHANGAAN-TSONGA

The Shangaan-Tsonga comprises the Shangaan, Tsonga and Tonga.

My search produced very little information on this group. Most of the sites that I hit dealt with language. However, I did find a short article on the history of the Tsonga at [countrystudies.us/south-africa/48](http://countrystudies.us/south-africa/48).

## THE VENDA

The Venda people are regarded as one of the last groups to have settled in the area south of the Limpopo River. They practice rituals, which they consider very secret, such as those associated with the initiation that girls and boys undergo when they come of age. Music and dance play an important role in the daily life of the Venda people.

I found links to two interesting articles on the Venda at the following sites: [www.African-arts-crafts.com](http://www.African-arts-crafts.com).

[www.krugerpark.co.za/Africa\\_venda](http://www.krugerpark.co.za/Africa_venda): You will find an article dealing with the historical

background, initiation rituals, traditional beliefs, music, dance and arts and crafts of the Venda.

## MYTHS AND LEGENDS

The myths, legends and folktales handed down from one generation to another, enrich a culture, as well as make for fascinating reading.

I found a number of examples of collections of myths, legends and folktales, published between 1886 and 1933, online.

*Myths and Legends of The Bantu* by Alice Werner (1933) - [www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/bantutexts](http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/bantutexts). *Xhosa Folk-Lore* by Georg McCall Theal (1886) - [www.sacred-texts.com/afr/xft/index](http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/xft/index).

*South-African Folk-Tales* by James A Honey, M.D. (1910) - [www.sacred-texts.com/afr/saft/index](http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/saft/index).

*Specimens of Bushman Folklore* by WHI Bleek and LC Lloyd (1911) - [www.sacred-texts.com/afr/sbf/index](http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/sbf/index).

## CULTURAL VILLAGES

Many visitors to this country want to experience the cultures of the various ethnic groups. There are many cultural villages which can be visited and where travellers can experience traditional dances and rituals. Search tourism web sites for references to cultural tours on offer. On the following I found information on cultural villages:

[www.tourismnorthwest.co.za/culture](http://www.tourismnorthwest.co.za/culture): Lesedi Cultural Village and Mapoch Ndebele Village amongst many others.

[www.chico.mweb.co.za/mg/saarts/cult-villages/](http://www.chico.mweb.co.za/mg/saarts/cult-villages/): Information on cultural villages throughout the country, including the Kosi Bay Project, Shakaland, Botshabelo and Groot Marico.

[www.southafrica.net/heritage/villages/basotho.cfm](http://www.southafrica.net/heritage/villages/basotho.cfm): Basotho Cultural Village.

I have been well and truly sidetracked. My initial search as you may recall was to find an Ndebele beaded hat. Alas, there is still no hat in sight. Perhaps I'll just have to visit an Ndebele village and ask somebody to make one for me.