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# kwazulu-natal: an overview

KwaZulu-Natal is a province characterised by diversity: of its people, landscape and culture. The province's name is a combination of KwaZulu (literally meaning 'Place of the Zulu') – referencing the Zulu chieftainship of Shaka kaSenzangakhona and also the Bantustan under the apartheid government – and the British colony and apartheid-era province of Natal. Geographically, the area ranges from dense subtropical forest on the North Coast and South Coast to fertile farmlands and mountain ranges in the west, with savannah grasslands and African bushveld in the north. Historically, it has been the site of clashes between the KhoiSan people, the British Empire, the nascent Boer Republic and the Zulu nation. This contested past has resulted in a legacy of a culturally diverse demographic, with influences from Europe, Asia and Africa, leading to a number of different literatures (colonial, Indian, settler, Zulu) defining the region's literary output. This cultural diversity is also reflected in the region's architectural heritage, which ranges from colonial cottages to Edwardian and Victorian houses, Art Deco apartment buildings, Indo-influenced neighbourhoods and traditional Zulu homesteads. Apart from being a literary hotbed, the region is known for its art and culture, with a number of film-makers, artists and musicians based in the province, including both traditional and contemporary creative practitioners. From a tourism point of view, KwaZulu-Natal has always been known as a holiday destination, with visitors flocking to it from around South Africa and abroad, to escape the winter or to spend time on the beaches in summer. This has led to a proliferation of tourist enterprises, from mainstream to alternative.

## GEOGRAPHY

Hugging the coast of South Africa (giving the province one of its colloquial names, 'East Coast'), KwaZulu-Natal is bordered by the warm Indian Ocean to the east; to the north Swaziland and Mozambique; to the south the province of the Eastern Cape and the mountain kingdom of Lesotho, while the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg mountain range forms its western border. The province is roughly 94 000 square kilometres – forming less than 10 per cent of South Africa's landmass – yet KwaZulu-Natal is the second-most densely populated province after Gauteng, the country's economic hub.



The province is home to two UNESCO (*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*) World Heritage Sites: iSimangaliso Wetland Park, an important coastal wetland and estuary system in the north of the province, and the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg mountain range to the west, with its striking natural beauty and a unique collection of Bushman rock art in its caves. The province is also home to a number of well-known game reserves, including Mkhuze and the Hluhluwe–Imfolozi Park (formerly Hluhluwe–Umfolozi Game Reserve), the oldest proclaimed nature reserve in Africa.

The provincial capital is the inland city of Pietermaritzburg, in *isiZulu uMgungundlovu*, although the largest city in the region is the port of Durban. Margate, on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, and Ballito, on the North Coast, are popular holiday resort towns. Inland, the city of Newcastle is a centre of steel production and coal mining while Estcourt is known for meat production (a popular brand of pork products is named after the town). The towns of Ladysmith and Richmond are centres for the fertile agriculture industry in the region. Sugar has been the most important agricultural crop in KwaZulu-Natal, but other subtropical fruit is grown along the coast, while the interior farms are mainly dairy, vegetables and livestock.

Since KwaZulu-Natal is a coastal province, the sea features prominently in the regional imagination. The relationship with the sea is explored by many of the province's writers, including the lauded poet Douglas Livingstone (1932–96), who in 'Carnivores at Station 22' writes of his experience with a stranded dolphin off the coast of Durban:

Here, once, awash in shallows  
 a dolphin beached, or spent in strength was hurled  
 by the surf and I got soaked and desperate  
 trying to dislodge her back to her world.

The men weighed these failed attempts  
 – fishing for families, lean faces bland,  
 the tide ebbing with my receding hopes –  
 and looked away as I yelled and beckoned.

...

Her blowhole barely fluttered.  
 Strapped to a schedule, I had to give her up.  
 Winded, eyes stinging from the salt  
 I offered up a curse on *homo sap* (Livingstone 1991: 55).