

SOWETO, JOHANNESBURG



South of Johannesburg is **Soweto**, a city developed as a township for black people under the apartheid system. Most of the struggle against apartheid was fought in and from Soweto. The name Soweto is an acronym, made up - in apartheid days - from the first letters of the words “south western township”.

Soweto is inhabited by over two million people, with homes ranging from extravagant mansions to makeshift shacks. **Soweto** is a city of enterprise and cultural interaction. It is a popular tourist destination with sites such as Kliptown (where the Freedom Charter was drawn up), the home of former President Nelson Mandela, the Hector Petersen Memorial site, restaurants and shopping malls. It boasts one of the largest hospitals on the continent and the only African-owned private clinic (see Soweto Map).

Soweto is a sprawling township, or more accurately, a cluster of townships on the south-western flank of Johannesburg. Soweto was created in the 1930s, with Orlando the first township established. In the 1950s, more black people were relocated there from 'black spots' in the inner city - black neighbourhoods which the apartheid government had reserved for whites.

Soweto's growth was phenomenal - but unplanned. Despite government attempts to stop the influx of black workers to the cities, waves of migrant workers moved from the countryside and neighbouring countries to look for employment in the city of gold. With a population of over 2 million, the township is the biggest black urban settlement in Africa with a rich political history. Soweto was the centre of political campaigns aimed at the overthrow of the apartheid state. The 1976 student uprising, also known as the Soweto uprising, started in Soweto and spread to the rest of the country. Many of the sights on the heritage route therefore have political significance.

Sowetans pride themselves on being urbane and streetwise. They look down on the moegoes (country bumpkins) from the rural areas. Most residents here are rooted in the metropolis and are detribalised. Soweto is a melting pot of South African cultures and has developed its own sub-cultures - especially for the young. Afro-American influence runs deep, but is adapted to local conditions. In their speech, dress and gait, Sowetans exude a sense of cosmopolitan sophistication. Sowetans have evolved a local lingo, tsotsitaal, an eclectic mix of several local languages, Afrikaans and street slang, constantly evolving and spoken mainly by the young.