

# Lesotho

By Tom Kirvan

## THE SPARKLING 'KINGDOM IN THE SKY'

Nestled entirely within the borders of South Africa, the mountainous kingdom of Lesotho is a land of breathtaking landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and warm-hearted people. Known as the "Kingdom in the Sky" due to its high-altitude terrain, Lesotho offers visitors a unique blend of adventure, history, and natural beauty.

Lesotho is home to approximately 2.3 million people, with the Basotho ethnic group making up the vast majority of the population. The official languages are Sesotho and English, with many locals also speaking one (or more) of South Africa's languages due to close economic and cultural ties with their larger, surrounding neighbor.

Geographically, Lesotho is remarkable for being the only independent state in the world entirely above 1,000 meters (3,281 feet) in elevation. The rugged Drakensberg and Maloti ranges dominate the landscape, providing stunning scenery and ample opportunities for outdoor activities like hiking, horseback riding, and skiing. The country's rivers, including the Senqu River (known as the Orange River in South Africa), contribute to both its beauty and economy.

Lesotho's history is deeply tied to its founder, King Moshoeshoe I, who united various Sesotho-speaking groups in the early 19th century to form a unified nation. The kingdom managed to retain its independence from European colonizers longer than most African nations, ultimately becoming a British protectorate in 1868 before gaining full independence in 1966.

Throughout its history, Lesotho has maintained a strong cultural identity, with its traditional governance structures coexisting alongside modern political institutions. The monarchy remains an important symbol of national unity, with King Letsie III serving as the current head of state.

Lesotho's economy is largely based on agriculture, textiles, mining, and remittances from citizens working in South Africa. The country is known for its high-quality wool and mohair, which are exported worldwide. The textile industry is a major employer, supplying global fashion brands with garments produced in its factories.

Water is another key economic resource. Lesotho's mountainous terrain makes it an ideal location for hydroelectric power, and the country exports water to South Africa through the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, a vital economic partnership that generates revenue for national development.



## Fast Facts

Capital: Maseru

Population: 2.3 million

Highest Point: Thabana Ntlenyana (11,424 feet)

Languages: Sesotho and English

### Primerus Member: Kleingeld Attorneys

Kleingeld Attorneys, a business law firm located in Maseru.



# Lesotho

Maseru, the capital and largest city, is the political and economic heart of Lesotho. Situated along the Caledon River on the border with South Africa, Maseru blends modern amenities with traditional Basotho culture. Visitors will find lively markets, government buildings, and cultural sites that provide insight into the country's past and present.

## Top 5 Must-See Tourist Destinations

- **Maletsunyane Falls:** One of Lesotho's most iconic natural attractions, Maletsunyane Falls near Semonkong plunges 630 feet into a stunning gorge. It is one of the highest single-drop waterfalls in Africa and offers breathtaking views. Thrill-seekers can take part in one of the world's longest abseiling experiences down the falls.
- **Thaba-Bosiu:** A site of immense historical and cultural significance, Thaba-Bosiu is the mountain fortress where King Moshoeshoe I established his stronghold in the 19th century. Visitors can hike to the top and explore the ruins of the settlement while enjoying panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.
- **Sehlabathebe National Park:** Located in the remote southeastern part of the country, Sehlabathebe National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its dramatic landscapes, unique rock formations, and rare plant and animal species. The park is perfect for hiking, photography, and immersing oneself in the tranquility of Lesotho's wilderness.
- **Afriski Mountain Resort:** For those looking to experience snow in Africa, Afriski Mountain Resort in the Maloti Mountains offers skiing and snowboarding during the winter months (June to August). In the summer, it transforms into an adventure hub with mountain biking, hiking, and ATV riding opportunities.
- **Katse Dam and the Lesotho Highlands Water Project:** The Katse Dam is an engineering marvel and the centerpiece of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. Visitors can take guided tours to learn about the dam's construction, its role in water distribution, and its impact on the local environment. The surrounding area is also ideal for boating, fishing, and hiking.