

## **Bloemfontein, the city of roses**

Written by {ga=staceyv}

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The expression 'an iron fist in a velvet glove' is fitting for Bloemfontein, as it is both the judicial capital of South Africa and home to the Supreme Court of Appeals, but is also popularly known as the 'city of roses'.

Bloemfontein is the sixth-largest city in the country and is the capital of the Free State province. While it does indeed have many lavish gardens and flowers (like the 4000 rose bushes planted in Kings Park), and is made more unusual for the fact that it is in an arid part of South Africa characterised by grasslands and the encroaching Karoo desert, the true origins of its poetic name are a mystery. Translated directly from Dutch, Bloemfontein means 'fountain of flowers' or more accurately 'flower spring'.

### **Born in Bloemfontein**

Bloemfontein is the birthplace of novelist JRR Tolkien, the author of *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings*, although the Tolkien family left South Africa when he was only three years old after the death of his father. Other famous Bloemfontein folk include long distance athlete Zola Budd, the late controversial cricketer Hansie Cronje, comedian Leon Schuster, actor Tony Kgoroge, and Olympic gold medal swimmer Ryk Neethling.

### **Bloemfontein sports and stadiums**

The city is also called Mangaung or 'place of cheetahs' in Sesotho, the predominant African language in the Free State. The Free State Rugby Union's team that competes in the annual Super 14 and Currie Cup tournaments is also known as the Cheetahs, and their home stadium is Vodacom Park in Bloemfontein. Vodacom Park seats 40 911 and is also home to local football club Bloemfontein Celtic that competes in the South African PSL (Premier Soccer League).

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An unusual sport that has really taken off in Bloemfontein – forgive the pun – is soaring. That is, the aerial sport of gliding, where unpowered aircraft are launched into the sky by a variety of different methods, and then pilots must use all their wits, wings and air streams to remain airborne.

Motorsport is also a popular sport in the city of roses.

### **Things to do in Bloemfontein**

Bloemfontein was first established in 1846, and there are plenty of historical buildings to be explored and photographed by history buffs, such as

There are plenty of restaurants and good shopping at the Loch Logon Waterfront, as well as the Windmill Casino to while an afternoon away at the slots. Alongside the Modder River is the Maselspoort Resort, which offers plenty of activities, as well as a stay-over in bungalows and chalets.

For the little ones, there's the Bloemfontein Zoo and a ride on the model steam engines of Modenso Park. The Boeremark (or 'farmer's market') in Langenhoven Park is the place to be on a Saturday morning, for fresh produce, traditional preserves and local arts and craft.

Don't forget to visit Naval Hill in Franklin Game Reserve for fantastic views of the city.

### **Five interesting facts about Bloemfontein**

- The African National Congress (ANC), the ruling party of South Africa, was founded in Bloemfontein in 1912.
- During the Second Anglo-Boer War (also called the South African War), one of the largest concentration camps was located in Bloemfontein where it is estimated that 45 000 people

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perished, many of them women and children. Today the National Women's Memorial just outside the city serves as a reminder of this great tragedy.

- The Free State is known as South Africa's bread basket, as 70% of the country's grain is produced in the region.
- Thanks to desertification, climatologists have noted that the semi-arid Karoo desert is slowly encroaching on Bloemfontein.
- The Mangaung Fire Station Museum at Ehrlich Park fire station in Bloemfontein is a great family day out, and has vintage fire engines, cars and fireman's equipment that date back to 1926. It is the only fire station museum in the Southern Hemisphere.