

Frommer's®

You Haven't Eaten in South Africa Until You've Tasted This Food



[Visit Durban](#)

By Melissa Klurman

You never forget your first bite of *peri peri*. The tangy pepper sauce that's slicked over fire-roasted chicken can range from slightly zesty to downright feisty, but it makes every bite unique. In fact, the memorably assertive experience is not unlike the cuisine of [South Africa](#) in general. Peri peri is only one of the many tastes you'll start to crave as you explore the Rainbow Nation's unique amalgam of flavors that traveled from India, Malaysia, Europe, and Africa to collide in a distinct national cuisine. When you eat in South Africa, taste the rainbow. Don't miss these dishes.



[Visit South Africa](#)

Bunny chow

Durban is the third-largest city in South Africa and home to the largest Indian population outside of India. It's got a funky vibe that combines traditional Zulu heritage, Colonial British influences, and Indian flair, all along the beaches of the tropical Indian Ocean. A unique flavor profile has emerged from this amalgam of cultures, an only-in-Durban kind of street food known as *bunny chow*. Believed to be named for Indian merchants known as *Banias*, which became anglicized as "Bunnies," the dish combines hollowed-out loaves of white bread filled with spicy Indian curry.

Tasty tip: The right way to eat this somewhat unwieldy dish is without utensils. First use the lopped-off top of the loaf to soak up the tangy curry, then nibble down from the top while waiting for the critical moment when the bread has absorbed enough liquid to be eaten easily—but before it becomes a sodden mess.



CoCo Safar

Bobotie

Layers of savory spiced ground beef topped with a baked béchamel sauce, this hearty comfort food casserole is often called the national dish of South Africa. It's a bit like Greek moussaka, or even English shepherd's pie, but with Cape Malay curry seasonings that make it very specifically South African.

Tasty tip: Be sure to sample the traditional bobotie accompaniments of chutney and sambal relishes as well as yellow rice seasoned with turmeric and raisins.



[Visit South Africa](#)

Biltong

Many first-timers to South Africa confuse air-dried *biltong* with jerky, but because this meat snack isn't smoked, it's often tougher and oilier. It's usually made with beef, but you'll also find ostrich and antelope versions. Throughout South Africa, biltong is regarded as the perfect on-the-go, grab-and-eat treat, as well as a satisfying complement to a cocktail at sundown.

Tasty tip: Although you can buy bags of biltong at most convenience stores and supermarkets, the best and freshest stuff is purchased directly from a butcher. (The meat seller pictured above is at the popular Saturday market in **Johannesburg** called **Neighborgoods**). **Heads-up:** Since biltong isn't technically cooked, it's not legal to bring any back home in your luggage.



Viist South Africa

Knysna oysters

The rocky coast of South Africa's **Garden Route**, the scenic road that runs between the southern cities of Port Elizabeth and Cape Town, is home to some of the crispest and briniest oysters anywhere. Among the most celebrated bivalves: those from the coastal town of **Knysna**, where you can easily spend an afternoon slurping freshly shucked oysters and sipping local wines.

Tasty tip: You can gorge yourself without putting a sizable dent in your wallet thanks to the abundant stock and an advantageous exchange rate for Americans.



Steel Wool

Peri peri chicken

Peri peri sauce is ubiquitous on tables across South Africa. The spicy condiment arrived courtesy of Portuguese explorers, who imported it in turn from Mozambique and Malaysia, creating the culinary backbone of Cape Malay cuisine. For *braais* (barbecues), chicken or shrimp is basted in the heat-packing sauce and cooked over an open flame until fiery in both flavor and temperature.

Tasty tip: For an inexpensive, authentic, and easy-to-find version of this classic dish, stop by the very popular chain **Nando's**. The restaurant originated in South Africa and has now spread to more than 30 countries—there's even one in the Johannesburg airport. Add-your-own-sauce heat levels range from "plainish" to "extra extra hot."



Ellerman House

Wines

In **Winelands** towns such as Franschhoek, Stellenbosch, and Paarl, the rich soil and mild climate nurture grape varietals that rival any around the world. Although South African wines are increasingly distributed in the United States, the best way to sample the wide range of stellar sips is in person along one of the country's 13 wine routes. Some favorite options include crisp, mineral-edged chenin blanc and rich, ripe *Pinotage*, a unique South African red blend of pinot noir and cinsault.

Tasty tip: Visit a vineyard or wine cellar (**Ellerman House** in Cape Town is pictured above) to taste multiple varietals from the array of vintages available. Did we mention the favorable exchange rate means you can buy excellent bottles on the cheap?



[Singita](#)

Chakalaka

Chakalaka is a traditional vegetable dish—part stew, part relish—that was created in the townships as a topping for traditional *pap and samp* (cornmeal porridge). The basic version combines tomatoes, beans, onions, and sometimes cabbage and peppers, all mixed with Cape Malay spices to create a sambal-like accompaniment for any savory dish. South Africans like to pile chakalaka onto everything from bread to *boerewors* (pictured here), which are sausages made with beef, lamb, and pork.

Tasty tip: All of the above items are staples at South African barbecues. If you're invited to attend one, jump at the chance.



Manne

Koeksisters

Koeksisters are made with braided fried dough that's drenched in honey syrup, creating a sticky-sweet snack somewhere between doughnuts and baklava. The treat has a Dutch Afrikaner background: "Koek" usually refers to a sweet dough (think of the word "cookie"), and "sisters" derives from the braided design resembling a girl's plaited hair.

Tasty tip: To cut through the sweetness, try these with a cup of black tea such as Five Roses or traditional rooibos made from indigenous plants.



Singita

Melktert

South Africa serves up many options for a sugar rush, including malva pudding, a cousin of the British sticky toffee pudding, and this creamy concoction, the "milk tart." A cinnamon-flecked custard pie, it has its origins in Cape Dutch cuisine but also borrows from Portuguese *pastel de nata*, an eggier, bite-size version. The dessert is a South African teatime favorite and also a classic ending to a *boerekos*, a home-cooked Afrikaans meal.

Tasty tip: You'll see traditional melktert with a shortbread or puff-pastry crust, but keep an eye out for newly popular crustless versions that let you focus all of your attention on spooning up the silky-smooth custard.



Amarula

Amarula Cream

The marula tree grows in the wild northern part of South Africa—when the tree's small golden fruit becomes ripe, it's a favorite delicacy for elephants. It's said they gorge on the slightly fermented flesh and get a little tipsy. For human consumption, the marula is combined with sweet cream to create a liqueur that tastes like a mildly fruity Baileys. You can sip it straight, over ice, or in sweet cocktails like the Don Pedro, a summertime cooler that also involves vanilla ice cream and whiskey. It's basically a milkshake for grownups.

Tasty tip: If you develop a taste for Amarula during your South African travels (and who could blame you?), there's no need to lug bottles home—the liqueur is now widely available in stores around the world.