Country Guide (IAM)

South Africa

This guide is compiled from the IAM Country Guide for reference only. Customs regulations change frequently; please consult your Seapoe relocation consultant for the latest requirements before shipping.

Updated 2026-09-05

Documents

Documents required for importing used household goods, personal effects, and related shipments.

For All Importers

- Original passport (including the page with entry stamp)
- Original bill of lading (OBL), express or telex release, or copy of air waybill (AWB)
- Detailed inventory
- Customs form DA 304 (declaration for household furniture and personal effects -- for returning residents and immigrants)
- Customs form P.1.160 (where applicable)

For Returning South African Residents

- Affidavit stating the reason for return to South Africa
- Permanent residence documents or visa

For Foreign Nationals (Immigrants / Work Permit Holders)

- Valid temporary residence permit or work permit

For Diplomats

- Diplomatic clearance documentation
- Certificate from the embassy signed by the South African Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)

Specific Information

The owner of the goods must provide all required documents to the destination agent before the shipment is cleared. The owner must be present for customs clearance.

Used household goods and personal effects may be imported duty-free under rebate item 407.04 (immigrants) or 407.06 (returning residents) if all of the following conditions are met:

- The articles have been in the owner's use and possession for more than 12 months.
- The articles are not for sale or other disposal.
- Returning South African residents must have been abroad for a period of at least 6 consecutive months for purposes other than touring, and must have established temporary residence in unfurnished or semi-furnished accommodation abroad.

New household goods and furniture are treated as commercial imports and are subject to full customs duties and 15% VAT. Works of art forming part of a bona fide household shipment, or works over 100 years old (antiques), may be imported duty-free as part of an otherwise qualifying shipment.

The goods should arrive in South Africa after the owner if possible. If the shipment arrives before the owner, goods are placed in storage at the owner's expense pending clearance.

Returning residents must register personal items of value (jewelry, watches, cameras, laptops, etc.) with SARS before leaving South Africa to avoid paying duty upon re-importation. Failure to do so may result in a duty deposit being required at the time of re-entry.

Non-compliance with requirements may result in destruction of the goods by customs, or return of the entire consignment to the port of origin at the owner's expense.

All solid wood packing materials must comply with ISPM 15 phytosanitary treatment standards.

Prohibited & Restricted Items

Prohibited Items

The following items are prohibited from import into South Africa:

- Narcotics and illegal drugs
- Pornographic books, magazines, and material
- Plants and vegetable products (subject to strict phytosanitary controls; all plants and plant products require phytosanitary certificates and inspection) [PERMIT REQUIRED for authorized imports]
- Animals and animal by-products, birds, poultry, dairy products, butter, and eggs without authorization [PERMIT REQUIRED]
- Animal products including certain feathers, furs, skins, tusks, and products from protected species [CITES]
- Radio communication equipment and walkie-talkies (may include other prohibited communication devices -- confirm with destination agent) [PERMIT REQUIRED]
- Counterfeit goods
- Left-hand drive vehicles (if registered on or after 1 January 2000)
- Rabbits and ferrets
- Goods subject to South African sanctions

Restricted / Dutiable Items

Traveller duty-free allowances (accompanied baggage, per person):

New or used goods: R5,000 (or R25,000 if arriving from Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, or Swaziland/Eswatini); valid once per person per 30-day period after an absence of at least 48 hours. Goods between R5,000 and R20,000 may be assessed at a flat customs duty rate of 20% (less full duty) with VAT exempt; goods over R20,000 pay standard duty plus 15% VAT. Tobacco: 200 cigarettes and 20 cigars and 250 g of tobacco per person. Alcohol: 2 litres of wine and 1 litre of spirits or other alcoholic beverages per person (persons under 18 may not claim alcohol or tobacco allowances). Perfume: 50 ml; eau de toilette: 250 ml.

Currency: South African bank notes in excess of R25,000, gold coins, coin and stamp collections, and unprocessed gold must be declared. Foreign currency may be imported freely but amounts exceeding the exchange control regulations must be declared and may require SARB authorization.

Wine and liquor in household goods shipments: Require an import permit and, for quantities of 15 litres or more, a liquor removal certificate. For quantities under 15 litres, the liquor removal certificate is not required but duties and taxes remain payable. A wine list must be prepared and the wine/liquor must be packed last in the shipment (to be accessible for customs examination). Documentation requirements must be met before the shipment arrives.

Firearms: Require an import permit and a South African Police Service (SAPS) Firearm Registrar Certificate (SAP 312). Firearms must be hand-carried by the owner -- they cannot be included in sea or air freight shipments and the shipment cannot be cleared if firearms are included. [PERMIT REQUIRED]

Medicines: Personal-use medicines may be imported for one month's supply without permit. For larger quantities, a letter or prescription from a registered physician is required.

Endangered species (CITES): Require a CITES permit. [CITES]

Inheritances: Documents required: death certificate; will or certified extract or court probate order (with English translation); inventory with lawyer's declaration; declaration from the beneficiary confirming permanent South African residency and right to the estate. Items of inheritance may be imported duty-free if the beneficiary is permanently resident in South Africa. Duty is payable on inherited motor vehicles. Goods should not be shipped until customs has authorized duty-free entry.

Wedding trousseaux: Require an invoice and, if customs requests, an import permit for second-hand goods. Subject to payment of duties.

Consignment Instructions

Recommended: Contact the destination agent to ensure all requirements have been met prior to import, especially for differences regarding air and sea shipments.

South Africa has three major seaports relevant to household goods: Durban (busiest, east coast), Cape Town (west coast), and Port Elizabeth/Gqeberha (east coast). Motor vehicles are processed through a specialist customs warehouse (Elliottwarehouse in Johannesburg). Air freight moves through OR Tambo International Airport (Johannesburg), Cape Town International Airport, and King Shaka International Airport (Durban).

The owner must be present in South Africa for customs clearance of household goods -- clearance cannot be done entirely by the agent in the owner's absence.

For vehicle imports, the 10-day pre-arrival presence requirement is strictly enforced. The LOA from NRCS takes time to obtain and should be applied for well before the vehicle shipment departs origin.

Wine and liquor must be packed separately and last in the shipment for easy customs access. Declare all wine and liquor quantities accurately -- under-declaration is treated as a serious customs offence.

New goods within a household goods shipment are treated as commercial imports and will be assessed for full duties and 15% VAT. Members should advise clients to separate new items from used goods documentation, or to declare them accurately.

Non-compliance -- including failure to declare goods, under-declaration of values, or inclusion of prohibited items -- can result in destruction of the entire consignment or its return to origin at the owner's expense.