

# Overview of Sierra Leone

Situated on the West African coast between Guinea and Liberia, Sierra Leone is a well-hidden tropical destination. With over 300 miles (483km) of coastline with stretches of palm-fringed sandy beaches, wildlife sanctuaries, lush mountains, and a wonderful blend of history and culture, this small coastal country offers a multitude of attractions and activities for visitors. However, with the brutality of a long civil war still fresh in the memories of many, it may take some time before the tourist hordes discover the hidden treasures of this beautiful little country.

Visitors to Sierra Leone can look forward to a warm and friendly welcome. The main attraction is on its stunning beaches where a variety of water sports, including diving, fishing, and surfing, are on offer. The capital and commercial centre, Freetown, is rich in history, originally founded as an important centre for slave trade in the mid-1500s and later becoming a safe-haven for freed slaves. For outdoor adventurers, Sierra Leone's wildlife is diverse and protected within conservation areas such as Outamba Kilimi National Park, the Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary near Freetown, and the Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary on the Moa River. The Tingi Hills are popular for hiking, with breath-taking mountain scenery and a variety of bird and animal life, while Mount Bintumani and Lake Sonfren offer various mountain activities.

While the scars of the civil war have yet to fully heal, Sierra Leone is a nation with enormous potential and a bright future in tourism. A kaleidoscope of colour, the country's cultural and natural resources within its borders will reward intrepid travellers seeking a largely unexplored tropical paradise within the African continent.

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## Key Facts

**Language:**

English is the official language, although each ethnic group has its own tribal language, used more widely in the interior of the country. Krio is a form of Pidgin English that is widely spoken in Freetown.

**Passport/Visa:**

Anyone travelling to the country for a purpose other than tourism, a visit or business will need to get a visa before they arrive. It is highly recommended that visitors' passports have at least six months' validity remaining after the intended date of departure from their travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

**Currency:**

The official currency is the leone (SLL), which is divided into 100 cents. Foreign currency can be exchanged at banks, foreign exchange bureaux or hotels. Banks are open on weekdays only. The use of credit cards is very limited, although a few top hotels and restaurants in Freetown might accept them for payment. Not all ATMs accept foreign cards, but some major banks, such as Ecobank and United Bank for Africa (UBA), accept foreign cards.

**Electricity:**

Electrical current is 230 volts, 50Hz, but supplies are erratic and power failures common. Round three-pin plugs or rectangular three-blade plugs are used.

# Travel to Sierra Leone

## Climate in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone experiences a hot and humid tropical climate with a distinct wet and dry season. The summer rainy season is between May and November with most rain falling in July and August. Temperatures average 78.8F (26C) throughout the year, with nighttime temperatures hovering around 75F (24C). The Harmattan desert wind blows between November and February, relieving the high humidity in Freetown and making this period the coolest time of year in the city.

## Health Notes when travelling to Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is one of three countries that has been at the heart of the Ebola outbreak in previous years, causing serious alarm in West Africa. The WHO officially declared Sierra Leone Ebola transmission free on 17 March 2016, and the FCO no longer advise against all but essential travel to Sierra Leone. However, travellers are advised to familiarise themselves with the disease and current health and travel advice for the country before travelling to Sierra Leone. Some travel restrictions may be in place due to the Ebola outbreak.

Health policies require that all travellers arriving from a yellow fever area have a vaccination certificate, but yellow fever is a risk throughout the country and immunisation is recommended for all visitors. Other recommended vaccinations include Hepatitis A, typhoid, rabies, and polio. Malaria and dengue fever are high risks and precautions against mosquito bites are advised, as well as prophylaxis for malaria, which occurs throughout the year.

Outbreaks of Lassa fever is endemic in the east. HIV/AIDS is prevalent. Diarrhoea and dysentery are common complaints and water should be treated before drinking. Cholera is also a concern. Travellers should bring adequate supplies of personal medication to the country, as supplies are often not available in pharmacies. Medical care is limited in Freetown and almost non-existent elsewhere. An emergency hospital is located near Freetown, but the bad road makes it difficult to get there; there is no ambulance service in the country. Comprehensive travel insurance is advised, which includes emergency evacuation.

## Safety Notes when travelling to Sierra Leone

Most visits to the country pass without trouble, though a small number of incidents involving British nationals being robbed, sometimes at knifepoint, have been reported. The incidents were reported around Congo Cross, Wilkinson Road, Lumley Beach and Aberdeen, and visitors are advised to be cautious in these areas after dark. Petty crime is more common, with pick-pocketing and other opportunistic crimes prevalent throughout the country. Visitors should take care not to flash valuables or cash.

Travel outside of the Western Area that includes Freetown can be difficult, as roads are poor and transport unreliable. All road or sea transfers from the airport to Freetown should be done in daylight hours due to safety concerns. Political demonstrations and large gatherings should be avoided, as these have the potential to turn violent.

## Customs in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leoneans are extremely polite and manner-conscious, and elders are especially respected. There is a strong Muslim culture among locals, who expect visitors to be sensitive to religious customs, particularly during the month of Ramadan, when eating, drinking, and smoking during daylight hours should be discreet. Visitors should be aware it is illegal to buy or export diamonds, gold, or ivory without the necessary licenses; homosexuality is illegal.

## Duty Free in Sierra Leone

Travellers may bring 200 cigarettes or 225g tobacco, and 1 litre of wine or spirits into the country without paying customs duty. Narcotics are strictly forbidden.

## Doing Business in Sierra Leone

Punctuality is not necessarily expected, especially if the delay relates to traffic or if it concerns the person who called the meeting. English is the most common language for business and most business meetings require only casual comfortable clothing. Shaking hands for men and women is the most common form of introduction and business cards are exchanged. It is acceptable to address colleagues by their first names at business meetings. Business hours are generally 8am to 12pm and 2pm to 5pm Monday to Friday.

## Communication in Sierra Leone

The international dialling code for Sierra Leone is +232. The outgoing code is 00 followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0044 for the UK). Most good hotels and some restaurants offer free WiFi, and mobile phone service is good, with SIM cards being widely available.

## Tipping in Sierra Leone

A service charge of about 10 percent is included in restaurant and hotel bills, but otherwise tipping is optional.

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## Entry Requirements

### Entry requirements for Americans:

US nationals require a visa and a valid passport.

### Entry requirements for Canadians:

Canadians require a visa and a valid passport.

### Entry requirements for UK nationals:

UK nationals require a visa and a valid passport.

### Entry requirements for Australians:

Australians require a visa and a valid passport.

### Entry requirements for Irish nationals:

Irish nationals require a visa and a valid passport.

### Entry requirements for New Zealanders:

New Zealand nationals require a visa and a valid passport.

### Entry requirements for South Africans:

South Africans require a visa and a valid passport.

## **Tourist Offices**

National Tourist Board, Freetown: +232 77 347810 <https://ntb.gov.sl/>

## Sierra Leone Embassies

### **In the United States:**

Sierra Leone Embassy, Washington DC, United States (also responsible for Canada): +1 202 939 9261.

### **In the United Kingdom:**

Sierra Leone High Commission, London, United Kingdom: +44 20 7404 0140.

### **In Australia:**

Consulate General of Sierra Leone, Sydney, Australia: +61 2 8964 8851

### **In New Zealand:**

Sierra Leone High Commission, Beijing, China (also responsible for New Zealand): +86 10 6532 1222.

### **In South Africa:**

Sierra Leone High Commission, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (also responsible for South Africa): +251 1 710 033.

## Foreign Embassies in Sierra Leone

### **American Embassy**

United States Embassy, Freetown: +232 22 515 000.

### **Canadian Embassy**

Canadian Embassy, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (also responsible for Sierra Leone): +225 2 030 0700.

### **British Embassy**

British High Commission, Freetown: +232 76 541 386.

### **Australian Embassy**

Australian High Commission, Accra, Ghana (also responsible for Sierra Leone): +233 (302) 216 400.

### **Irish Embassy**

Irish Embassy, Abuja, Nigeria (also responsible for Sierra Leone: +234 9 462 0611.

### **South African Embassy**

South African Embassy, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (also responsible for Sierra Leone): +225 2 244 5963.

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# Overview of the Attractions in Sierra Leone

## Public Holidays in Sierra Leone

	2020	2021
<b>Birth of the Prophet</b>	Tue. October 29	Fri. October 18
<b>Woman's Day</b>	Fri. March 8	Fri. March 8
<b>New Year's Day</b>	Mon. January 1	Mon. January 1
<b>Good Friday</b>	Wed. April 10	Tue. April 2
<b>Easter Monday</b>	Sat. April 13	Fri. April 5
<b>Independence Day</b>	Sat. April 27	Sat. April 27
<b>Eid al-Fitr (End of Ramadan)</b>	Fri. May 24	Mon. May 13
<b>Tabaski (Feast of the Sacrifice)</b>	Wed. July 31	Sat. July 20
<b>Christmas Day</b>	Wed. December 25	Wed. December 25
<b>Boxing Day</b>	Thu. December 26	Thu. December 26