



Ecotourism*

Destination Guide



BUNCE ISLAND



TIWAI ISLAND



TACUGAMA

Village Weaver



Introduction

Sierra Leone is an emerging tourism destination and one of West Africa's most seductive ecotourism destinations. Its contrast of palm-fringed beaches, breathtaking mountains, welcoming people, sweeping savannah, vibrant culture and tropical rainforests offer an exciting and inspiring adventure in undiscovered Africa. The country is located on the west coast of Africa between Guinea to the north and Liberia to the East. Sierra Leone covers an area of 73,326 square kilometres (27,925 square miles). A flat plain 113 kilometres (70 miles) stretches along much of the coastline from the mangrove swamps on the Liberian border to the peninsular, where the capital, Freetown, sits, framed by the majestic Sierra Loya mountains rising 1000m (3280ft) behind it.

Moving eastwards, away from the coast, the land rises to take in the lofty peaks of Wara Wara, Loma, Sula, Tingi and Bintumani, West Africa's highest mountain at 1,948m (6,391 ft). Lowland plains of forests, bush and farmland sweep from the centre of the country down to the rainforests of the south. Cutting across the country are seven rivers — the Sewa, Moa, Rokel, Jong, Waanje, Bagru and the Little Scarcies — flowing from the north-east to the south-west and into the Atlantic Ocean.



People

Sierra Leone has a growing population of around 8 million people comprised of fifteen ethnic groups, each with their own language. The Temne to the north and Mendes to the south are the largest. The Loko, Limba, Koranko, Fula, Madingo, Susu, Limba, Kissi, Kono, Vai, Yalonka, Sherbro, Krio and Krim make up the rest. The Krios, primarily found in the Western Area, are the direct descendants of freed slaves that landed in Freetown between 1787 and 1885. They account for just 4% of the population, yet it is the Krio language, derived from English and several indigenous African languages, that is the lingua franca and is spoken in virtually all parts of Sierra Leone uniting all ethnic groups. With that said, English is the official language of instruction.

Sierra Leone is predominantly a Muslim and Christian society with growing indigenous belief minorities. Despite this, it is one of the most religiously tolerant nations in the world. Its people live in peaceful co-existence, often marrying across ethnic and religious lines and beliefs.



Where to visit...

Sierra Leone promises an exotic ecotourism experience. Our ecotourism offers ranges from adventure tourism, wildlife tourism, heritage and are comparable to any in the world, without much of the dangers. Adventurers enjoy the natural beauty of the country without the fair of being attacked by carnivores animals.



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Adventure

Mountains and Hills



Wara Wara Mountain - The Mountain of the North

Wara Wara Mountain is located in the village of Wara Wara Yagala in Koinadugu District, Northern Province approximately 5 hours drive from Freetown.

Famous for its New Year's Day celebrations, where Sierra Leoneans travel from around the country to picnic and party high on the mountain peak, Wara Wara offers breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. The mountain holds spiritual significance for the Limba tribe, who believe the guardian spirit Kumba will cleanse and purify all those who journey to the mountain top. Kabala is also home to the Korankos who are known to be fierce fighters and hunters. The Oronko is the guardian spirit of the Korankos.





The mountain stands tall over the valley that carves through the heart of Wara Wara Yagala town ringed by hills and offers great opportunities for trekking to neighbouring villages such as Bafodia, Falaba and Sinkunia. A hike up the mountain will take around 35 to 45 minutes.

After a hike, visitors can rest in Kabala, the nearest town where the people are friendly in a comfortable climate.

Most recently through the support of the Enhanced Integrated Framework Tourism Project; a nature trail to the site was developed, adding value to the experience. Adventurers will also find Eco-lodges and an entertainment centre at their disposal for rest and to learn more about the area.

While in the North you can also use the opportunity to explore other ecotourism sites like the Bintumani Mountain, Lake Sonfon and the Tingi Hills. For those who enjoy walking or mountaineering, Sierra Leone offers a range of the most beautiful and untouched of mountains and rolling hills. Climb Bintumani Mountain, walk in the Tingi Hills or take a dip in Lake Sonfon. The Bumbuna Falls, with its huge volume of water rushing over rocks into a pool below, are a dramatic and inspiring sight. There are also many forest paths and walks in the area and hiking routes into the Sula Mountains.



Wild Life

The Gola Rainforest National Park

The Southeast is also home to the great Gola Rainforest - Sierra Leone's green diamond. Some 40km east of Kenema is the Gola Rainforest National Park, officially opened in 2010 and Sierra Leone's second national park. It is Sierra Leone's largest tract of rainforest and was originally part of a larger forest that covered much of West Africa's coastal region. The Forest is home to the most interesting and spectacular diversity of wildlife to be found in West Africa. This includes over 330 bird species, over 650 species of butterfly and 49 species of mammals including a population of over 300 Chimpanzees. It is also home to the Pygmy Hippopotamus and a small Forest Elephant population. Accommodation is available on-site in local community guesthouses.





Tacugama Chimp Sanctuary

Western Area

The Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary is situated in 100 acres of rainforest within the Western Area Reserve about 30 minutes drive from Freetown and is home to more than 100 orphaned and rescued chimpanzees. The sanctuary advocates for wildlife and habitat conservation in Sierra Leone. A tour leads visitors through the journey of these rescued chimps, from their arrival in the nursery, which offers the best viewing opportunities, to their release into the larger reserves. Visitors can overnight in one of their beautiful self-catering eco-lodges surrounded by pristine rainforest.



Islands

TIWAI ISLAND

There is a wonderful diversity of wildlife in Sierra Leone with a total of twenty-one protected areas. The following are some of the most compelling and special places:

Tiwai Island — situated in the South-Eastern part of Sierra Leone.

Tiwai, meaning Big Island in Mende, is a unique rainforest island that has one of the highest concentrations of primates in the world, over 120 different bird species and 800 species of butterflies.

Located on the Moa River in the south-east of the country, and about eight hours drive from Freetown, Tiwai is Sierra Leone's only community conservation programme, designated a national park in 1987 at the request of the Barri and Koya people.

A birdwatcher's delight, the island offers glimpses of rare species including the endangered white-breasted guinea fowl, as well as the rufous fishing owl, and seven types of hornbill and kingfisher birds. Its eleven species of primates include the endangered colobus and Diana monkeys. Lucky visitors may also catch a peek of the famously elusive Pigmy Hippos while exploring the 50km of hiking trails across the island. Guided walking treks and river boat rides are available upon request.

The Island offers basic and comfortable camping in the centre of the rainforest that can accommodate up to 25 guests at a time, with tents, hammocks, dining and washing facilities. A Research Centre accommodates 15 guests. It is advisable to take bed sheets, blankets (it can get very cold at night), insect repellent and rain gear. The nearest small shops are 16kms from the island. Visitors can bring their own food and drink or local dishes of fish and rice can be prepared if booked in advance.

Tiwai Island is also one of the ecotourism sites that benefited from the Enhanced Integrated Framework Tourism Project to develop the jetty between Kambama Village and the Island itself. The campsites, toilets, art and craft centre, cultural sites, research centre, excursion boats and Eco-lodges, all add value to the experience.



Islands

For a real tropical island castaway experience travel to Banana Island, just a 30 minute boat ride from Kent beach.

Comprised of three close knit islands — the two main islands of Dublin and Ricketts and the uninhabited Mes-Meheux — Banana Island offers secluded white beaches surrounded by tropical rainforest in which lie relics of the Islands history.

Rusting canons lie on strategic headlands where they were once used by the British Royal Navy stationed on the island to stop slaving activity after the trade was abolished in Britain in 1807. Ship-wrecks, visible from a boat, lie in the waters around the island. Elsewhere on the island lies the remains of a fort through which slaves passed on their way to be sold in Europe and the Americas in the 18th century. In the late 18th and 19th centuries, the islands became a settlement for freed slaves whose descendants make up most of the 900-strong friendly inhabitants today.

Banana Island offers excellent snorkelling opportunities with both shipwrecks and marine life to explore along with game fishing, either from shore or a boat. As a beneficial to the Enhanced Integrated Framework Tourism Project; Banana Island can now boast of three chalets, an art and craft centre, and excursion boats.

BANANA ISLAND



Islands

A boat trip to Bunce Island, which lies in the mouth of the Sierra Leone river 18 km from Freetown, is a journey into the dark past of the slave trade. Described as 'the most important historic site in Africa for the United States,' Bunce was the largest British slave station on the West African rice coast, a notorious point for the collection for slaves destined for Europe and the Americas, including the Gullah people of South Carolina. Explore the old fort wall, the slave quarters, the ruined fort and canons, the graveyard for both blacks and whites, and the dark prison with shackles still fastened to the walls and feel the gravitas associated with the harrowing experience.



BUNCE ISLAND





USEFUL INFORMATION

Language: English is the official Language. Krio is the lingua Franca.

Currency: New Leone (NLe) and cents

Time Zone: Greenwich Mean Time (GMT)

International Telephone code: +232

Electricity: 220-240 volts AC, 50Hz

Economy: Agriculture, fishing, mining and a developing tourism sector

Political Status: Sierra Leone operates under a multiparty democracy.

Religion: Islam, Christianity

Climate: Sierra Leone has a tropical climate with average temperatures of 27 to 30 degrees celcius. It has two seasons, the rainy season and the dry season. The rains starts in May and ends October, while the dry season is between November to April.

Airport: Sierra Leone has recently opened its new international Airport - Freetown International Airport managed and operated by the Summa Groups.

Travel: Sierra Leone is only six hours direct flight from Europe on international airlines Brussels Airlines, Air France, Turkish Airlines, Royal Air Maroc, Kenya Airways, Air Senegal, and Asky airlines operate to and from Freetown.

Entry requirements: Sierra Leone operates a visa on arrival policy for about 80 countries. All visitors are required to carry a valid passport and for those countries that are illegible for visa on arrival should obtain a valid visa. Visas can be secured at Sierra Leone Missions Abroad. It must also be noted that citizens from ECOWAS states, do not require an entry visa. Handling Agents such as Visit Sierra Leone, Tourism is Life and IPC Tours also assist in facilitating the visa process.

Travel Insurance: It is advisable for visitors to take a comprehensive travel insurance covering, injury, illness, death, delayed/lost/damaged baggage and personal belongings.

Transfer to/from the Airport: The most common entry point to Sierra Leone by air is the Freetown International Airport located across the Sierra Leone River from Freetown. Due to its location, there are various transfer facilities including water taxi services to Aberdeen and ferries to Kissy and Government Wharf in the Eastern/central parts of the city.

Airport Security Charges: There is a fee of \$25 security charge for all passengers. We accept Payment in the following forms: 1.xxx 2.xxx 3.xxx

Driving: Traffic drives on the right. An international driving license is required to drive in Sierra Leone.

Health Requirements: A vaccination certificate for yellow fever is required. It is advisable to take anti-malaria tablets and consult your doctor or Travel Agent on what other precautions may be advised, from time to time.

Official/Business Hours: Monday to Friday, 08.00-17.00 hours (8AM-5PM)

Banks: Banking hours in Sierra Leone are between 8:30am-3:30pm from Monday to Fridays. Some banks do offer international cash withdrawal services.

Photography: Always ask permission before taking pictures of nationals and private and sensitive properties. In most cases people will be happy to comply, especially if you send them a copy of the picture.

For further details contact

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