

AFRICA · BEACHES · WILDLIFE · HISTORY · OFF THE BEATEN PATH



Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's Freetown peninsula is lined with palm-backed beaches of pale sand, from River Number Two to Bureh, while Tiwai Island and Tacugama offer some of West Africa's best primate encounters. Bunce Island's slave-fort ruins add sobering history. Tourism is still small-scale, so expect few crowds and patchy infrastructure.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Sierra Leone and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 19 June 2026.

 CAPITAL Freetown	 CURRENCY Sierra Leonean leone (SLE) £1 ≈ SLE 32.55	 LANGUAGE Krio, English Mende, Temne	 BEST TIME Dec–Mar
 DAILY BUDGET £40–£180 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type D, G 230V · UK plugs fit	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 10h 30m via Brussels, Casablanca or Istanbul ~£650–£1,050 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+0 standard time

Sierra Leone fits forested mountains, rainforest islands and long Atlantic beaches into an area a little smaller than Scotland. Freetown, founded in 1792 by formerly enslaved Black Loyalists shipped from Nova Scotia, sits where the green hills of the peninsula meet one of the world's largest natural harbours. Most visits base themselves on the peninsula's beaches south of the city, add Tacugama's chimpanzees and a boat to Bunce Island or the Banana Islands, then travel east via Bo to Tiwai Island and the Gola rainforest near Kenema.

Travel is slower and pricier than many expect. Good beach lodges and Freetown hotels charge international rates, roads beyond the main highways are rough, and the rainy season from May to October is among the wettest anywhere. The rewards are near-empty beaches, superb seafood, warm, joking hospitality and a country rebuilding with real energy after war and Ebola. It suits travellers comfortable with improvisation; check the FCDO advice and plan the airport transfer before you arrive.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

BEACH

River Number Two and the peninsula beaches

Where a river meets the sea beneath forested hills, River Number Two is the peninsula's postcard beach, run by a community association. Bureh, Tokeh and Kent lie nearby; Bureh has a surf club.
- 2

WILDLIFE

Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary

A community-run island in the Moa River with 11 primate species, including red colobus and chimpanzees, plus elusive pygmy hippos. Stay overnight at the camp and take guided forest walks and canoe trips.

3

WILDLIFE

Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary

Set in the forested hills of the Western Area Peninsula National Park above Freetown, this sanctuary rescues orphaned chimpanzees. Guided tours explain its work, and you can stay overnight in its eco-lodges.

4

HISTORY

Bunce Island

Ruins of an 18th-century British slave fort in the Sierra Leone River, from which thousands of captives were shipped to the rice plantations of South Carolina and Georgia. Reached by boat from Freetown.

5

NATURE

Banana Islands

Three small islands off the peninsula's southern tip, reached by boat from Kent, with snorkelling, colonial-era ruins, simple guesthouses and fishing villages that feel far from Freetown's traffic.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Freetown

≈ 1.1 million people

The hilly capital has the Cotton Tree site, the National Museum, colourful Krio board houses and Lumley Beach's bars; traffic is heavy, so stay near where you plan to spend time.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Kenema

≈ 200,000 people

The eastern diamond-trading hub, lively but with few sights; useful as a stop on the way to Gola Rainforest National Park and the Kambui Hills.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Bo

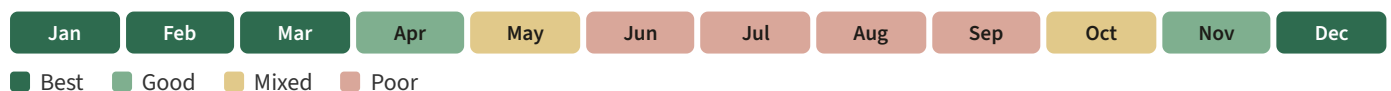
≈ 175,000 people

A relaxed, friendly provincial capital and educational centre, Bo is the usual transport hub and overnight stop for reaching Tiwai Island.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

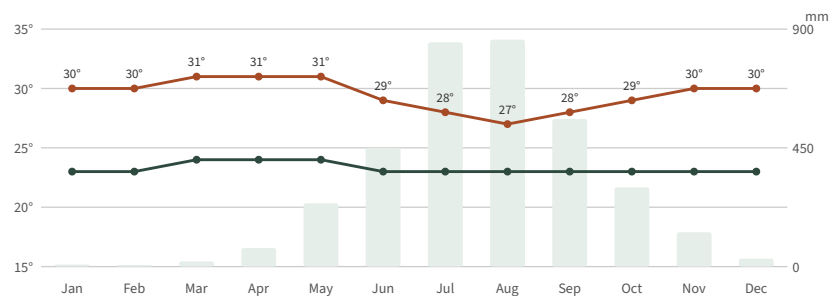
When to go to Sierra Leone

Best time: **Dec–Mar**.



Average climate in Freetown

High °C Low °C Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan, Dec	Christmas and New Year masquerades Over the festive season, Ode-lay and other masquerade societies parade elaborately costumed 'devils' through Freetown's streets to drums and dancing crowds.
Apr	Independence Day On 27 April, Sierra Leone marks independence from Britain in 1961 with parades, flag-raising and street parties, especially lively in Freetown.

How much does Sierra Leone cost?

SHOESTRING £40 per person / day ≈ SLE 1,302 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £90 per person / day ≈ SLE 2,929 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £180 per person / day ≈ SLE 5,859 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Cassava leaf plasas Finely pounded cassava leaves stewed in palm oil with fish, meat and chilli, served over rice — 'plasas' is the Krio word for a leafy sauce.	Groundnut stew Chicken or fish simmered in a rich peanut sauce with tomato and chilli, eaten with rice; a comforting staple across the country.	Pepper soup A fiery, thin broth of fish or meat with hot peppers and local spices, said to cure everything from colds to hangovers.
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Getting around

Freetown International Airport is at Lungi, across the estuary: most visitors take the water taxi to Aberdeen, around 30–40 minutes, timed around flights. In town, kekes, okadas and shared poda-poda minibuses are cheap but slow in traffic. Paved highways link Freetown with Bo, Kenema and Makeni; for Tiwai, Gola or the north, hire a 4x4 with driver.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  D G 230V — UK plugs fit	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Telephone: 117 (ambulance, fire, police) Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +232	TIME ZONE UTC+0 (standard time)
TAP WATER Not safe — drink bottled or treated water	DRIVING On the right
TIPPING Not expected at local eateries; around 10% in upmarket Freetown restaurants, and tip guides, boatmen and drivers for good service.	

ETIQUETTE

Greet people with 'kushe' and ask after their health before getting to business; use your right hand, and always ask before photographing people or markets.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Freetown International Airport (FNA), Freetown (Lungi)

Visas & entry for Sierra Leone

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to enter Sierra Leone.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus Typhoid Yellow fever

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya Dengue Hepatitis B Measles Rabies Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required for all travellers (usually over 9 months or 1 year old). There is a risk of yellow fever in parts of the country — vaccination may be advised.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in Sierra Leone: antimalarial tablets recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Sierra Leone

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Sat 26 Dec 2026	Boxing Day
Mon 28 Dec 2026	Boxing Day (observed)
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Thu 18 Feb 2027	Armed Forces Day
Mon 8 Mar 2027	International Women's Day

Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Fri 26 Mar 2027	Good Friday
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Easter Monday
Tue 27 Apr 2027	Independence Day
Sat 1 May 2027	International Worker's Day
Mon 3 May 2027	International Worker's Day (observed)
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (observed, estimated) (date may shift)
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (date may shift)
Mon 16 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (observed, estimated) (date may shift)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Krio

ENGLISH	KRIO	SAY IT
Hello	Kushɛ	<i>KOO-sheh</i>
Thank you	Tɛnki	<i>TEN-kee</i>
Please	Duya	<i>DOO-ya</i>
Excuse me	A bɛg padin	<i>ah BEG pah-DEEN</i>
How much is this?	Ɔmɔs fɔ am?	<i>AW-maws faw am</i>

Know before you go

- Plan your airport transfer: the water taxi from Lungi to Aberdeen is quickest, while the road round via Port Loko can take three hours or more.
- The leone was redenominated in 2022 by removing three zeros; old-style prices are still sometimes quoted, so check which one a seller means.
- A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required on arrival, and malaria is widespread: take antimalarials and use repellent, especially in the rainy season.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.