

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has largely stayed out of the news lately, which, considering how it earned most of its press in the 1990s, is a good thing. The decade-long civil war garnered regular headlines thanks to widespread atrocities committed by rebel soldiers, many of them not yet in their teens.

But oh how things have changed. Peace was declared in 2002 and it has blossomed. Life has largely returned to normal and today Sierra Leone is one of West Africa's safest destinations. Reconstruction continues apace, investors are arriving in droves and travellers are trickling in. The one recent event that did make headlines was a free and fair election.

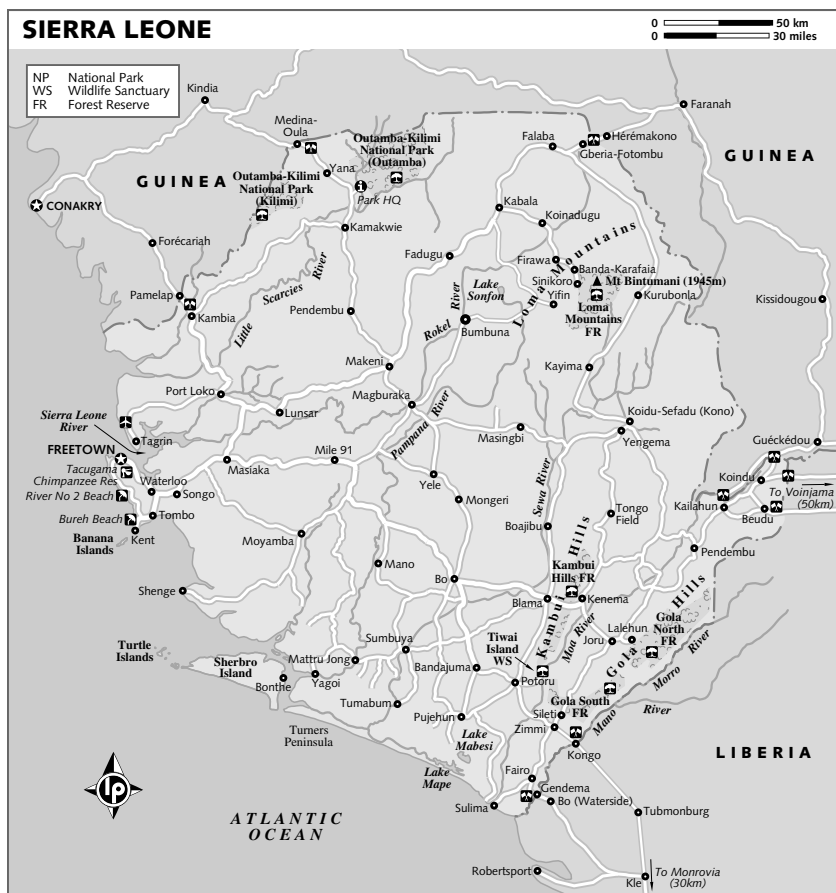
With some of the most perfect palm-lined sands on the continent, it won't be long before Sierra Leone takes its place in Europe's packaged-beach-holiday scene, but for now visitors can have the surf outside the capital pretty much to themselves. Travel to the provinces, where roads are often abysmal and facilities usually basic (but getting better), remains in the realm of the adventurous, but with cheerful people and wonderful parks, the rewards are many.

To be sure, Sierra Leone still has problems. It ranks third from last (after many years at the very bottom) in the UN's Human Development Index, unemployment remains high and corruption seems to be getting worse. But most locals hang on to their optimism and most visitors come away enchanted.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 72,325 sq km
- **ATMs** Available in Freetown
- **Borders** Guinea and Liberia
- **Budget** from US\$15 per day
- **Capital** Freetown
- **Languages** English, Krio, Mende, Temne
- **Money** Leone; US\$1 = Le3825, €1 = Le5540
- **Population** 6.4 million
- **Seasons** Dry (mid-November to mid-May), wet (mid-May to mid-November)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 232; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visas** Required by everyone except most West African citizens. Should be arranged before arrival.





HIGHLIGHTS

- **Beach bumming** Kick back on the Freetown peninsula (p513) and the Banana Islands (p514).
- **Tiwai Island** (p515) Commune with primates at the famous wildlife sanctuary.
- **Outamba-Kilimi National Park** (p515) Search for wildlife on foot or from a canoe.
- **Freetown** (p509) Marvel as such minor historic sites paint such a vivid history.
- **Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary** (p514) Get close to man's closest relative.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Sierra Leone is hot and very humid. The coast gets up to 3250mm of precipitation per

year during the mid-May to mid-November wet season. July and August are the wettest months, except in the far south, which gets a bit of a break then.

The best time to visit is November, after the rains and before the dusty harmattan winds blow in. During the rainy season, washed out roads make travel to some destinations difficult or impossible.

ITINERARIES

- **One Week** Many people spend their whole week at the beach, though it's worth taking a few days upcountry to visit Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary (p515) and a town or two. If you're here for the wildlife you can get to both Tiwai and