

# Sierra Leone

📍 232 / POP 5.4 MILLION

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## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Seafood at Franco's (p357)
- ➔ Oasis (p354)
- ➔ Picnic at Turtle Islands (p359)

## Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Tokeh Sands (p357)
- ➔ Tiwai Island (p359)
- ➔ Tribe Wanted (p357)

## Why Go?

West Africa's secret beach destination rises from the soft waters of the Atlantic, dressed in sun-stained hues, rainforest green and the red, red roads of the north. Sierra Leone: the land so-named because it's shaped like a mountain lion. Sweet Salone, the locals say.

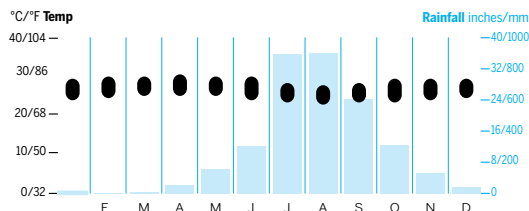
In Freetown, colourful stilted houses remember the days when freed slaves from the Caribbean were resettled upon these shores. Some landed on the peninsula, blanketed with sands as white and soft as cotton wool.

In the north, the Loma Mountains form the highest point west of Cameroon. Further east, streams cut national parks and mangrove swamp water swathes rainforest that shelter endangered species like the shy, waddling pygmy hippo.

The curtains have been drawn on the painful past, and it's time for a new act in Sierra Leone. Join the island-hoppers and sun-seekers, swim in the clear blue waters, explore the archipelagos and crack open fresh lobster in the shade of skinny palms and rope-strung hammocks.

## When to Go

### Freetown



**Nov–Jun** The dry season is marked by mild, dusty harmattan winds from December until February.

**April** The average daytime temperature is 32°C.

**Jun–Nov** The rainy season sees spectacular storms and up to 3200mm of precipitation.

## FREETOWN

022 / POP 1.1 MILLION

Strung between the mountains and the sea, Sierra Leone's capital is a cheeky, quicksilver capital bubbling with energy, colour and charm. One minute it's calm, offering up quiet beaches, friendly Krio chat and warm plates of soup and rice. The next it's frenzied and playing dirty, throwing you into the back of a shared taxi and hurtling you up and down its pretty little hills.

And it might just be the only capital in the world where when you emerge from the airport, blinking after an overnight flight, you find yourself standing on the wooden deck of a port flanked by a backdrop of mountains, beaches and palm trees so idyllic you wonder if it's real. Well it's all real, all of it – the chatter and the chaos and the colour and the dirt and the lush lobster dinners and the devastating war history – and those lovely white sands too.



### Sierra Leone Highlights

- 1 Feeling the white sand between your toes on **River No 2 Beach** (p356) and other Freetown beaches that line the stunning peninsula.
- 2 Tracking colobus monkeys and joining the search for the elusive pygmy

- hippo on **Tiwai Island** (p359).
- 3 Pushing through the cool mist as you scale, **Mt Bintumani** (p358) West Africa's highest peak this side of Cameroon.

- 4 Soaking up the spirit of **Freetown** (p350), the colourful, cheeky capital.
- 5 Sleeping in tree houses in **Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary** (p358) while rescued chimps chatter in the rainforest below.