

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 Sierra Leone has blossomed. Life has largely returned to normal and today it is one of West Africa's safest destinations. Reconstruction continues apace, investors are arriving in droves and travellers are trickling in.

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. And after a day in the sun, Freetown offers everything you need for a night out. Travel to the provinces, where roads are often abysmal and facilities usually basic, remains in the realm of the adventurous, but with vibrant culture and wonderful parks, the rewards are many.

To be sure, Sierra Leone still has problems. It ranked second last in the UN's most recent Human Development Index, unemployment remains high and the education system hasn't met expectations, but most locals hang on to their optimism.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 72,325 sq km
- **Capital** Freetown
- **Telephone code** ☎ 232
- **Famous for** Diamonds
- **Languages** English, Krio, Mende and Temne
- **Money** leone (Le); US\$1 = Le2925; €1 = Le3475; CFA1 = Le5.3
- **Population** 6 million (2005)
- **Visa** Available at airport and borders, but best bought before arrival.



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Beach bumming** (p760) Relax on the Freetown peninsula.
- **Tiwai Island** (p763) Primate-watching at the famous wildlife sanctuary.
- **Outamba-Kilimi National Park** (p766) Track big mammals at Sierra Leone's only national park.
- **Freetown** (p758) Discover the anything-goes nightlife.
- **Bonthe** (p763) Explore the remote coastal waters and islands.

ITINERARIES

- **One week** Many people spend their whole week at the beaches. Although it might be hard to pull yourself off the sand, it's worth taking a few days upcountry to visit **Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary** (p763) and a town or two. If you are here for the wildlife you can get to both Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary and **Outamba-Kilimi National Park** (p766) and still have a day at the beach.
- **Two weeks** In two weeks you can see most of the country without travelling too fast. It also gives you enough time to add scaling **Mt Bintumani** (p767) to your itinerary.
- **One month** A month is enough time to see and do just about everything in this chapter.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Sierra Leone is one of West Africa's wettest and hottest countries, with an average annual rainfall of 3150mm and temperature of 27°C (see climate charts p813). The rainy season stretches from mid-May to mid-November, with July and August the wettest months. The humidity can be oppressive along the coast, although sea breezes afford some relief. Inland, the days are even hotter, but it cools down much more at night, especially in Kabala and other northwest towns.

The best time to visit is November, after the rains and before the dusty harmattan winds blow in and paint the skies grey. During the rainy season, washed out roads make travel to some destinations difficult or impossible, though there are some sunny days at the beginning and end. The further you go into the dry season the more heat you'll have to endure and the less green you'll see in the countryside.

HOW MUCH?

- **Small Temne basket** Le5000
- **100km bush taxi ride** Le15,000
- **Bottle of palm wine** Le600
- **2 lapa (about 4 sq yds) of gara cloth** Le25,000
- **A night at a music show** Free

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of petrol** Le2500
- **1.5L of bottled water** Le2500
- **Bottle of Star beer** Le2000
- **Souvenir T-shirt** Le15,000
- **Fry fry with egg** Le800

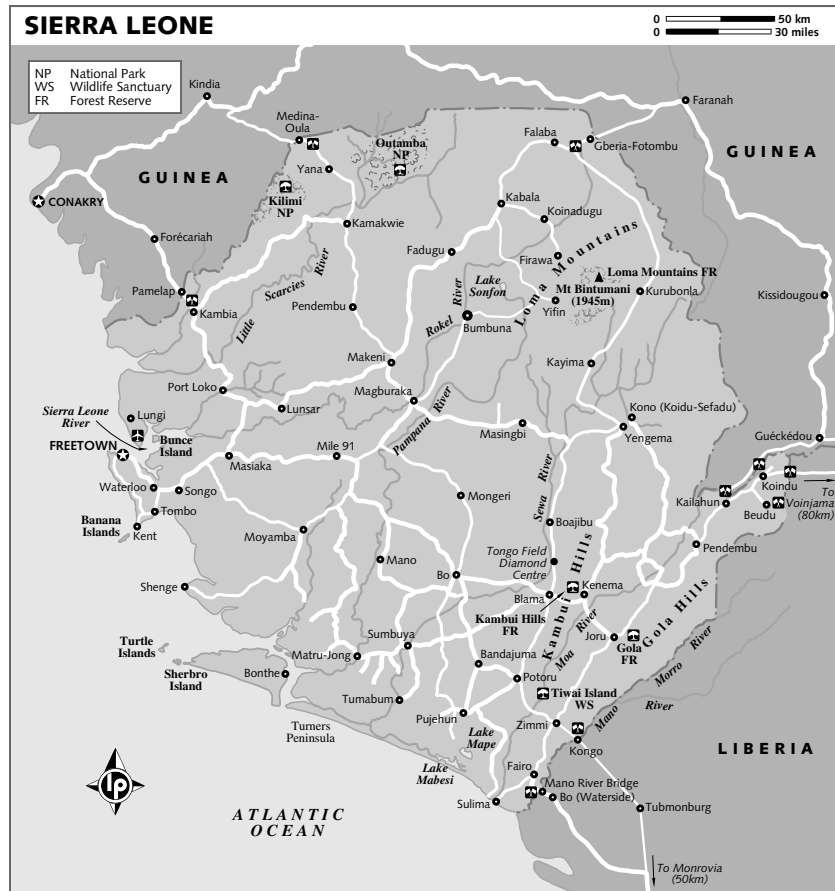
HISTORY

The region now called Sierra Leone was on the southern edge of the great Empire of Mali, which flourished between the 13th and 15th centuries (for more details on the early history of the region, see p30). Early inhabitants included the Temne, the Sherbro and the Limba, who were organised into independent chiefdoms. Mandingo/Malinké traders had also entered the region early on and integrated with indigenous peoples.

European Contact

Contact with Europeans began in 1462 with the arrival of Portuguese navigators who called the area Serra Lya (Lion Mountain), which was later modified to Sierra Leone. Around 120 years later, Sir Francis Drake stopped here during his voyage around the world; however, the British did not control the area until the 18th century when they began to dominate the slave trade along the West African coast.

The American War of Independence in the 1770s provided an opportunity for thousands of slaves to gain freedom by fighting for Britain. When the war ended, over 15,000 ex-slaves made their way to London, where they suffered unemployment and poverty. In 1787 a group of philanthropists purchased 52 sq km of land near Bunce Island in present-day Sierra Leone from a local chief for the purpose of founding



a 'Province of Freedom' for the ex-slaves. This became Freetown. That same year, the first group of about 400 men and women (300 ex-slaves and 100 Europeans, mainly prostitutes) arrived.

Within three years all but 48 settlers had deserted or had died from disease or in fights with the local inhabitants. But in 1792 the determined British philanthropists sent a second band of settlers, this time 1200 ex-slaves who had fled from the USA to Nova Scotia. Later, they sent 550 more from Jamaica. To the chagrin of the philanthropists, some settlers, both white and black, joined in the slave trade. In 1808 the British government took over the Freetown settlement and declared it a colony.

The Colonial Period

By the early 1800s, slavery had been abolished in Britain. Over the next 60 years British ships plied the West African coast, trying to intercept slave ships destined for America. Freetown became the depot for thousands of 'recaptives' from West Africa, as well as many migrants from the hinterland. By 1850 over 100 ethnic groups were represented in the colony. They lived in relative harmony, each group in a different section of town.

Like the previous settlers, the recaptives became successful traders and intermarried. All nonindigenous blacks became collectively known as Krios. British administrators favoured the Krios and appointed many to senior posts in the civil service.

Near the end of the 19th century, the tide began to turn against the Krios, who were outnumbered 50 to one by indigenous people, and in 1924 the British administrators established a legislative council with elected representatives, to the advantage of the more numerous indigenous people. Many Krios, who monopolised positions within the civil service, reacted by allying with the British. While other colonies clamoured for independence, they proclaimed loyalty to the Crown, and one group even petitioned against the granting of independence.

Independence

At independence in 1961, it seemed that Western-style democracy would work. There were two parties of equal strength, but they became divided along ethnic lines. The Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) was the party of the Mendes (the dominant ethnic group in southern Sierra Leone) and represented the tribal structure of the old colony. The All People's Congress (APC), formed by trade unionist Siaka Stevens, became identified with the Temnes of the north and voiced the dissatisfaction of the small modernising elite. The Krio community threw its support behind the SLPP, whose leader, Milton Margai, became the first prime minister.

Following Margai's death in 1964, his brother Albert took over and set about replacing the Krios in the bureaucracy with Mendes. The Krios took revenge in the 1967 elections by supporting the APC, which won a one-seat majority. A few hours after the results were announced, a Mende military officer led a coup, placing Siaka Stevens under house arrest. Two days later fellow officers staged a second coup, vowing to end the corruption that was so widespread under the Margai brothers. Stevens went into exile in Guinea and with a group of Sierra Leoneans began training in guerrilla warfare techniques for an invasion. This became unnecessary when a group of private soldiers mutinied and staged a third coup 13 months later – an African record for the number of coups in such a short period.

The Downward Spiral

Stevens returned and formed a new government, but his first decade in office was turbulent. He declared a state of emergency,

banned breakaway parties from the APC and put a number of SLPP members on trial for treason. Meanwhile, the economy continued to deteriorate. The iron-ore mine closed, diamond revenues dropped, living costs increased, students rioted and Stevens again declared a state of emergency. The 1978 election campaign almost became a civil war, and the death toll topped 100. Stevens won, and Sierra Leone became a one-party state.

Despite the one-party system, the 1982 elections were the most violent ever. Stevens was forced to give Mendes and Temnes equal representation in the cabinet, although this did not stop the deterioration of economic and social conditions. With virtually no support left, Stevens finally stepped down in 1985 at the age of 80, naming as his successor Major General Joseph Momoh, head of the army since 1970.

Under Momoh, the economy continued its downward spiral. By 1987 the inflation rate was one of the highest in Africa, budget deficits were astronomical, and smugglers continued to rob Sierra Leone of up to 90% of its diamond revenue.

Things worsened in late 1989 when civil war broke out in neighbouring Liberia. By early 1990, thousands of Liberian refugees had fled into Sierra Leone. The following year, fighting spilled across the border and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Sierra Leonean rebels who were opposed to Momoh, took over much of the eastern part of the country.

The Difficult Decade

The Momoh government used the war in the east as an excuse to postpone elections, but finally, in September 1991, a new constitution was adopted to allow for a multi-party system. Before an election date could be announced, though, a group of young military officers overthrew Momoh in April 1992. The National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) was set up, and 27-year-old Captain Valentine Strasser was sworn in as head of state. Elections and a return to civilian rule were promised for 1995.

Soon, though, optimism began to fade. A major drain on resources was the continuing fighting in the east against the RUF, which expanded its control over the diamond-producing areas, robbing the government of a wealth of revenue. They were bolstered after

the coup by supporters of the Momoh regime and by escaping rebels from Liberia. It soon became apparent that none of these groups was fighting for a political objective, but rather their goal was to control the diamond and gold fields. By late 1994 northern and eastern parts of the country had descended into near anarchy, with private armies led by local warlords, government soldiers, rebel soldiers and deserters from the Sierra Leonean and Liberian armies roaming the area at will and terrorising local communities.

In January 1996 Brigadier General Julius Maada Bio overthrew Strasser in a coup. Despite NPRC efforts to postpone them, previously scheduled elections went ahead, and in March, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah – the leader of the SLPP – was elected president. Kabbah's government continued peace talks with the RUF, which had been initiated by the previous military government, but his efforts bore little fruit.

The Rise of the RUF

On 25 May 1997, a group of junior military officers sympathetic to the RUF staged a coup in Freetown. President Kabbah fled to neighbouring Guinea, and a wave of looting, terror and brutality engulfed the capital. Guerrilla warfare spread throughout much of the country, perpetrated by the RUF and the occupying junta. By early 1998 there were few areas that had not been affected. Food and fuel supplies were scarce almost everywhere, and thousands of Sierra Leoneans had fled the country.

In February 1998 a Nigerian-led West African peacekeeping force, Ecomog (Ecowas Monitoring Group), succeeded in ousting the junta and in taking control of Freetown and many upcountry areas – although not before fleeing rebels had looted and destroyed much in their path. President Kabbah was reinstated in March, but the situation refused to stabilise. On 6 January 1999, with nearly a quarter of the entire Nigerian military serving in Sierra Leone, the RUF staged its boldest assault yet on Freetown, code-named Operation No Living Thing. In the ensuing weeks the city was virtually destroyed and over 6000 people killed before Ecomog again forced the rebels from the capital.

The bloody battle prompted the government to sign the controversial Lomé Peace Agreement with the RUF on 7 July

1999. Under the agreement, the RUF leader Foday Sankoh was to become the country's vice-president and the cabinet minister in charge of diamond production, but over the next year the RUF repeatedly violated the agreement. In May, shortly after his soldiers shot and killed 19 anti-RUF demonstrators, Sankoh was arrested for plotting a coup.

Sierra Leone Today

As part of the Lomé Peace Agreement, the UN deployed a peacekeeping mission, Unamsil, in Sierra Leone that became the largest and most expensive ever deployed by the body. Unamsil's disarmament of the RUF (over 40,000 firearms were destroyed) finished in February 2002, officially ending the war. Elections held that May garnered an 80% turnout and were deemed Sierra Leone's most fair and trouble-free in years. Kabbah was re-elected to a five-year term, while the RUF's political party didn't win a single seat in parliament. That summer an independent war crimes court and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission began and by autumn Unamsil began reducing its 17,500 personnel.

The only hitch in the country's new stability occurred on 13 January 2003, when Johnny Paul Koroma, a member of parliament and one of the 1997 coup leaders, organised an unsuccessful break-in at a Freetown armoury. He fled to Liberia, where unconfirmed reports claimed he died. Sankoh died of natural causes soon after. The first local elections in over 30 years were held in 2004 and the Special Court for Sierra Leone also issued its first indictments. The 11 people charged so far include leaders from all sides of the conflict, as well as former Liberian president Charles Taylor. The last Unamsil soldiers left Sierra Leone at the end of 2005 and were replaced by Uniosl, the United Nations Integrated Office for Sierra Leone, which will promote government accountability, reinforce human rights, oversee development, and prepare the nation for the 2007 elections.

THE CULTURE National Psyche

When Sierra Leoneans get together, whether they're the best of friends or strangers thrown together in a *poda-poda* (minibus), talk always seems to turn to politics, development and corruption – the three largely being one and the same in Sierra Leone.

With elections coming up in 2007, people need to decide whether the ruling SLPP deserves more time to confront what everyone agrees are difficult problems, or if a changing of the guard will speed up the pace.

Though people will argue their points vigorously, they can still share a laugh with those taking the other side. The war did a lot to foster nationalism: everyone knows they are in the same boat and politicians of all stripes get chastised for the sluggish progress. But a line is being drawn between those who only see rough seas ahead and others who fear a sinking ship. Sierra Leone was awash with optimism coming out of the war, but four years on, people see few improvements in their country or their lives and a growing number are feeling tired and hopeless.

Daily Life

The Mendes and Temnes operate a system of secret societies responsible for maintaining culture and tradition. If you see young children with their faces painted white, you'll know that they're in the process of being initiated. Masks are an important feature of some groups' ceremonies.

Population

Sierra Leone is one of the more densely populated countries in West Africa. The two largest of the 18 indigenous tribal groups, the Temnes of the north and Mendes of the south, each comprise about one-third of the population. Other groups include the Limba and Koranko in the north, the Kissi in the east and the Sherbro in the southwest.

Krios, most living in Freetown, constitute less than 2% of the population but a large percentage of the intellectuals and professionals. There are significant numbers of Mandingo/Malinké and Fula/Peul in the north and east. For more information about the Fula and Malinké people, see p75 and p76. Nearly 50,000 Liberian refugees still live in the south. About 4000 Lebanese, 500 Indians and 2000 Europeans reside here permanently, while the profusion of aid workers has made Freetown a very multicultural city.

SPORT

World football is more popular than the local club competition. Some even talk of erecting a giant TV screen at Freetown's stadium to show English Premiership

games as a way to get more people to come watch their local teams.

Cricket matches have recently returned to the country's dusty pitches and many ex-combatants have been recruited to the teams as a way of bringing both sides together in 'gentlemanly conduct'. The national team occasionally plays other former British colonies in Africa.

Parasports, naturally, have come to Sierra Leone and the Single-leg Amputee Sports Club plays in many international football tournaments.

RELIGION

The most recent figures available (which are very outdated) show that Muslims, who are concentrated in the north and east, comprise about 60% of the population. Christians, mainly Anglican, Methodist and a growing number of evangelicals, make up 30%, with the remainder adhering to traditional religions. But in recent years there have been many Muslim converts to Christianity, so the current breakdown is unclear. Additionally, traditional beliefs remain close to the heart of many Christians and Muslims.

ARTS

Textiles & Craftwork

Sierra Leone is known for its fabrics, especially country cloth and *gara*. Country cloth is a coarse material woven from wild cotton into narrow strips that are joined to make blankets and clothing, then coloured with natural dyes. *Gara* is a thin cotton material, tie-dyed or batik-printed, usually with bright synthetic colours. As you'll see in most hotels, it makes excellent bedding.

The Mendes produce the country's best-known masks. These are often used in initiation ceremonies of the women's *bundu* (secret societies). Another traditional craft is the distinctive Temne basketry, made in the north of Sierra Leone but available throughout the country.

Music & Dance

Sierra Leone's main contribution to the world of music is palm-wine music, known locally as *maringa*, which merged the acoustic guitars introduced by Portuguese sailors with Caribbean Calypso brought back by freed slaves. *Maringa* strongly influenced West African music, but has been on the decline

since its best-known exponent, SE Rogie, who crooned with a country twang even before moving to the US, passed away in 1994. For more about the music scene see p58.

When they're not on tour in Europe, you can stop by to watch the Sierra Leone Dance Troupe practise at Freetown's Cultural Village on weekday mornings from 9am to about noon. On the village level, Sierra Leone's traditional dances are some of the most animated in West Africa, though opportunities for watching them are rare. Independence Day is your best bet. The Mende society is one of the few where women do masked dances.

Literature

The narrator of *Moses, Citizen & Me*, by Delia Jarrett-Macaulay, must deal with the fact that her cousin is an eight-year-old child soldier. Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* is a more visceral look at child soldiers. Graham Greene's classic *The Heart of the Matter* goes back to colonial times, where Freetown is the setting for a tale of human weakness, waste and frustration. He wrote it while staying at the ruined City Hotel while working for the British Colonial Service in WWII. Richard Dooling's *White Man's Grave*, the story of the search for a missing Peace Corps worker, was a 1994 National Book Award finalist. On the local scene it is hard to find Sierra Leonean authors, even though many are published. The book vendors in downtown Freetown, on Garrison and Lightfoot Boston Sts, won't have any local books in stock, but can find some for you. Dozens of poets share their work at www.sierra-leone.org/poetry.html.

Cinema

Amistad (1997) tells the story of Mende slaves, led by Sengby Pieh, who in 1839 revolted to obtain their freedom while being shipped from one Cuban port to another. The *Amistad* case so fuelled anti-slavery feelings in the USA that it became one of the catalysts of the American Civil War and, later, Sierra Leone's drive for independence. The Hollywood rumour mill says Leonardo DiCaprio will soon star in *The Blood Diamond*, a thriller set in 1999 Sierra Leone.

Two documentaries worth seeking out are *The Refugee All Stars* (2004), an inspiring story of the eponymous band, and the

harrowing *Cry Freetown* (1999), featuring first-hand footage from Operation No Living Thing.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

The coastal zone, consisting of mangrove swamps, beaches and islands, is flat except for the 40km-long Freetown peninsula – one of the few places in West Africa where mountains rise near the sea – where some peaks top 600m. Inland is an undulating, forested and extensively cultivated plateau. In the northeast are the Loma Mountains where Mt Bintumani (1945m) is one of the tallest peaks in West Africa.

Wildlife

Much of the country's wildlife was killed or displaced to calmer regions during the war, but crocodiles, chimpanzees, bongos, buffalo, hippopotamuses, elephants, leopards and lions all hung on and are slowly recovering, especially the primates. Birdlife is much richer and grey parrots, great blue turacos, brown-cheeked hornbills, rufous fishing-owls and Sierra Leone prinias are some of over 650 recorded species. In October and November humpback whale sightings off the Freetown peninsula are reliable.

National Parks

The government has established 21 parks and reserves, covering 4% of the country, though most are protected more by proclamation than practice. Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary is one of the best places in Africa to see primates, while Outamba-Kilimi National Park is good for large mammals. Sierra Leone's last remaining virgin rainforest covers the Gola Hills in southeastern Sierra Leone. Some hope that the present Gola Forest Reserve, home to many chimpanzees, can become a national park. Protected by its remoteness, the highland rainforest of the Loma Mountains Forest Reserve, surrounding Mt Bintumani, is very pristine. Bird-watchers come to Kambui Hills Forest Reserve just outside Kenema for the near-guaranteed sightings of white-necked rockfowl.

Environmental Issues

Most of Sierra Leone's original forest cover has been destroyed by logging, mining and unsustainable agricultural practices; only

about 5% remains today. Population pressures, exacerbated by returned refugees, threatens what remains. Rapid development in the hills above Freetown has begun causing flooding problems down below. Diamond mining is polluting the Sewa River and gold mining is draining the sacred Lake Sonfon.

FOOD & DRINK

Sierra Leone is known for its cuisine and every town has at least one *cookery* (basic eating house) serving tasty, filling chop (meals). Rice is the staple and *plasas* (pounded potato or cassava leaves, cooked with palm oil and fish or beef) is the most common sauce. Other typical dishes are okra sauce, palm-oil stew, groundnut stew, pepper soup and, for special occasions, jollof rice. Street-food favourites include roasted groundnuts and corn; fried chicken, plantains and dough balls; *suya* sticks (spiced beef or chicken on a kebab skewer); and fry fry (simple sandwiches). Every town of any size also has a choice of Lebanese restaurants, while Freetown has restaurants serving cuisine from around the globe. Seafood, often bought right off the boat, is a real treat in the capital.

Star is the top-selling beer, though Star Draft, Holsten and Heineken are preferred by those who can spend a little extra. *Poyo* (palm wine) is light and fruity, but getting used to the smell and the life forms floating in your cup takes a while.

FREETOWN

☎ 022 / pop 1 million

Reminders of the recent violence are fading in the capital, but evidence of its growing pains is never far away. The city is crammed with war victims and refugees who have chosen not to return to their upcountry homes, traffic jams last from morning until night, the government seems to have given up on rubbish collection, and there hasn't been reliable power since the 1980s.

But, despite the difficulties, Freetown feels less threatening than other large West African cities and the beautiful setting and stunning beaches compensate for the chaos. Besides, if you spend all your time in the tourist-focused Lumley and Aberdeen areas you'll rarely encounter these problems anyway. But if you do head into the heart of town

to explore the markets and historical sights you'll soon find there's more to the city than first meets the eye. Freetown is filthy and frantic, but you can't help loving it.

ORIENTATION

Central Freetown is set out on a grid pattern with Siaka Stevens St as the main thoroughfare. Halfway along is the huge Cotton Tree, a good landmark with which to orient yourself. Within a few blocks of the tree are the post office, banks, offices and several markets. Away from the central area, winding streets climb the surrounding hills.

The main route to the east is Kissy Rd, although some shared taxis and *poda-podas* go along Fourah Bay Rd through the dock area. Going west, the main route follows Sanders St and Main Motor Rd towards Aberdeen and Lumley, where most visitors spend their time. Note that Sir Samuel Lewis Rd is often called Aberdeen Rd because that is where it ends. Wilkinson Rd goes south all the way to Lumley Village.

INFORMATION Cultural Centres

British Council (Map p756; ☎ 222223; www.britishcouncil.org/sierraleone; Tower Hill; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon, 9am-7pm Tue & Thu, 9am-6pm Wed & Fri, 10am-4pm Sat)

Emergency

☎ 999

Internet Access

E-Zone (Map pp754-5; 70D Wilkinson Rd; per hr Le4500; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 4-9pm Sun)

Fidelity Globalcom (Map p756; 19 Pultney St; per hr Le5000; ☎ 8.30am-10.30pm Mon-Thu, 24hr Fri & Sat)
Lumley Beach Dot Com (1 Lumley Beach Rd, Lumley Turntable; per hr Le4500; ☎ 24hr)

Libraries

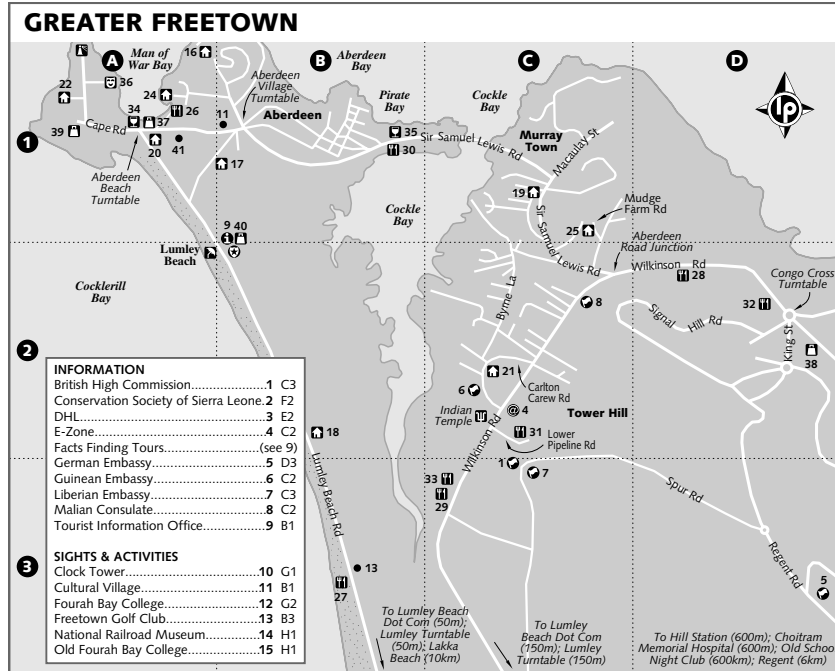
Central Library (Map p756; cnr Rokel & Gloucester Sts; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

Dr King Library (Map p756; cnr Walpole & Siaka Stevens Sts; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon, Tue, Thu & 10am-3pm Wed) In the US Embassy building.

Medical Services

Central Pharmacy (Map p756; ☎ 221735; 30 Wallace Johnson St; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3.30pm Sat)

Choitram Memorial Hospital (Map pp754-5; ☎ 232598; Hill Station) Freetown's best hospital, though for serious problems you'll need to go to Dakar or Europe.



Kono Care Pharmacy (Map p756; ☎ 229356; 11 Siaka Stevens St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Money

Forex bureaus can be found throughout the city: Rawdon and Wilberforce Sts have several. Rates at the airport's exchange bureau are usually better than the banks, though a little below the forex bureaus in town.

Rokel Commercial Bank (Map p756; 25/27 Siaka Stevens St; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri)

Sierra Leone Commercial Bank (Map p756; 29/31 Siaka Stevens St; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri)

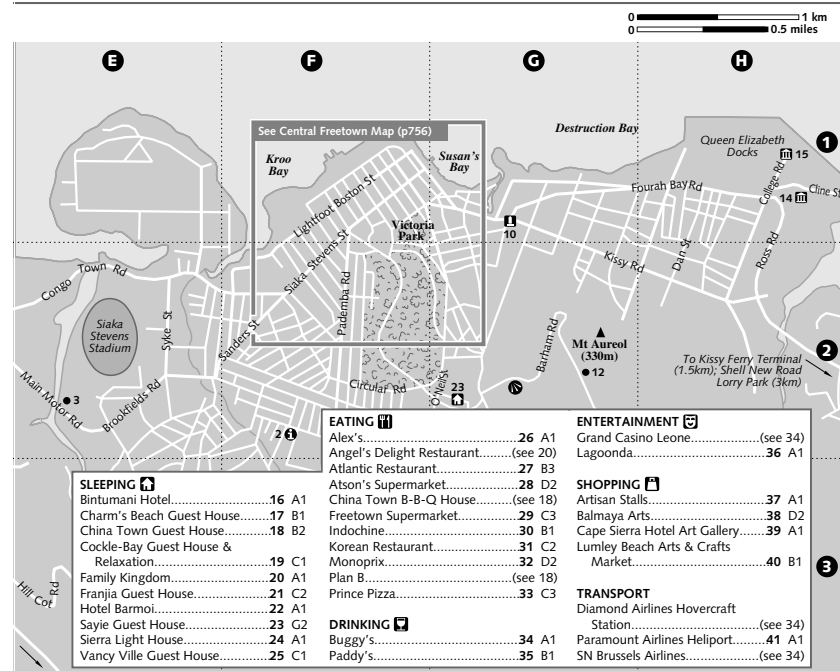
Post

DHL (☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat); Central (Map p756; ☎ 225215; 15 Rawdon St); Greater (Map pp754-5; ☎ 236156; 30 Main Motor Rd)

Post office (Map p756; 40 Siaka Stevens St; ☎ 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

Tourist Information

Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (Map pp754-5; ☎ 229716; cscs_03@yahoo.com; 2 Pyke St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat)



town, especially in Victoria Park and along Lumley Beach.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES Downtown

The massive **Cotton Tree**, perhaps 500 years old, in the heart of town, is the city's principal landmark. Thousands of bats fly out en masse at dusk and return in the morning. This beloved tree casts its shadow on the **Sierra Leone National Museum** (Map p756; ☎ 223555; Siaka Stevens St; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri), which has a small but fascinating collection of juju trinkets and historical artefacts, including Temne Guerrilla leader Bai Bureh's drum, clothes and sword.

The ornate **Law Courts** (Map p756; Siaka Stevens St), beautifully restored following considerable war damage, are immediately east of the tree, while the **State House** (Map p756; Independence Ave) is just up the hill.

St John's Maroon Church (Map p756; Siaka Stevens St), a squat white building with big windows built around 1820, is two blocks southwest of the tree. The much larger **St George's Cathedral** (Map p756; Wallace Johnson St) was completed in 1828.

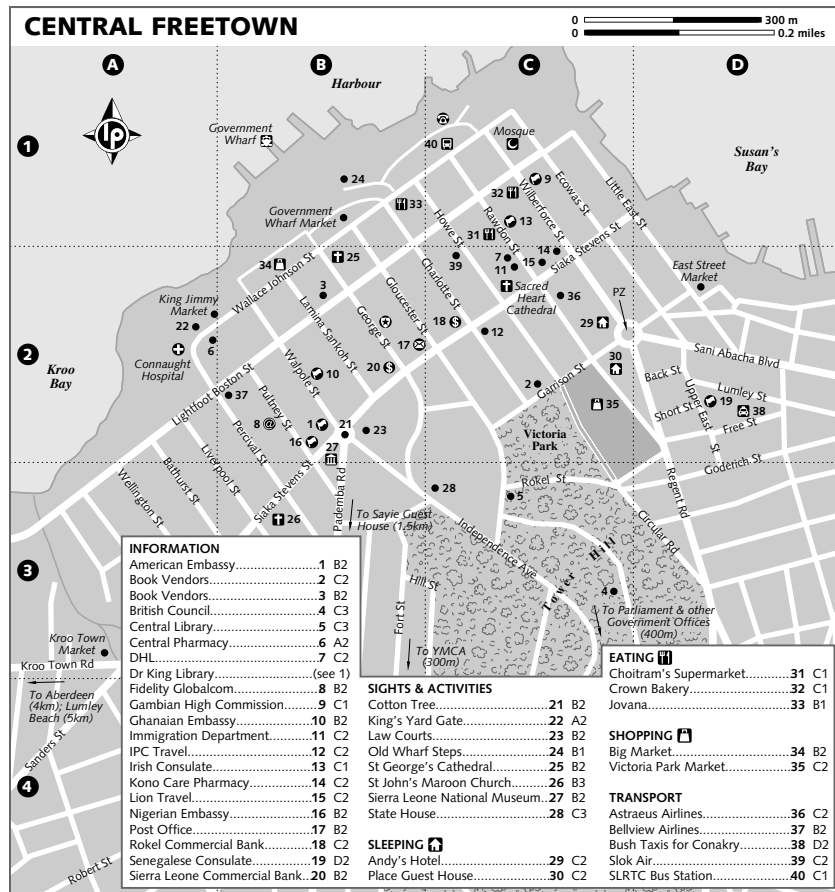
The ancestors of nearly all present-day Krios passed through **King's Yard Gate** (Map p756; Wallace Johnson St). Now the site of Connaught Hospital, this is where the British brought rescued slaves to begin their new lives. Many of these new arrivals climbed the **Old Wharf Steps** (Map p756), sometimes erroneously called the Portuguese Steps, that lead up from Government Wharf. The stones were set in 1818.

Many wood-framed **Krio houses** (Map p756) are scattered west of Tower Hill. A walk down Pademba Rd presents many good examples. Most date from the late 19th century and a few are even older.

Up the Hills

Freetown's beauty, and potential, shows clearly when seen from above. The views are especially good from **Hill Station** (Map pp754-5) and **Leister Peak** (Map p761).

On Mt Aureol is **Fourah Bay College** (Map pp754-5; Barham Rd), founded in 1827. It later became one of the first universities in sub-Saharan Africa. On the edge of campus is a botanical garden and you can follow the



walking path through the forest down to the waterfall you passed on the drive up.

Sierra Leone's **Parliament** (Map p756) building sits atop Tower Hill, close to downtown. If MPs are in session the police might take you in for a look. Next to the entrance is the foundation of the Martello Tower, built in 1805 to defend Freetown against Temne attacks.

Lumley Beach

With every patch of beachfront property purchased and many construction projects underway, it's not hard to imagine what Lumley Beach will look like in a few years, but for now development is pretty much limited to a few bamboo and thatch beer-

shacks. Life guards and beach wardens are on duty and the public toilets and showers are kept clean, but the beach is not.

Only desperate hackers will be satisfied, but visitors can rent clubs and play a round at the **Freetown Golf Club** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 272956; Lumley Beach Rd; 18 holes Le30,000).

Cline Town

Visitors to the **National Railroad Museum** (Map pp754-5; Cline St; admission free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sat) are very rare, but the short tour through these restored train engines and cars is surprisingly interesting.

Gutted by fire in 1999, only the stone shell of the **Old Fourah Bay College** (Map pp754-5; Colledge Rd) remains, but this 1848 building is graceful

even in its decay. The World Monuments Fund lists it as one of the world's 100 most-endangered historic sites. There is talk of turning it into a community arts centre.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The whole country goes kite crazy on Easter Monday and Lumley Beach is packed with free-flying families. Independence Day's Lantern Parade, an evening procession of illuminated floats, has recently been revived.

SLEEPING Budget

Place Guest House (Map p756; ☎ 222608; 42 Rawdon St; s/d with shared bathroom Le30,000/35,000, s/d with private bathroom Le35,000/40,000, r with air-con Le50,000; ☎) Perhaps the best budget hotel in Sierra Leone, the Place is spotlessly clean and the generator runs all night. *Podapodas* coming back from Aberdeen (though not those going via Circular Rd) can drop you off just a few doors down.

Andy's Hotel (Map p756; ☎ 222177; 31 Wilberforce St; r with fan/air-con Le45,000/75,000; ☎) A block over from the Place, Andy's is a bit scruffy, but the rooms are clean and big, and a restaurant is attached.

Franjia Guest House (Map pp754-5; ☎ 030 240426; 9K Carlton Carew Rd; r with fan & shared bathroom Le60,000, s/d with air-con & private bathroom Le80,000/120,000; ☎) Little Franjia, in a quiet neighbourhood, is very homey and the staff is eager to please. The rates include breakfast and they'll cook lunch or dinner on request.

Cockle-Bay Guest House & Relaxation (Map pp754-5; ☎ 272789; 36 Sir Samuel Lewis Rd; r with shared bathroom Le50,000, s/d with fan Le70,000/85,000, d with air-con Le95,000-110,000; ☎) Not the quietest place in town, but Cockle Bay is a good choice for beachgoers on a budget. Rooms are simple but clean and breakfast is included. Prices are discounted for midweek and long-term stays.

Sayie Guest House (Map pp754-5; ☎ 225550; 6 O'Neil St; r 40,000; ☎) Though it's a little out of the way and only has bucket showers, Sayie, up a dirt road behind Tower Hill, is a bit cooler and quieter than hotels in the centre.

YMCA (32 Fort St; s/d with shared bathroom Le25,000/35,000) The Y has some of the cheapest rooms in town, and with good reason, though the views sort of make up for it.

Midrange

These hotels, all convenient to Lumley Beach, have refrigerators, satellite TV and private bathroom, as well as breakfast, hot water and 24-hour power.

China Town Guest House (Map pp754-5; ☎ 236664; 84 Lumley Beach Rd; s/d Le195,000/255,000; ☎) These eight oriental-themed rooms lie just across the road from a quiet stretch of Lumley Beach.

Charm's Beach Guest House (Map pp754-5; ☎ 235716; 29 off Cape Rd; r Le105,000-180,000, ste 240,000; ☎) This big pink house on a quiet backstreet is just a few minutes' walk from the beach. The cheap rooms downstairs lack character, but the others are homey.

Vancy Ville Guest House (Map pp754-5; ☎ 076 636850; 7 Mudge Farm Rd; s Le105,000-150,000, d 135,000-165,000; ☎) This cosy British-style B&B is in a quiet location between downtown and the beach.

Hotel Barmoi (Map pp754-5; ☎ 234933; cape@sierratel.sl; 75C Cape Rd; s/d from Le223,500/319,000; ☎) Formerly the Cape Guest House, this small lodge has fine rooms and a great seaside location near the lighthouse. Some of the most expensive rooms virtually stick out over the ocean; prices for these rooms are higher. There is a small swimming pool and a good restaurant.

Sierra Light House (Map pp754-5; ☎ 273485; 5 Man Of War Bay; s/d Le255,000/315,000; ☎) All 38 of the large rooms have a balcony overlooking the bay and a separate sitting area. The restaurant has the same great views.

Family Kingdom (Map pp754-5; ☎ 236133; fkingdomresort@yahoo.com; Lumley Beach Rd; s Le180,000, d 240,000-270,000, 2-room ste Le360,000; ☎) The most colourful and bizarre lodging can be found at the Family Kingdom. The rooms are ordinary, and the cheapest could use a touch-up, but the real attractions are inside the compound, which has enough playground equipment for several schools worth of children, a wading pool, and a duiker roaming the grounds.

Top End

Bintumani Hotel (Map pp754-5; ☎ 233996; 11 Man Of War Bay; r Le414,000, ste Le560,000-780,000; ☎) This massive, hilltop tower is Freetown's largest and most exclusive hotel and each of the 200 rooms has at least a partial sea view. Facilities include a casino,

disco, tennis court, two restaurants (Chinese and Western) and a pool large enough for a real swim.

EATING Aberdeen & Lumley

Alex's (Map pp754-5; 64 Cape Rd; meals Le10,000-25,000; ☺ lunch Fri-Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) From under the palm trees you have a great view west over Man of War Bay at what is easily Freetown's loveliest dining room. Seafood is the speciality, but the large global menu includes enchiladas, lasagne, shepherds pie, *jollof rice* (rice and vegetables with meat and fish), falafel and Cajun chicken. The adjacent sports bar has a wide-screen TV and a pool table.

Atlantic Restaurant (Map pp754-5; 30 Lumley Beach Rd; meals around Le30,000; ☺ lunch Sun, dinner Tue-Sun) This restaurant at the southern end of Lumley Beach has good fish dishes and a terrace, which is great for drinks at sunset.

China Town B-B-Q House (Map pp754-5; 84 Lumley Beach Rd; meals Le8000-45,000; ☺ lunch & dinner) Eat Freetown's best Chinese food in the little open-air restaurant or under a thatch roof on the beach.

Indochine (Map pp754-5; 64 Sir Samuel Lewis Rd; meals Le15,000-30,000; ☺ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner daily) This classy spot with a patio overlooking Cockle Bay serves decent Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai food.

Angel's Delight Restaurant (Map pp754-5; Lumley Beach Rd; meals Le10,000-50,000; ☺ lunch & dinner) Angel's Delight, part of the Family Kingdom hotel complex, serves tasty Lebanese dishes, seafood and good pizzas. After the meal you can enjoy a hookah on the patio.

Paddy's (right) serves good Indian food.

Wilkinson Rd

Prince Pizza (Map pp754-5; 125 Wilkinson Rd; pizzas from Le 7000; ☺ lunch & dinner) This simple little snack bar not far from Lumley Village makes tasty brick-oven pizzas, plus other fast-food favourites.

Korean Restaurant (Map pp754-5; 34 Lower Pipeline Rd; meals Le10,000-30,000; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Attached to the Korean Guest House, the small Korean community gathers here for Korean, Chinese and European dishes.

Downtown

Street-food vendors work their candlelit stalls around the PZ Turntable late into the night.

Jovana (Map p756; 16 Wallace Johnson St; meals Le4000-23,000; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Popular with business people, Jovana serves tasty African dishes, pizza and the usual meat and seafood choices. The patio is shady and the air-con is turned up inside.

Crown Bakery (Map p756; 5 Wilberforce St; meals Le13,000-45,000; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Besides being a delicious bakery, this expat favourite has a broad and expensive menu spanning pancakes to pizzas and curries to fajitas.

Supermarkets

The flock of well-heeled UN and NGO workers living in Freetown keep many supermarkets, all full of expensive imported goods, in business, including **Atson's Supermarket** (Map pp754-5; 16 Wilkinson Rd), **Choitram's Supermarket** (Map p756; 7 Radwon St), **Freetown Supermarket** (Map pp754-5; 137 Wilkinson Rd) and **Monoprix** (Map pp754-5; 4C Wilkinson Rd).

DRINKING

Paddy's (Map pp754-5; 63 Sir Samuel Lewis Rd) No longer the den of iniquity it once was, Paddy's is still Freetown's most famous nightspot and the only place where everyone, no matter what their stripe, can really let their hair down at the bar or on the dance floor. The food is pretty good too. Paddy's never closes.

Buggy's (Map pp754-5; 74 Cape Rd; ☺ 8am-3am) This is a wild place on Man of War Bay that's more of what Paddy's used to be back in the day – though not quite that crazy. It has a dance floor and snooker tables. Many album launches by local artists take place here.

Plan B (Map pp754-5; 84 Lumley Beach Rd; ☺ dinner) Unusually tranquil for Freetown, Plan B, part of the China Town complex, is a jazz-infused wine bar.

ENTERTAINMENT

Live music is rare, though bands sometimes take the stage at various spots around town. No place really gets hopping until midnight.

Old School Night Club (Map pp754-5; Hill Station; admission Le10,000-15,000, ladies free Wed; ☺ 11pm Wed-Sat) Owned by football star Mohamed Kallon, this is Freetown's hottest dance venue.

The slick disco at **Lagoonda** (Map pp754-5; 55 Cape Rd; admission Le10,000; ☺ Fri & Sat) is very popular with expats and there is a casino upstairs. Dress smart. You can also try to

beat the odds at **Grand Casino Leone** (Map pp754-5; 74 Cape Rd; ☺ 8am-2am) and the Bintumani Hotel (p757).

SHOPPING

The Lumley Beach Arts & Crafts Market (Map p756) and the artisan stalls near Aberdeen Beach Turntable are the main places people pick up woodcarvings, baskets and other tourist bric-a-brac. The top floor of the **Big Market** (Map p756; Wallace Johnson St), or Basket Market, downtown has a larger selection than Lumley, though what makes this the best place to shop for souvenirs is the traditional household goods on the ground floor. Lumley is tops for country cloth, and the hectic Victoria Park Market (Map p756) is the best place for *gara*.

Balmaya Arts (Map pp754-5; 32B Main Motor Rd) in Congo Cross has top-quality stuff from across West Africa (plus good sandwiches and salads), and the paintings at the **Cape Sierra Hotel's art gallery** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 272268; Cape Rd) are interesting.

GETTING THERE & AWAY Air

Lungi Airport is about 25km north of Freetown across the river. For details of international flights to/from Freetown, see p770. There are no internal flights.

Bus, Bush Taxi & Minibus

SLRTC buses leave around 7.30am from the **bus station** (formerly the train station; Map p756) on Wallace Johnson St, though not every day, so check the schedule before making plans. They are always full, so you'll need to arrive around 6am to be sure of getting a seat. Cities served are Bo, Kenema, Makeni, Kabala, Kono and Conakry in Guinea.

Bush taxis and *poda-podas* leave throughout the day from Shell New Rd Lorry Park on the far east side of town (from downtown catch a taxi on Goderich St), except those going to Conakry, which park along Free St near Victoria Park Market.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

The easiest ways to get to Lungi Airport are **Paramount's helicopters** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 076 621041; one way Le120,000) and **Diamond's hovercraft** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 076 624786; one way Le90,000). Both drop and depart from Cape Rd in

Aberdeen and time their trips to coincide with flight arrivals and departures, though be sure to check a day in advance of your departure because they don't necessarily connect with every flight. Taxis stake out the landing sites in town.

The adventurous way from the airport is to take a shared taxi (Le2000) to the ferry terminal at Tagrin. A car ferry (Le1500 for passengers) crosses to the Kissy ferry terminal five or six times a day between 7.30am and 7.30pm. If you don't want to wait for it you can take one of the large *pam-pams* (big boats) for Le2000 or the less overcrowded speedboats for Le5000. These are wet landings, but men wait to carry passengers to the boats for a small tip. Chartering a taxi all the way to Aberdeen costs about Le50,000.

Boat

Hiring a boat to go fishing or get to islands in the area is not cheap, though most hold 20 people. In Freetown you can find speedboats for around Le1,200,000 per day (try the Aqua Sports Club on ☎ 076 695455), while slower traditional boats can be found at Government Wharf and Kissy Ferry Terminal for around Le300,000 per day. Of course, the prices depend on the destination, your bargaining prowess and the cost of fuel. Most of the beach resorts down on the peninsula have their own boats.

Car

Car hire is expensive (starting at around Le225,000; much more if you're heading upcountry), but don't base your choice of company only on the price; ask about the terms too. Miles will always be unlimited and a driver is usually included, but fuel costs and after-hours charges vary. Also, if going upcountry find out if the driver's food and lodging are your responsibility or his. IPC's prices are a little higher than the competition, but you'll get the vehicle for more hours and with few extra costs, so it might work out cheaper in the end.

Cape Sierra Hotel (☎ 272268)

Dial A Ride (☎ 241934)

IPC Travel (☎ 221481)

Shared Taxi & Poda-Podas

Shared taxis and *poda-podas* cost Le700 per ride. Taxis generally make short hops while *poda-podas* run long distance, including

going from downtown all the way to Lumley and Aberdeen. Pay no attention to the route numbers painted on the side of the cars. Not only do the drivers not use them, many don't even know what they're for. Just call out your destination to each passing vehicle. During the week there are few vehicles after midnight, while on weekends they run all night in Aberdeen and Lumley.

Taxi

Freetown taxis don't have meters. Just find an empty one and bargain hard. A trip from downtown to Aberdeen will cost about Le15,000, while a short hop won't be less than Le3000.

AROUND FREETOWN

BEACHES

Some of West Africa's best beaches lie along the mountainous, 40km-long Freetown peninsula. Most beach resorts offer fishing and, in the autumn, whale-watching trips. *Podapodas* run to all points except Kent, but they are infrequent south of Lakka Village.

Shortly after **Goderich Village** and its animated afternoon fish market is **Lakka Beach**, home of **Pierre's Resort** (☎ 076 680737; s/d with fan Le120,000/165,000, s/d with air-con 200,000/250,000; 📍 📞 📺). The bungalows need a serious spruce up, but remain popular. The swimming pool has its own bar and the restaurant is good, though try to have one meal at the simple Hard Rock restaurant on a petite island just offshore.

Lakka is followed promptly by so-so **Hamilton Beach** and, further down, by gorgeous **Sussex Beach** where you'll find **Franco's Dive Centre** (☎ 076 744406; r 180,000; 📍 📞 📺). Besides leading scuba trips to shipwrecks, Italian-born Franco offers seven large, well-equipped rooms and a restaurant with seafood and Italian dishes for around Le15,000. Have a meal here and you can sleep on the beach for Le2000.

About halfway down the peninsula at little **Bawbaw Village** is **Fivele Guest House**, with three simple rooms on a small but stunning stretch of sand. Prices are negotiable. Ask for directions to the natural whirlpool.

Many people rank **River No 2** as the choicest beach in the country, and scenery-wise it's hard to argue with that, though it's also one

of the busiest. The community-run **River No 2 Development Association** (☎ 033 365934; camping Le5000, r incl breakfast Le120,000; seafood Le20,000; 📍) offers new and large rooms right on the beach. Entry for the day (Le5000) gets you use of umbrellas, thatch huts and showers. Be sure to let them paddle you up to the waterfall on River No 2, passing monkeys and crocodiles on the way. The nearby **Guma Dam** is a popular picnic spot. You can either drive there or walk along the overgrown **Guma-No 2 Nature Trail**, passing a waterfall on the way.

Just down the shore is **Token Beach** where you'll find **Baam Token** (bungalows Le60,000; 📍), a laid-back hang-out with nightly bonfires and superb seafood dinners. Hammocks front the three beachfront bungalows, or you can pitch a tent on the beach for next to nothing. A large luxury resort is under construction nearby.

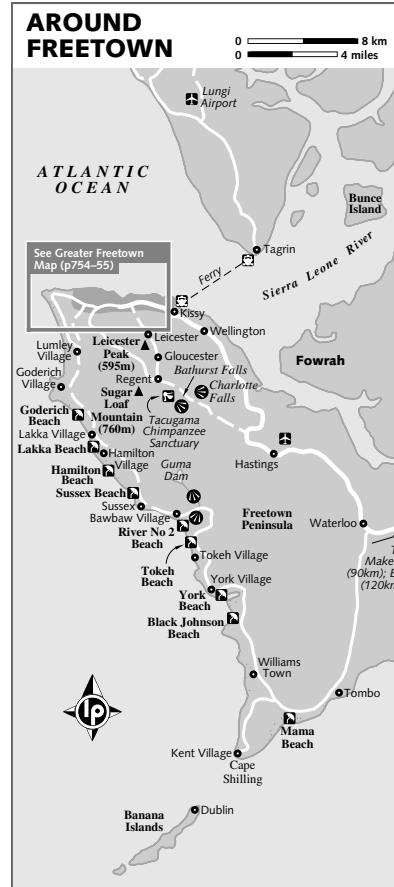
York is an interesting Krio village. Ask someone to show you the caves where slaves stayed before being loaded onto ships. From nearby **York Beach** you can walk around the rocky bay to **Black Johnson Beach**. At the end of the peninsula is **Kent** village with its little horseshoe beach and ruined fort.

BUNCE ISLAND

Bunce (rhymes with dunce) Island is at the mouth of the Sierra Leone River, 15km east of Freetown. With plenty of monkeys, it's a good wildlife-watching destination, but the major attraction is the ruined fortress. First built in 1663, it was levelled in 1702 by French warships. The ruins you'll see today are of a second fort built soon after.

After the original British and French occupations the fort was held by the Dutch, the Portuguese and the British (again) who made it one of the major collection points for slaves destined for Europe and the Americas. Before it was shut down in 1808 some 50,000 men, women and children were shipped off into exile, including the Gullah people of South Carolina.

To visit you're supposed to get a permit (Le15,000, Le9000 for students) from the National Tourist Board at the Cape Sierra Hotel (p759). They also lead tours, as does IPC Travel (p754), though neither is cost effective unless you have a large group.



Around the bend and past **Mama Beach** you'll end up at the ramshackle fishing town of **Tombo**. From here there is a Saturday morning boat to Bonthe (Le10,000); it returns on Thursday. Another boat back-and-forths every other day to Shenge (Le8000), where you can have miles of white sand and palm trees all to yourself.

BANANA ISLANDS

Diving and snorkelling are superb at the Banana Islands, which are off the south-eastern tip of the peninsula. There is some coral and one of the shipwrecks left a piece of Portuguese cannons in shallow water. In **Dublin**, on the northern tip of the main island, there are more cannons, the remains

of an 1881 church, and the old slave docks. Pay your respects to the chief before going off exploring and the locals will happily provide a guide.

The easiest way to get to the Bananas is to hire a local fishing boat at Token Village: expect to pay around Le180,000, which includes a lavish seafood meal. It's a two-hour round trip and you should allow at least an hour to explore the ruins in Dublin. It's only a short hop from Kent, but you probably won't find the boats any cheaper and they aren't as used to taking travellers out there.

REGENT AND AROUND

The village of **Regent** has many interesting Krio-style houses, including some that date from the early 19th century. St Charles Church, begun in 1809 and completed seven years later, is the third-oldest stone church built by Europeans on the continent. **Sugar Loaf Mountain** (760m) offers sweeping panoramas, though the paths to the summit are indistinct, so ask the chief to arrange a guide. Plan on three hours to the summit.

Three kilometres past Regent, uphill the whole way, is **Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary** (☎ 224098; admission Le15,000; 🕒 10am-5.30pm) where dozens of confiscated and abandoned chimps are being prepared for release. Most live semiwild inside large fenced enclosures. Just past the turn-off to the chimp sanctuary, at the bridge, you can see **Bathurst Falls** and a little further on is the path to **Charlotte Falls**, a good spot for a swim.

Taxis run from Freetown to Regent (Le1500). Chartering a taxi from Regent to the chimp sanctuary and back will cost around Le15,000.

THE SOUTH & EAST

Southern Sierra Leone is humid, low-lying and forested. It also has the country's major diamond-mining areas, notably Tongo Field between Kenema and Kono (Koidu-Sefadu). Bo and Kenema are the largest and busiest towns outside the capital, but the region is still principally pastoral with some fantastic wildlife-watching opportunities, and remote islands and beaches ripe for exploration.

BO

☎ 032 / pop 167,000

Sierra Leone's second-largest city, Bo is a lively, pleasant town in the heart of Mende country. Although it suffered much during the fighting with almost all residents at least temporarily uprooted, it's now bustling again with diamond merchants and other businessmen. There isn't really anything to see or do, except stroll the market or have a tailor sew you a smart shirt using kola-nut *gara*, but it's a pleasant place to while away some time.

Information

COMSU (32 Dambara Rd; per hr Le12,000; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) Has painfully slow Internet.

Forex Bureaus There are several of these on Fenton Rd.

Rokel Commercial Bank (10 Bojon St) Does foreign exchange and cash advances on credit cards.

Union Trust Bank (7 Bojon St) Across the street from Rokel, handles Western Union.

Sleeping

Hotel Sir Milton (☎ 032439; 6 Kissy Town Rd; s/d Le38,000/49,000, r with air-con Le65,000; P ☎) This

centrally located hotel is a little rough around the edges, but good for the price.

Madame Wokie Hotel (☎ 032432; 25 Dambara Rd; P ☎) Same owners, prices and quality as Hotel Sir Milton, but fewer guests.

Country Side Guesthouse and Club (☎ 076 883527; s/d Le90,000/120,000; P ☎) Bo's top hotel, 2km outside of town on the Kenema Hwy, is nothing too fancy, but it's pleasant enough and has a swimming pool, tennis court and small gym.

Green Leaf Guest House (☎ 076 639817; 41 Fofanah St; r Le20,000) One of several sketchy hotels along Tikonko Rd – it has tolerable rooms.

Eating

Cheap and filling Lebanese and African food can be found at a number of small restaurants on Dambara Rd, such as **Cool Zone** (meals around Le3000). Many street stalls are set up around here at night.

More substantial meat and seafood dishes (around Le12,000) are available from the Sir Milton and Madam Wokie hotels. The former is the most popular and also does

tasty pastas, while the latter has a smaller menu but a breezy 3rd-floor dining room.

Imported groceries can be bought at the **Bo Mini Market** (26 Dambara Rd) and **Sabbagh Supermarket** (7 Dambara Rd). The latter also serves fast food.

Entertainment

After dusk many visitors camp out at their hotel's restaurant and watch the passing crowds. People watching is also good from the 2nd-storey **Black & White Bar** (8 Kissy Town Rd), one of the few watering holes not full of prostitutes.

Aries Night Club (2 Kissy Town Rd), next to Hotel Sir Milton, is loud and fun. Ask around before going to any other night club, as some are very rough and tumble.

Getting There & Away

Bush taxis to Freetown (Le17,000, six hours) depart frequently each morning from Maxwell Khobe Park, as does the daily SLRTC bus. This is also the spot to catch taxis to Potoru (Le15,000, three hours), Matru-Jong (Le15,000, 2½ hours) and the Liberian border (Le35,000, six hours); though for the latter it is best to go from Kenema. To get to Freetown in the afternoon you'll probably need to go out to New London Park.

Bush taxis for Kenema (Le6000, one hour) and Makeni (Le15,000, four hours) depart from the market.

TIWAI ISLAND WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Tiwai is a beautiful reserve on a pristine, 1200-hectare island in the Moa River. Many animals that are rare elsewhere thrive here, including chimpanzees, pygmy hippos, river otters and white-breasted guinea fowl. It is not unusual to see over half of the island's 11 primate species on a two-hour walk. Besides strolling the well-maintained trails, a variety of boat trips are available and a beach is exposed in the dry season. They hope to restart white-water kayaking trips.

The **park headquarters** (☎ 076 755146, tiwai_island@hotmail.com) is in Lakka, near Freetown, and there are also offices in **Bo** (☎ 076 625277) and **Potoru** (☎ 076 922792). If you don't have a car, the friendly staff in Potoru, accessible by bush taxi from Bo and Kenema, will arrange transport at a fair price for the final 16km to Kambama village, where you take a boat to the island. Park entrance is Le15,000

(Le30,000 to stay the night) and the various guided tours range from Le10,000 to Le20,000. Overnight visitors sleep in tents and local women will cook meals.

SULIMA

It's hard to believe when you see it, but Sulima was once a busy port town. Today this shady town at the mouth of the Moa River consists of mostly mud-and-thatch houses and a few crumbling colonial buildings. Siaka Stevens' old vacation home, a victim of the war, lies along the metal track leading to the lagoon, and Fanti fisherman, originally from Ghana, repair their nets down by the steep beach. It's a great place to chill a while – and you'll need to after roughing it over the road that brings you here.

The only hotel is the spartan but clean **Mamie Sambo Guest House Bar and Video Entertainment Centre** (r Le20,000). Ask permission from the paramount chief if you'd rather sleep on the beach.

There are taxis to Fairo on Friday and Saturday, but virtually no traffic at other times. Bargain hard and you might get a car for Le50,000 for the one-hour trip.

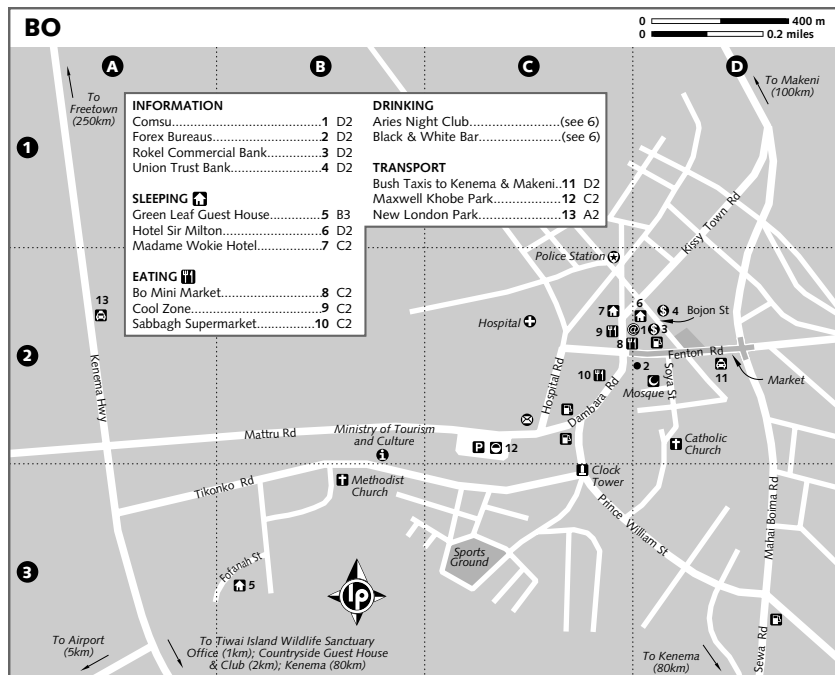
BONTHE

pop 9,500

Bonthe, the only notable town on Sherbro Island, was used by the British as an anti-slaving post from 1861; later it grew into a prosperous port. Old British colonial buildings, like the town hall, still dot the sandy streets. Today fishing and farming are the primary livelihoods. Though Bonthe is small and remote, it's a district headquarters so there is a hospital and a police station and shops are pretty well stocked.

You can walk past the waterworks to visit some small beaches and fishing outposts or hire a boat to explore the surrounding mangrove forests. To get really remote bring a tent and trek along the south shore's unspoiled beaches to Cape St Ann. You could also ride along on the weekly boat to the idyllic **Turtle Islands**; it stops briefly at several villages to load fish.

The **Bontec Guest House** (r with shared/private bathroom Le15,000/25,000) has OK rooms and a generator. Eating is all about seafood, and wherever you are staying will prepare what you request, as long as someone caught it in their net that day.



Bush taxis go from Bo to Matru-Jong (Le15,000, 2½ hours) in the morning and from there you connect with a boat (Le20,000, four hours) heading down the beautiful Jong River to Bonthe. There is also a boat to Tombo (Le10,000) on the Freetown peninsula departing every Thursday and returning on Saturday.

KENEMA

☎ 042 / pop 138,000

Kenema, the provinces' most prosperous town, is a busy trade centre for coffee, cacao, timber and, most visibly, diamonds. The main artery, Hangha Rd, is a crush of Lebanese diamond merchants. Befriend one and they may let you eyeball raw stones. It is possible to visit mines too, but don't show up without a guide. Again, Lebanese business owners might set you up, or ask at your hotel.

On the west edge of town is **Kambui Hills Forest Reserve**, a large woodland area and a good place for a walk, though you need to get pretty far out from the city to see much wildlife. Bambawo and Bayama villages are good starting points. Some 40km east of Kenema are the Gola Hills, the nation's largest remaining swath of virgin rainforest, parts of which are protected at the **Gola Forest Reserve**. Access is difficult, so there is little poaching and there are healthy populations of elephants, leopards, buffaloes, pygmy hippopotamuses, chimpanzees and hornbills. There are few facilities now, but a camping area is planned near Joru, the main access point. The **District Forestry Office** (☎ 420059) at the end of Maxwell Khobe St provides information for both reserves and can arrange guides, which are a must in Gola.

Kenema gets online at **African Information Technology Holdings** (18 Hangha Rd; per hr Le12,000; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat).

Sleeping

Sinava Guest House (☎ 076 770270; 9 Blama Rd; s/d Le100,000/120,000; P) Sinava is the best hotel in town, though it is overpriced for what you get.

Ruby Motel (☎ 076 784638; 20 Mambu St; r with shared/private bathroom Le15,000/35,000; P) This friendly place, down a lot of backstreets on the edge of town, was an anti-RUF militia base during the war. It's in good shape now.

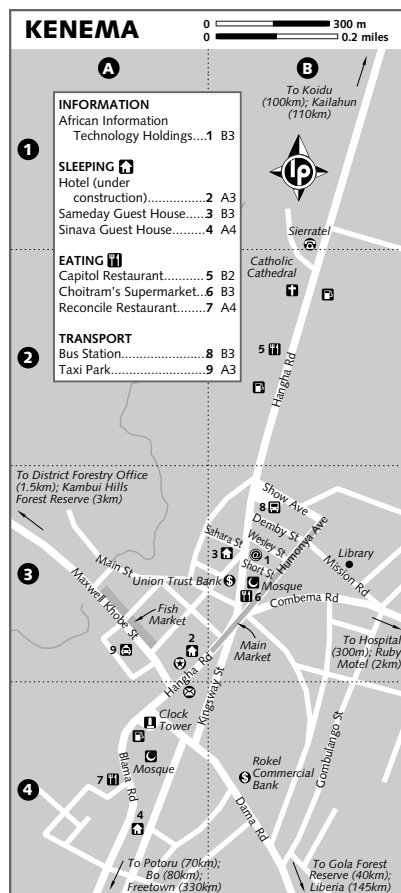
Sameday Guest House (1 Sahara St; r with shared/private bathroom Le10,000/30,000) This is the best of the grubby guesthouses in the centre.

What is expected to be a fancy hotel is under construction on Hangha Rd.

Eating

Capitol Restaurant (51 Hangha Rd; meals from Le5000; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A friendly restaurant with tasty African and Lebanese dishes. The front patio is a good people-watching place.

Sinava (☎ 076 770270; 9 Blama Rd; dishes around Le10,000) and **Reconcile** (Blama Rd; dishes around Le10,000) restaurants are popular places for drinks and basic fish- and chicken-and-rice dishes.



DIAMONDS FROM SIERRA LEONE

One of the tragedies of Sierra Leone is that despite being one of the poorest countries on earth it has one of the best sources of wealth. Hundreds of thousands of carats of diamonds wait under the jungle carpet to be mined, cut, polished and set into jewellery. Most mines have been dug around Kenema, Bo and Kono, but new fields are being found elsewhere and for the first time since independence, Sierra Leone might be able to harness the wealth of its diamonds for the benefit of its citizens.

When the RUF began its war in 1991, its sole aim was to control the country's diamond mines. It used forced labour to extract the wealth, and the receptive government of Charles Taylor in Liberia and ask-no-questions Western diamond dealers to put the gems on the world market. The money the RUF reaped from this enterprise – estimated at between US\$25 million and US\$125 million per year – was used to buy weapons to continue the brutal war. In the end, two million people (about one-third of the population) were displaced and at least 50,000 killed, while another 30,000 had their hands, lips, ears, or other body parts amputated by the rebels.

Diamonds are the most portable form of wealth known to man – 30g of gem-quality diamonds are equal in value to 18,000kg of iron ore – making smuggling them across borders very easy. They're also readily resold into the world market and practically impossible to trace. Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda terrorist network bought millions of dollars' worth of Sierra Leone diamonds prior to the 11 September 2001 attacks on the USA.

Although Sierra Leone's was not the only African war fuelled by 'blood diamonds' – they play a major role in Côte d'Ivoire's current crisis, see p259 – it was largely the atrocities committed by the RUF that brought the issue to international attention. In 2002 industry leaders and over 60 governments, with the backing of the UN, adopted the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme to regulate the trade in rough diamonds. The breakthrough deal, two years in the making, is a weakened version of the original proposal – monitoring is voluntary rather than mandatory – but it covers up to 99% of exported diamonds. The agreement also hinders establishing gem-polishing industries in the top producing nations, including Sierra Leone. Though far from perfect, the Kimberly Process is a significant silver lining from Sierra Leone's recent dark cloud.

Choitram's Supermarket (4 Hangha Rd) is well stocked with imported goods.

Getting There & Away

SLRTC buses to Freetown depart every morning from the bus station in the centre. Bush taxis to Bo (Le6000, one hour), Potoru (Le8000, four hours), Kailahun (Le22,000, five hours), Kono (Le35,000, five hours), Freetown (Le21,000, seven hours) and the Liberian border (Le40,000, nine hours) depart from the taxi park on Maxwell Khobe St. The roads south to Monrovia and north to Kono are extraordinarily bad. Taxis for the latter go via Boajibu instead of the direct route.

THE NORTH

Northern Sierra Leone is the homeland of the Temne people. The landscape is higher and drier than the southeast and the largest towns feel more like overgrown villages than cities. Where they haven't been culti-

vated, the undulating hills are covered in light bush or savanna woodland, although ribbons of dense forest run along the major rivers. The hills become mountains in several places, with many peaks rising above 1500m.

MAKENI

☎ 052 / pop 85,000

Makeni, the quiet capital of Northern Province, is a market town for the surrounding villages. Despite being the RUF headquarters for the final three years of the war, Makeni suffered little physical damage – there was plenty of human suffering though.

The crowded market is worth a wander, though you won't find any of the *blai* the area is known for. A few women sell the distinctive coiled baskets in the shade of the cotton tree in Independence Sq and across from Makeni Central Mosque, one of the most beautiful in the country. It is also the largest in the province, though not

for long; another is under construction a short walk away.

Wusum Hill, rising to the west, can be climbed in about an hour. The route up the back (any small boy can show you the trail) isn't so steep and there is a small pool to cool off in on the way down. Other peaks north of town, along the road to Kabala, are just begging for rock hounds to break out the ropes.

MJ Motel (☎ 076 139945; 14 Freetown Hwy; s/d Le60,000/80,000; **P** **♿**) is Makeni's best by far. Rooms have satellite TV and power all night. Across the street is **Buya's Motel** (25 Ladies Mile; r with shared/private bathroom Le15,000/25,000; **P**), which is cheaper than Makeni's other bottom-end lodging and just as good, though that's not saying much. Both hotels will make dinner by request, plus there are several simple restaurants in the centre such as **Mem's** (8 Rogbane Rd; meals Le3000) serving cheap chop.

Bush taxis run frequently to Freetown (Le14,000, three hours) plus the SLRTC buses to Kono and Kabala will drop passengers here. There are also several taxis a day to Kabala (Le10,000 two hours), Kamakwie (Le12,000, four hours), Bo (Le15,000, four hours) and Kono (Le12,000, five hours).

OUTAMBA-KILIMI NATIONAL PARK

Sierra Leone's only **national park** (admission Le7500) is a beautiful, peaceful place. The Wilderness Camp, as it is called locally, is easily reached by 4WD or motorcycle, though there are no roads inside, so visitors need to explore on foot or by canoe.

The 74,000-hectare Outamba ('hilly' in Susu) eastern section consists of rolling hills, grasslands, flood plains and rainforests intersected by several rivers. The headquarters is here. The 19,000-hectare Kilimi section to the west is flatter, less ecologically intact and has no facilities. Crocodiles, hippopotamuses, baboons, chimpanzees, elephants, buffaloes, bongos, leopards and perhaps lions all roam here. Black-casqued hornbills and great blue turacos are two of 260 bird species.

Footpaths cross the park – it's 8 miles to a waterfall – or you can track elephants on their own trails. By canoe you can look for hippos (sightings are almost guaranteed in the dry season) on the Little Scarcies River or go to Lake Idrisa and watch wildlife from observation towers. These excursions cost Le10,000 per person plus Le5000 for the

guide. The cosy thatch **huts** (Le10,000) right on the riverbank are reason enough to come. You need to bring your own food, though people there will cook it.

Without your own transport you'll need to hire a motorcycle (try for Le40,000) in Kamakwie, the nearest sizable town, for the 20-mile trip as the entrance road is too rough for taxis. Alternatively, you can catch any northbound vehicle (which are rare) and walk the 3.7 miles from the main road.

If you reach Kamakwie too late to get to the park you can sleep at the overpriced, but otherwise decent, **Sella Guest House** (r with shared bathroom Le40,000; **P**) on the hill by the phone tower. Don't believe anyone here when they tell you there's no lodging in the park.

KABALA

Kabala, the largest town in the north, is at the end of a sealed road and the last place of any size en route to Faranah, Guinea. It's quiet and friendly and well worth a visit. Gbawuria (*bow-ree-ah*) Hill provides a dramatic backdrop to the town and is easily climbed. A colourful New Year's Day

celebration is held at the top. Any *moto-taxi* driver can take you to see the women who dye the rust-coloured *ronko* cloth that Koinadugu district and the Kuranko people are known for.

Gbawuria Guest House (28 Yagala Rd; r with shared bathroom Le15,000; **P**), which resembles a Swiss chalet, is the most popular place to stay. If it's full of NGO workers try the louder **Pay-gay's Pub** (2 Moneh St; r with shared/private bathroom Le15,000/20,000). There are *cookery* shops at the market or try **Choice's Bar & Restaurant** (17 Barrier Rd; meals Le2000-5000; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) for the cassava leaves or other dish of the day.

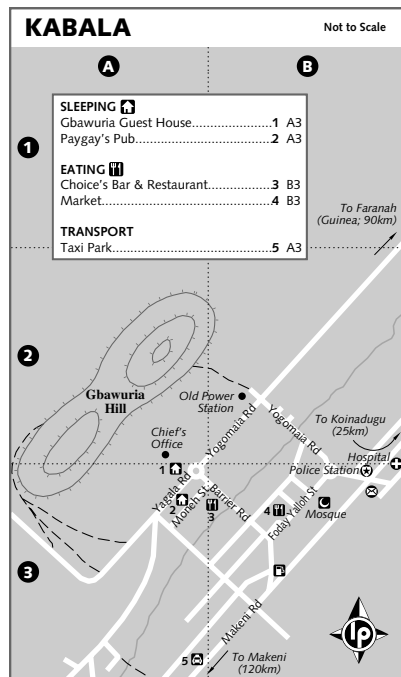
Bush taxis travel to Freetown (Le20,000, five hours) and Makeni (Le10,000, two hours). There's also a SLRTC bus to Freetown three times a week. Both leave from the taxi park. To Faranah in Guinea, the road is bad and usually plied by very few taxis, but trucks go more often.

MT BINTUMANI

Loma Mansa, as Sierra Leone's highest peak is also known, rises 1945m. In clear weather views from the summit are excellent. The Loma Mountains Forest Reserve protects the highland rainforest covering the lower slopes. There are chimpanzees and several species of monkey here and you have a fair chance of seeing elephants and bongos as you approach the mountain. In the rivers, you may be lucky enough to see pygmy hippopotamuses, dwarf crocodiles and rufous fishing-owls; all endangered species. Above 1500m the forest gives way to grassland where you can spot baboons, wart hogs, duikers, porcupines and even buffaloes.

The most scenic and wildlife-rich approach to the summit is from the west, either from Kabala via Koinadugu and Firawa or more commonly from Yifin village (from where it's at least a four-day walk), east of the dirt road between Kabala and Bum-buna. The western route from Kurubonla, north of Kono, can be done in two days if you move fast.

Pay your respects to the chief in either Firawa, Yifin or Kurubonla and he'll help you find a guide, which is necessary because many paths are overgrown. The climb isn't technical, but you need to be self-sufficient with camping gear and food.



SIERRA LEONE DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Freetown is full of classy, comfortable and costly hotels and more will open soon on the peninsular beaches. There are many budget choices in the capital, but few good ones; however, decent rooms can be found for around Le30,000. Generally budget rooms are under Le100,000 and top end over Le300,000.

Upcountry, most large towns have several hotels, though nothing that will satisfy those who need plenty of creature comforts. The cheapest are usually grubby and cater to short-term guests.

Always request discounts for stays of more than one night, as you'll often get them. Also note that a man and a woman can share a single room with no questions, but a same-sex couple, regardless of whether they are a 'couple', usually can not. Westerners are sometimes exempted from this rule if no doubles are available, but don't count on it.

PRACTICALITIES

- Sierra Leone uses British weights and measures.
- Electricity is 230V/50Hz and plugs have three large pins, like the UK, or sometimes three round pins.
- *Awoko* and *Concord Times* are two of the most respected newspapers, though the humorous *Peep* is more popular.
- Magazines like *Newsweek* and *Africa Week* are sold at supermarkets.
- Hardly anyone watches the government-owned SLBS TV station except when they show music videos: the American dramas and Nigerian soap operas on the privately owned ABC are far more popular.
- The BBC World Service is heard on 94.3FM, while Democracy (98.1FM) and SKYY (106FM) play the hits.

ACTIVITIES

Hiking is excellent on the remote southern beaches and northeastern mountains. Climbers can scale Mt Bintumani (p767) and several other peaks, though getting to the mountains is more challenging than getting to the top. The Moa River will please white-water kayakers in the rainy season and Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary (p763) is planning to offer trips. As soon as people learn the county is now safe, Sierra Leone is sure to become a bird-watching hotspot.

For swimming, the ocean is calm and warm and most beaches are rip-tide free, though always get local advice. The deep-sea fishing off the coast is some of Africa's best – twelve current world tarpon records in various line classes have been set here – and can easily be arranged in Freetown. To find a captain, ask around at the fancy hotels or at bars and restaurants popular with foreigners.

BOOKS

The war spawned numerous harrowing books including Greg Campbell's *Blood Diamonds* and Daniel Bergner's *In the Land of Magic Soldiers. Fishing in Rivers of Sierra Leone* by Heribert Hinzen is a collection of local folk tales and songs.

In the first half of *The Devil That Danced on Water*, Aminatta Forna recounts her childhood in Freetown, during which her dissident father was executed, and then returns as a journalist 25 years later to investigate his death.

BUSINESS HOURS

Business hours are 9am to 5.30pm Monday to Saturday, although many places close at 1pm on Saturday. Government offices are open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Banking hours are Monday to Friday 9am to 3pm.

CUSTOMS

You can not take more than Le50,000 out of the country. Exporting gold and diamonds without a licence is illegal.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

These days Guinea's uncertain political future and Liberia's tenuous security situation present bigger challenges to Sierra Leone's newfound stability than anything internal.

Be sure to check on the condition near the borders if things in either neighbouring nation deteriorate.

Except for in Bo and Kenema, electricity is either sporadic or nonexistent, and even these towns suffer occasional shutoffs at the end of the dry season. Just about all hotels have generators, though most budget places will only run them from around 7pm to 1am.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Sierra Leonean Embassies

Within West Africa, Sierra Leone has embassies in Ghana, The Gambia, Guinea, Senegal, Nigeria and Liberia. For details see the relevant country chapter. Elsewhere, Sierra Leone has the following embassies: **Belgium** (☎ 0332-771 0053; sierraleoneembassy@brute.le.be; 410 Ave de Terveuren, 1150 Brussels) **Germany** (☎ 0228-352001; Rheinallee 20, 53173 Bonn) **Netherlands** (☎ 35-6213504; G Van Amstelstraat 1, 1213 CG Hilversum) **UK** (☎ 020-7287 9884; www.slhc-uk.org.uk; 245 Oxford St, W1D 2LX London) **USA** (☎ 202 939 9261; www.embassyofsierraleone.org; 1701 19th St NW, 20009 Washington DC)

Embassies & Consulates in Sierra Leone

All of the following are in Freetown: **Gambia** (Map p756; ☎ 225191; 6 Wilberforce St; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm Fri) **Germany** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 231350; germemb@sierratel.sl; 3 Middle Hill Station, Wilberforce; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri) **Ghana** (Map p756; ☎ 223461; 13 Walpole St; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) **Guinea** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 232496; 6 Carlton Carew Rd; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) **Ireland** (Map p756; ☎ 222017; 8 Rawdon St; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-4pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-noon Sat) **Liberia** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 230991; 2 Spur Rd, Wilberforce; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) **Mali** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 030 230284; 40 Wilkinson Rd; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-3.30pm Fri) **Nigeria** (Map p756; ☎ 224229; 37 Siaka Stevens St; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Fri) **Senegal** (Map pp754-5; ☎ 222948; Upper East St; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) **UK** (Map p756; ☎ 232961; bhc@sierratel.sl; 6 Spur Rd; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Thu & 8am-1pm Fri) Assists French nationals. **USA** (Map p756; ☎ 226481; http://freetown.usembassy.gov; cnr Walpole & Siaka Stevens Sts; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) A new embassy is under construction at Hill Station.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays include the following:

New Year's Day 1 January
Easter March/April
Independence Day 27 April
Christmas Day 25 December
Boxing Day 26 December

Sierra Leone also celebrates Islamic holidays; see p818 for details.

INTERNET ACCESS

Freetown has plenty of Internet cafés with good high-speed connections, most charging Le5000 per hour. Access in the provinces is rare and painfully slow.

INTERNET RESOURCES

National Tourist Board (www.welcometosieraleone.org) The information is not kept up to date, but the site is still useful.
Sierra Leone Web (www.sierra-leone.org) Lots of good background information.
Visit Sierra Leone (www.visitsieraleone.org) Tons of travel advice and an active discussion forum where, no matter how obscure your inquiry, someone will probably have an answer.

LANGUAGE

There are more than a dozen tribal languages, the most common of which are Mende and Temne. English is the official language and Krio is the most widely spoken. See p861 for a list of useful phrases in Krio.

MAPS

The Road Map of Sierra Leone and Freetown by Oxford Cartographers is sold at the Tourist Information Office at Lumley Beach for Le35,000, and by street vendors around Crown Bakery (see p758) for less than half this. Outside Africa you can buy the International Travel Map series (2001; 1:560,000), which is slightly better for the country, but it doesn't have Freetown. Both are outdated.

MONEY

The most easily exchangeable currencies are US dollars, UK pounds and euros. Large denominations get the best rates. You can't pay with a credit card anywhere in Sierra Leone, but some Sierra Leone Commercial Bank and Rokel Bank branches give cash advances on Visa cards. The handful of

ATMs in the capital only work if you have a local bank account.

Forex bureaus (and street traders, though you should avoid them unless you have a friend make the introduction) offer better rates than banks for cash and take travellers cheques for about 10% less than cash. There are banks and forex bureaus in Bo, Kenema, Makeni and a few smaller upcountry towns, but you'll get better rates in Freetown.

One hundred Leones is a 'block' and one thousand is a 'grand'.

POST

Sierra Leone's regular post, including poste restante, is unreliable, though the separate express service seems to work. It is best to send everything from Freetown.

TELEPHONE

The easiest way to make a phone call is at the countless small telecentres. Calls to the USA/UK/Australia cost Le2500 per minute. It's cheaper by about half to use the Sierratel phonecards, but finding a phone to use them on can be a chore.

Mobile phones are very common and the service is pretty good. If you have a GSM phone you can buy a SIM card for Le10,000 to Le15,000 and then use prepaid top-up cards. Mobile phone prefixes are Africel ☎ 077, Celtel ☎ 076, Comium ☎ 033 and Millicom ☎ 030.

VISAS

All travellers, except those from Ecowas countries, need visas. While visas are available at the airport and land borders, it is strongly recommended that you get a visa before arrival to avoid any hassles, as this is a new policy.

Visa Extensions

You can easily obtain visa extensions from the **Immigration Department** (Map p756; ☎ 223034; 15 Siaka Stevens St; ☎ 10am-3.30pm Mon-Fri). Enter on Rawdon St.

Visas for Onward Travel

GUINEA
 One-month single-entry visas cost up to GF100,000 and a three-month multiple-entry visa as much as GF200,000, depending on your nationality. You need one photo and the visa is ready almost immediately.

LIBERIA

Three-month single-entry visas cost Le225,000 for most nationalities and six-month multiple-entry visas are Le300,000. You need one photo and the visa should be ready in 15 minutes.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Sierra Leone does not present any specific problems for women travellers other than a handful of beach boys, though they are tame compared to The Gambia. For general information see p828.

TRANSPORT IN SIERRA LEONE

GETTING THERE & AWAY
Entering Sierra Leone

You'll need a certificate of vaccination for yellow fever and cholera to enter Sierra Leone, though in practice they only check for yellow fever.

Air

Lungi International Airport is efficient, though inconveniently located across the Sierra Leone River from Freetown. Return flights from London cost about £500 and often arrive/depart Freetown at ridiculous hours. SN Brussels charges a bit more for better service on flights from Brussels.

Airlines flying to and from Sierra Leone:

Astraeus (Map p756; 5W; ☎ 228405; www.flyastraeus.com; 24 Rawdon St) Hub: Gatwick Airport, London.

Bellview Airlines (Map p756; B3; ☎ 227311; www.flybellviewair.com; 31 Lightfoot Boston St) Hub: Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos.

DEPARTURE TAX

The airport departure tax is Le120,000. Some airlines include it in the price of the ticket, but most do not.

Slok Air (Map p756; S0; ☎ 076 770702; www.slokairinternational.com; 13 Howe St) Hub: Banjul International Airport, Banjul.

SN Brussels (Map pp754-5; SN; ☎ 236445; www.flysn.com; 72B Cape Rd) Hub: Brussels Airport, Brussels.

Land**GUINEA**

The main border crossing is at Pamelap. Bush taxis run between Freetown and Conakry, Guinea (Le30,000, seven hours), frequently and there is an SLRTC bus (Le40,000, seven hours) on Monday and Thursday. You can also get to the border from most large towns and easily continue to Conakry from there. The road is not yet paved north of the Makeni Hwy, but it should be completed soon. The trip usually takes about eight hours.

From Kamakwie to Kindia, Guinea, there is little transport on the Sierra Leone side, where the road is quite bad, and during the rainy season the Little Scarcies River sometimes runs so high the ferry shuts down. But once you get to Medina-Oula in Guinea moving on is easy. The road from Kabala to Faranah, Guinea, is also in bad shape and only has taxis a couple of times a week.

Get local advice before crossing from Kailahun on toward Guéckédou. Not only are the roads bad, but we've heard reports of hassles with Sierra Leone border officials. You'll need your own wheels to cross at Koindu as there is little traffic going this way. Both routes involve ferry crossings.

LIBERIA

The main route between Freetown and Monrovia is via Kenema, Zimmi then Bo (Waterside). The journey takes two days in the dry season and no taxis go direct from Freetown to the border (where you need to change), so you first need to go to Kenema. It is a little quicker via Bo (if the ferry over the Moa River is working), but few taxis go this way. If you reach the border after it has closed there are some grubby guesthouses and plenty of *cooking* in the border town of Jendema.

The seldom-used crossings from Zimmi, Koindu and Buedu are also via horrible roads and have very little traffic. Check the security situation before using any of these crossings.

Sea

Ferry service to Conakry is expected to begin again soon; inquire at Government Wharf in Freetown for details.

GETTING AROUND
Boat

Boats run from Tombo, on the Freetown peninsula, to Shenge and Bonthe. See p760 for details.

Bus, Bush Taxi & Minibus

Bush taxis and *poda-podas* link all major and many minor towns, though, except for departures to and from Freetown (and between Bo and Kenema), traffic is usually pretty sparse, especially on Sunday. Please note that all of the travel times given are just rough approximations. The government-run Sierra Leone Road Transport Corpor-

ation (SLRTC) buses charge the same as taxis and are more comfortable, but slower and at best have just one departure a day.

Car

Several companies in Freetown hire cars, with driver included, though prices are high; see p759.

ROAD CONDITIONS

The highway from Freetown to Kabala is paved and in excellent condition. From where it forks and heads to Bo is paved, but in horrible shape. Also surfaced and still smooth is the road between Bo and Kenema and the peninsular highway between Waterloo and Tokeh – south from Freetown it is very rough. The rutted dirt road between Kenema and the Liberian border is one of West Africa's worst, and though the route south from Bo to Zimmi is in better shape, don't head this way without ensuring the Moa River car ferry is working.

If you believe the government, all major roads will be paved in the next few years, but probably only the rest of the Peninsular Hwy, the Freetown-Bo road and the road to the Guinean border will be completed any time soon.

Tours

Facts Finding Tours (Map pp754-5; ☎ 076 903675, factsfinding@yahoo.com; Lumley Beach Rd, Freetown) The knowledgeable Kenneth Gbengba leads personalised bird- and wildlife-watching tours across the country.

IPC Travel (Map p756; ☎ 221481; ipc@sierratel.sl; 22 Siaka Stevens St; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri & 9am-1pm Sat) IPC offers several excellent city, peninsula and island tours and will be heading out to the provinces soon.

REGIONAL FLIGHTS FROM FREETOWN

Destination	No of flights per week	Airline	One way/return (Le)
Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire)	3	Bellview Airlines, SN Brussels	879,000/1,341,000
Accra (Ghana)	9	Bellview Airlines, Slok Air	1,020,000/1,530,000
Banjul (Gambia)	5	Bellview Airlines, Slok Air	393,000/552,000
Dakar (Senegal)	5	Bellview Airlines, Slok Air	555,000/984,000
Lagos (Nigeria)	6	Bellview Airlines	855,000/1,485,000
Monrovia (Liberia)	7	Slok Air	420,000/636,000

Prices are approximate.

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