

Riskline / Destination Report

This document was generated on 22 December 2023



SIERRA LEONE

Overall risk level

<p>Low Take normal safety precautions</p>	<p>Moderate Take normal safety precautions</p>	<p>Medium Exercise caution</p>	<p>High Reconsider travel</p>	<p>Extreme Defer non-essential travel</p>
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The Overall Risk Level will be determined by the higher of the Security Risk Level and Covid-19 Risk Level.

Security risk level

<p>Low Take normal safety precautions</p>	<p>Moderate Take normal safety precautions</p>	<p>Medium Exercise caution</p>	<p>High Reconsider travel</p>	<p>Extreme Defer non-essential travel</p>
Safe, with few security risks	Generally safe, with some predictable security risks	Not completely safe, but typically presents predictable security risks	Can be dangerous and may present unexpected security risks	Extremely dangerous and presents unpredictable security risks
Travel is possible with an expectation of routine disruptions and delays	Travel is possible with an expectation of routine disruptions and delays	Travel is possible, but there is a potential for disruptions	Travel is possible, but there is a potential for disruptions	Chaotic; travel impossible

Covid-19 risk level

<p>Low Take normal safety precautions</p>	<p>Moderate Take normal safety precautions</p>	<p>Medium Exercise caution</p>	<p>High Reconsider travel</p>	<p>Extreme Defer non-essential travel</p>
<p>Travellers should take normal precautions when travelling to Low Risk locations, which have limited or no restrictions on international travel and domestic activities.</p>	<p>Travellers should take normal precautions when travelling to Moderate Risk locations, which have few restrictions on international travel and limited or no restrictions on domestic activities.</p>	<p>Unvaccinated travellers should exercise caution when travelling to Medium Risk locations, and vaccinated travellers should take normal precautions. These locations may have some restrictions on international travel, but few restrictions on domestic activities.</p>	<p>Unvaccinated travellers should reconsider their need to travel to High Risk locations, and vaccinated travellers should exercise caution. These locations may have severely restricted international travel and partially restricted domestic activities.</p>	<p>Unvaccinated travellers should defer non-essential travel to Extreme Risk locations, and vaccinated travellers should reconsider their travel. These locations may have severely restricted international travel and domestic activities.</p>



Overview

Upcoming Events

There are no upcoming events scheduled

Travel Advisories

● **Medium risk: Disruptions following security breaches in Freetown**

Reconsider travel to **Freetown** and other urban areas in the near-term due to the risk of violent unrest following an attempted coup, involving security breach at **Wilberforce military armoury** and **Freetown Central Prison** and ongoing manhunt operations. The nightly curfew in place since the failed coup attempt on 26 November, was lifted on 20 December.

During early morning hours local time on 26 November, unidentified gunmen attempted to break into the military armoury at **Wilberforce barracks** located in the immediate vicinity of the presidential lodge in **Freetown**. State security forces reportedly rebuffed the perpetrators and maintained full control of the area. During early afternoon hours local time, officials announced that calm was restored in **Freetown's city centre** while state security was engaged with the assailants in the **Jui area** after managing to push them back to the outskirts of the city. Sporadic gunfire was also reported across other areas of **Freetown**, including near the **Murray Town barracks** and the **Grafton police barracks**; there were no immediate reports of casualties. Later in the morning, unidentified gunmen also attacked the Kissy and Calaba Town Police Stations and broke into large detention centres, including the **Freetown Central Prison** (also known as **Pademba Road Prison**), and set scores of prisoners free. It is unclear how many inmates fled the prison though the facility reportedly held over 2,000 people. Military officials indicated that the attack at **Wilberforce barracks** was carried out by active and retired soldiers and that at least 13 soldiers loyal to the government were killed in the clashes. Most of the leaders of the attack were reportedly arrested on 26 November while security operations to capture the remaining participants continued in the capital. On 28 November, it was reported that checkpoints were set on main roads and gunfire was heard near the Murray Town barracks in Freetown amid a manhunt for the remaining perpetrators, as well as for the 1,890 prisoners who escaped. An investigation into the incidents was also launched and the police were urging all prisoners and suspects to report themselves to the nearest police station or risk being prosecuted for "Escape from Lawful Custody".

A nationwide curfew was declared during morning hours local time with immediate

effect on 26 November and the population was advised to stay indoors. **Freetown International Airport (FNA/GFLL)** remained open but flight schedules were disrupted by the nightly nationwide curfew; airlines were urged to reschedule flights after the curfew was lifted. Unconfirmed reports indicated that the border with Guinea was closed. On 20 December, the revised nightly 00:00-06:00 local time/GMT curfew, implemented on 11 December, was lifted.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) condemned the attack at the barracks, emphasising its opposition to any seizure of power by force, and called for the arrest and prosecution of those involved. President Bio was reelected for a second term in June 2023 amid accusations of vote irregularities. In August, several soldiers were arrested and accused of plotting a coup against his administration.

In a press conference held on 28 November, authorities announced that the events of 26 November were indeed an attempted coup and at least 13 military officers and one civilian have been arrested following the incident, and a search for more suspects remains underway.

Confirm viability of entry to Sierra Leone before departure. Limit outdoor movement across urban areas and follow all official directives. Review evacuation plans should widespread violence occur and register all travel details with local embassies. Avoid all demonstrations and concentrations of security forces; plot route bypasses. Anticipate disruptions to travel and services during demonstrations. In the event of an escalation to violent unrest, immediately seek shelter and leave the affected area at the first opportunity.

Summary

Overall ● Medium Risk

Sierra Leone is a **Medium Risk** destination: exercise caution.

Security ● Medium Risk

Medium Risk locations are not completely safe, but typically present predictable security risks. Travel is possible, but there is a potential for disruptions.

Covid ● Low Risk

Authorities have lifted all restrictions on international travellers.

Political Instability ● Medium Risk

Sierra Leone has made considerable progress towards political stability and democratic rule following a devastating civil war from 1991-2002. However, state institutions remain weak and social integration is still strongly influenced by the rehabilitation of fighters from the civil war. Additionally, a political deadlock following recent elections coupled with high unemployment, increased food insecurity, poverty and soaring inflation threaten the country's political stability and democracy. A violent breach in security at Wilberforce barracks in Freetown was reported on 26 November in what was broadly seen as an attempted coup.

Conflict ● Medium Risk

The army has been rebuilt with considerable military aid from the United Kingdom (UK) and now sends peacekeepers to serve in United Nations (UN) missions around the world. Insecurity persists along the **Sierra Leone-Liberia** and **Sierra Leone-Guinea borders**, where government control is weak and remnants of anti-government militias remain active. All non-essential travel to these regions should be avoided.

Terrorism ● Moderate Risk

There is no history of terror attacks in Sierra Leone, however, there is an ongoing threat of militant attacks across West Africa, making the country a possible target.

Unrest ● Medium Risk

Strikes and demonstrations occur around diamond mines in **Eastern province**, including **Kono district**, and have previously triggered a heavy-handed response from the security services. Protests occur semi-frequently in **Freetown** and are most often triggered by social and political issues. On occasion, protests may result in violent clashes with security forces.

Crime ● Medium Risk

The high rate of unemployment and poor prospects for employment have driven many young people into informal criminal gangs that operate in **Freetown** and the surrounding areas. Violent crime does occur but travellers are more likely to be affected by petty theft and pickpocketing, especially in **Freetown**. Property crime, piracy, vehicle crime, frauds and scams also pose a risk to travellers.

Natural and Environmental ● Medium Risk

Flooding during the rainy season (May to November) poses the most serious natural risk facing foreign visitors to Sierra Leone. Mudslides often accompany severe floods.

Local Travel ● Medium Risk

Road travel is hazardous due to high accident rates, poor road conditions and badly maintained vehicles throughout the country. Police and military roadblocks are common, located at district boundaries as well as at country borders with Guinea and Liberia, and are often used to extract bribes from drivers. Motorcycle taxis, minibuses and private taxis for intercity travel are often poorly maintained and erratically driven.

Health and Medical ● High Risk

Medical care is limited and virtually non-existent outside of **Freetown**. An outbreak of Ebola between March 2014 and November 2015 had a severe impact on health facilities and medical personnel. There is a lack of trained doctors and nurses and hospitals lack modern equipment. Healthcare facilities in rural areas lack even the most basic medicines and staff are poorly trained. There are regular shortages of essential medicines in hospitals, clinics and pharmacies. Malaria, cholera, mpox and lassa fever pose a risk to travellers in Sierra Leone.

Political Overview : ● Medium Risk

In the June 2023 general elections, the National Electoral Commission announced that incumbent Julius Maada Bio of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) won after securing 56 percent of the votes, while his main challenger, Samura Kamara of the All People's Congress Party (APC), received 41 percent of the votes. Bio campaigned on promises to reduce price pressures and boost mining and agriculture, while Kamara pledged to address the country's weak economic situation. Kamara, a former prime minister, who was previously defeated by Bio in the 2018 presidential elections, rejected the results and demanded a re-run of the polls due to alleged irregularities. While regional observers such as the African Union and ECOWAS declared the elections free and fair, other international observers including those of the European Union (EU), also indicated irregularities due to a lack of transparency and communication by the electoral authority which led to further mistrust in the electoral process. The elections were also marred by violence at several polling stations.

The ruling party, Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), also won 81 seats in the legislative elections, securing a majority in the Parliament. The opposition All People's Congress (APC), which campaigned on the enduring cost of living crisis, won 54 seats and retained control of the mayorship of Freetown with 51.3 percent of the vote, while traditional leaders occupied the remaining 14 legislative seats. The general elections were held amid high unemployment, soaring inflation, increasing food insecurity and a growing violent rhetoric, which triggered numerous protests in the year preceding the vote.

Following the elections, Sierra Leone entered a political deadlock as the APC opposition refused to sit in Parliament demanding a re-run of presidential and parliamentary polls. The stagnation of political activity threatens the country's economic growth as the government's legislative agenda needs support from the opposition to reach the two-thirds majority required for approval. The country also risks losing aid funds if the APC does not soon re-engage in politics and more importantly, the country's political stability and democracy are at risk as the deadlock could set the stage for an authoritarian turn by Bio.

There is a vibrant and active civil society in the country and political openness to freely discuss and criticise politics and the government. The war did much to foster a strong sense of nationalism among ordinary Sierra Leoneans. State institutions and the rule of law remain weak, however, and the government has only limited control over

outlying areas, which function as safe-havens for militias and smugglers. The government's main challenges remain restoring trust amid rapidly rising inflation, corruption, widespread poverty and high unemployment, while simultaneously protecting the democratic gains achieved since the end of the civil war.

Religious tensions are negligible between the Muslim, Christian and animist communities of Sierra Leone. The Mende and the Temne are the largest of the country's 18 ethnic groups and are broadly aligned with opposing political factions. The SLPP is typically supported by the Mende and other southern tribes. The APC is favoured by the Temne tribe and others in the north and west. This rivalry rarely escalates to violence.

Recent incidents

28 November 2023 - 29 November 2023

- **High risk: Authorities declare attacks in Freetown as failed coup attempt - Update**

Government officials announced that the attacks on a military barracks, a prison and other locations in Freetown on 26 November were part of an attempted coup. At least 13 military officers and one civilian have been arrested following the incident, and a search for more suspects remains underway.

01 August 2023 - 02 August 2023

- **Moderate risk: Police arrest senior military officers ahead of anti-government protest anniversary**

Police officials indicated that several people, including senior military officers, were arrested due to their suspected plans to target state institutions and citizens during protests planned from 7-10 August to mark the one-year anniversary of deadly anti-government demonstrations. Further details were not immediately available.

01 July 2023 - 02 July 2023

● **Moderate risk: SLPP wins majority in legislative elections - Update**

The Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone announced on 1 July that the ruling party, Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), won 81 seats in the legislative elections on 24 June, securing a majority of the seats in the Parliament. The opposition All People's Congress, which alleged election irregularities, won 54 seats and retained control of the mayorship of Freetown with 51.3 percent of the vote. Traditional leaders occupied the remaining 14 legislative seats.

27 June 2023 - 28 June 2023

● **Moderate risk: Incumbent Julius Maada Bio wins presidential election - Update**

Electoral officials announced that incumbent President Julius Maada Bio of the Sierra Leone People's Party won the presidential election after securing 56 percent of the votes, while Samura Kamara of the All People's Congress Party received 41 percent. Kamara claimed that his electoral agents were not allowed to verify the ballot count, while European Union and Commonwealth observers also indicated irregularities.

Conflict : ● Medium Risk

Border Conflicts: Sierra Leone has a longstanding territorial dispute with neighbouring Guinea over the diamond-rich **Yenga area** of the **Kailahun district** in **Eastern province**. The dispute over the 640km (398 miles) border dates back to colonial times.

During Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 civil war, Guinea sent troops into the area to help Sierra Leone's national army suppress Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels. Following the rebels' defeat in 2002, Sierra Leonean and Guinean officials signed an agreement stating that Guinean troops would remain in the area and that the area would return to Sierra Leone when the border was secured. In 2012, following the signing of a joint declaration between the two nations, Guinean troops left the region and the border was fully demilitarised. Continued talks have kept tensions low in the area, with both sides agreeing to focus on economic and social developments in the region.

Militias/Warlords: Although demobilised, many former rebels and militia fighters have not been fully reintegrated into society and remain unemployed. Disillusionment among former fighters poses a potential security threat, with discontent among diamond miners over corruption and poor working conditions of particular concern, as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) drew much of its early strength from disgruntled mineworkers.

Remnants of Sierra Leonean and Liberian militias also remain active along the **Sierra Leone-Liberia border**. Effective control over the border is beyond the reach of both the Sierra Leonean and Liberian governments. Significantly, it was within this lawless region from which the RUF organised, launched and waged its campaign against the state. The border has become a thoroughfare for all manner of illegal trafficking and smuggling, including diamonds, wildlife and firearms. Travel to the region should be avoided. If travel is necessary, foreign visitors should do so only if accompanied by armed security personnel.

Strength of Armed Forces: The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) still lack basic communications, accommodation, logistical, transport capabilities and overall mobility. Pay and service conditions are likewise generally poor. The RSLAF has a history of intervening in politics. While efforts have been taken to instil a culture of professionalism to create a military that is accountable and loyal to the civilian

leadership, the army continues to be seen as a potential source of instability and is still feared by most civilians due to abuses committed in the past. Total force strength currently stands at around 10,300 personnel. The military is frequently deployed in response to natural disasters and public health crises.

Terrorism

International Terrorism: While militant groups in the Sahel region have not explicitly threatened to attack the country, Sierra Leone's contribution of troops to French-led military operations in the region means that the country is a potential target. Likely targets include hotels, restaurants, cafés, shopping centres and other locations that are frequented by foreigners or Sierra Leonean elites.

There are no recent incidents

Unrest : ● Medium Risk

Strikes: Strikes and demonstrations occur in and around the diamond mining areas in **Eastern province**, notably **Kono district**, and commonly involve miners striking against low wages and poor working conditions. Strikes usually take place outside and around mines and offices of mining companies in nearby towns. Strikes can turn violent and often see mine property and equipment being looted, damaged and burned. In cases of unrest, security personnel are often required to use force to disperse crowds and re-establish control over the mines. Travellers should adhere to established roads and tracks and should avoid entering onto any mining property as far as possible.

Violent Unrest: Violent protests occasionally break out in and around **Freetown**, often leading to looting, vandalism and the burning of vehicles and shops. In August 2022, authorities imposed a nationwide 24-hour curfew following protest clashes which resulted in at least 31 deaths, including police officers, in **Freetown, Makeni** and **Kamakwie**. Protesters demanded the resignation of the central government amid rising inflation and fuel crisis. In May 2019, violent clashes erupted between police forces and All People's Congress (APC) main opposition party supporters outside the APC's headquarters in **Freetown**, amid a protest against a court decision to unseat 10 APC MPs, accused of breaking electoral law after they refused to vacate their seats within the constitutionally-stipulated period of twelve months.

Although foreign nationals have not been targeted in such violence, personal security cannot be guaranteed. Visitors are advised to avoid all large crowds, public gatherings and demonstrations, especially political campaign rallies, when rival tensions have boiled over into violence in the past. In the case of unrest, visitors should remain indoors in a secure location.

There are no recent incidents

Crime : ● Medium Risk

Petty Crime: Pickpocketing and bag-snatching are common in markets, beaches, crowded areas and on public transport, especially in **Freetown**. The risk increases during holiday seasons. Negative sentiments against foreigners have been reported since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which could contribute to being targeted for opportunistic crimes.

Beware of your surroundings, do not leave your belongings unattended and exercise general personal safety for travel. Only carry what is needed, do not flash expensive valuables or large sums of money, and keep cash, identification and mobile phones in front pockets, or in a zipped or concealed pocket or pouch rather than in a bag. Secure belongings when using public transport or when frequenting markets and other crowded public areas; secure bags diagonally across the body against the chest, keep bags within sight and away from the street. Refrain from using mobile phones or laptops in congested public places; avoid putting bags containing valuables on the ground. Avoid walking in poorly lit and isolated areas. Stay in groups. Reject rides or drinks from strangers and never leave drinks unattended. Exercise extreme caution when purchasing and consuming alcohol in public venues. Do not accept pamphlets in the street or shopping centres; these could be impregnated with potent and disorienting drugs, which permeate the skin. If you start to feel unwell, tell staff or close friends and do not leave the venue alone or with strangers. Shout to attract attention, if needed.

Violent Crime: Muggings, armed robbery and murder are common in **Freetown**. Beaches and areas around petrol stations, restaurants, bars and small businesses are typically targeted, most often in the **East Area** and **Central Area**.

Commonsense measures are best kept to ensure against becoming the victim of a violent crime. Travellers are advised to remain vigilant at all times and exercise general personal safety for travel: avoid walking alone at night, do not venture down roads with poor lighting and few access points. Be careful when using taxis and public transport and plot route bypasses around rowdy crowds. Seek local advice for areas to avoid. If you are held-up by an armed robber do not become confrontational as any resistive behaviour may cause more violence by the attackers.

Property Crime: Home invasions and burglaries have occurred in foreigners' residences. Theft of personal belongings from hotel rooms occurs, even with doors

locked.

Travellers are advised against leaving valuables in hotel rooms. Deposit important items in the safe. Be sure to lock hotel/house doors, even when you are present. Home invaders often conduct thorough investigations of their victims' routines and whereabouts prior to an attack. Avoid visible displays of wealth and check for signs of being followed when returning to one's place of residence. If you do happen to be burgled, remain cooperative as perpetrators are likely to be armed and any resistive behaviour may cause more violence by the attackers.

Organised Crime and Gangs: International narcotics syndicates have become increasingly active in Sierra Leone in recent years. The country is fast becoming a key transit point for cocaine being smuggled from South America into Europe. Gangs of unemployed youth pose a potential threat to public order, particularly in **eastern Freetown**. Organised criminal activity is unlikely to affect foreign nationals but business travellers should be wary of their business partners before entering into contracts.

Violence is often contained within inter-gang rivalries, though bystanders may be caught up in drive-by shootings, street shootings and armed or arson attacks. Avoid the epicentres of criminal activities, which are often located on the outskirts of urban areas. Seek local advice on specific areas to avoid. Restrict travel in unfamiliar areas to daylight hours. Visitors should avoid association with members of any groups or individuals they suspect of being involved in such activities.

Piracy and Banditry: Without an effective naval force or coast guard, shipping vessels off the coast of Sierra Leone are susceptible to pirate attacks. Most attacks occur on ports and anchorages. Pirates are usually heavily armed, with attacks involving limited violence towards the crew members.

Piracy: In areas without an effective naval force or coast guard, shipping vessels may be vulnerable to an increased risk of pirate attacks. While attacks typically occur on vessels that are berthed or anchored, attacks on moving ships cannot be ruled out. Consult a local port agent or the Maritime Police for the current security situation, designated safe anchorage areas and which vessels to use when crossing higher risk ports. Keep all doors locked if sleeping on board a vessel. Follow best practice safety procedures while travelling in the high seas: extinguish navigation lights, roll up ship ladders, sail as fast as possible and only at recommended times, use barbed wire and avoid engagement with any fishing boats or vessels requesting assistance. Ensure access to updated HF emergency frequencies to broadcast mayday calls in the event of

pirate sightings. Report all suspicious activity to the nearest coastal state and flag state.

Vehicle Crime: Carjackings and car thefts are increasingly being reported in **Freetown**.

Theft: A common tactic for confrontational theft is for thieves to smash a car window or pull open passenger doors when cars are stopped at traffic lights, before stealing items such as bags, GPS, radios, phones or wallets. Motorists may also be signalled to stop by the occupants of another car pointing at their tyre and indicating a problem. Alternatively thieves may force victims out of their vehicle at knife or gunpoint in order to steal the vehicle. Avoid driving at night and exercise caution when stopped at traffic lights or in tunnels. Never stop at the indication of another driver. If you are being followed, drive to the nearest police station or public area. Stop at the nearest town or service station if you think you may have a genuine problem with your vehicle.

Carjacking: Avoid leaving or returning to your place of work or residence at the same time every day. Vehicles equipped with a coded key or a key fob tend to be increasingly targeted as they make it easier to hijack with jamming devices. Hijackers also tend to stage breakdowns, flagging victims for assistance. Two cars are often used to box the victim in and force them to stop. Leave a safe distance between yourself and the car in front of you at traffic stops, limiting speed as much as possible to avoid stopping in order to keep the vehicle moving and gain time before the light turns green. Hijackers are often armed and extremely willing to use deadly force so resistance is discouraged. Stay calm and move slowly and exit your vehicle avoiding eye contact with the assailants. Keep your hands in clear sight at all times.

Fraud and Scams: Credit cards are not widely accepted in Sierra Leone. Most establishments use carbon paper imprints, which are not safe. Online scams are common, primarily targeting foreign nationals through advance fee or 419 scams. These involve false offers of money transfers or sales, or contracts with promises of large commissions or immediate payments as part of business opportunities sent via unsolicited letters, faxes or emails, sometimes using government stationery and seals. In other scams, a friendship or romance is first started with the victim, who is then requested to go to Sierra Leone or to send large amounts of cash. Victims have been kidnapped, assaulted, killed or robbed.

Impersonating Law Enforcement: Criminals may pose as police officers and ask travellers to allow them to search their belongings for counterfeit money or drugs as a means to rob them. Request proper identification from all (plainclothes) police

officers.

Identity Theft: Avoid using free wireless access available in public areas and use a VPN to access the internet. Refrain from discussing your travel plans or personal information in the public or over the phone. Visitors are advised to use a paper shredder to dispose of sensitive documents, to avoid identity thieves rifling through garbage to find documents that can be used fraudulently.

Credit Card fraud: Visitors should only use credit cards when an electronic transaction is possible and when the transaction can be completed directly in front of them. Never let a clerk, sales assistant or waiter take a card to another location for the transaction to be processed. If this cannot be avoided, visitors should insist upon going with the individual to the point of sale to witness the transaction. Keep an eye on the card at all times. Always ensure that you receive a receipt and check the amount to be correct.

Kidnapping: Although kidnap cases were high during Sierra Leone's civil war, there is no serious risk of kidnapping targeting foreign nationals today. Kidnap for ransom and express kidnapping remain a threat due to high levels of poverty and instability. Response of law enforcement officials, in the event of kidnapping, is likely to be poor due to the lack of training, infrastructure and equipment of security forces.

Travellers should remain aware of their surroundings and follow the latest advisories for their destination. Maintain communications and your itinerary with local contacts, authorities or embassy staff, especially in locations with a higher risk of kidnapping. Consider a local guide or security escort for the highest risk locations.

There are no recent incidents

Law

Overview

The legal system is based on English law and incorporates traditional customary law. The constitution provides for an independent judiciary and this has been respected in recent years. However, the judiciary is understaffed, underfunded and vulnerable to bribery. In turn, the legal process suffers from delays, with many offenders having to endure lengthy pre-trial detention in deplorable, sub-standard prison conditions.

Justice is administered in different ways depending on where you are in Sierra Leone. Common law is applied in **Freetown** and the **Western Area**. Elsewhere, unwritten customary law prevails. This form of justice is based on customary and traditional practices. It is overseen by the chiefs and local court personnel. It typically favours men and is abused and exploited by many of those who preside over it for their own personal benefit and agendas.

Corruption

Corruption: Foreign visitors are commonly solicited for bribes by public officials, especially those in the police, customs and immigration services. Even small bureaucratic procedures are often accompanied by a request in exchange for services, usually visa concessions of one form or another. Foreign nationals are strongly advised to ensure that all travel and identification documents are in order and carried at all times so as to minimise possible opportunities for bribery.

Various laws and regulations are applied arbitrarily by corrupt officials in order to solicit bribes, particularly at the various police and military roadblocks and security checkpoints across the country. Foreign nationals are likewise frequently offered more efficient service in exchange for a bribe when applying for work permits.

Both domestic and foreign businesses are subjected to extortive practices by corrupt government officials. When applying for government tenders, businesses should avoid offering so-called commissions to officials involved in tendering processes. Business ethics are extremely poor among both local and foreign companies, with many known to secure licences and government contracts via irregular means. While corruption extends across various industries, Sierra Leone's diamond and other extraction industries are especially open to corrupt and unethical practices.

Security Services

Security Services: In general, there are two types of Sierra Leone Police (SLP) personnel patrolling the streets. The more visible of these are the unarmed uniformed officers directing traffic and patrolling assigned areas on foot or motorcycle. The other type are the members of the Operational Security Division. These individuals carry firearms and are typically deployed to man roadside checkpoints and to serve on emergency response teams. Despite new uniforms, vehicles and relatively better salaries, the SLP continues to lack the training and equipment to combat crime effectively. Many local police stations lack the communication infrastructure and transport capacity to provide assistance when required. Remuneration is likewise largely inadequate.

Natural Risks : ● Medium Risk

Flooding during the rainy season (May to November) poses the most serious natural risk facing foreign visitors to Sierra Leone. Mudslides often accompany severe floods.

Flooding

A flood is an overflow of water that submerges land that is usually dry. It is normally triggered by an extended period of heavy rainfall and can be exacerbated by poor drainage systems in the affected area.

Freetown is one of Africa's wettest capitals and the rainy season runs from May to November. Heavy rains during this period can lead to flooding, making already poor roads impassable, and can also cause landslides. Flooding in densely-populated towns and cities often has severe humanitarian consequences due to poor drainage, widespread pollution and poor infrastructure. Flooding is usually accompanied by disease outbreaks – malaria, diarrhoea, cholera and various respiratory infections – and mass displacement of residents. Even hilltop settlements are at risk during periods of heavy rain.

If instructed of the possibility that flash-flooding may affect the area you are in, monitor local updates and move immediately to higher ground away from rivers, streams, creeks and storm drains. Though flash-flooding is commonly attributable to excess upstream precipitation, be aware that flooding can occur without typical warning signs of rain clouds or heavy rain. This is especially true near streams, drainage channels, canyons and other areas known to flood suddenly. If you happen across a flooded road in your car, turn around and drive in the opposite direction. When trapped on a flooded road, vacate your vehicle immediately and climb to higher ground.

Landslides/Mudslides

Sometimes referred to as debris flows, mudflows, lahars or debris avalanches, landslides/mudslides are a form of mass soil movement that tends to flow in channels in a surge of water-saturated rock, earth and debris, typically following heavy rainfall.

Torrential rainfall and subsequent flooding often triggers mudslides in and around **Freetown**.

Follow local news updates in landslide prone areas for warnings about intense storms and rainfall. If landslide or debris flow danger is imminent, quickly move away from the path of the slide. Seek shelter on the nearest high ground in a direction away from the path. If rocks and debris are approaching, run for the nearest shelter and take cover (if possible, under a desk, table or other piece of sturdy furniture that can provide you with air space if the building collapses). Anticipate disruptions to overland travel in areas affected by landslides. Confirm the viability of intended overland travel routes before departure and remain alert for landslide warning signs including cracks in the soil or the faint rumbling sound of an approaching landslide or debris flow.

There are no recent incidents

Health and Medical: ● High Risk

Overview

Medical care is limited and virtually non-existent outside of **Freetown**. An outbreak of Ebola between March 2014 and November 2015 had a severe impact on health facilities and medical personnel. There is a lack of trained doctors and nurses and hospitals lack modern equipment. Healthcare facilities in rural areas lack even the most basic medicines and staff are poorly trained. There are regular shortages of essential medicines in hospitals, clinics and pharmacies. Malaria, cholera, mpox and lassa fever pose a risk to travellers in Sierra Leone.

Before you travel

Consult your doctor or a healthcare provider who specialises in travel medicine at least six weeks before your departure. If you have a medical condition, you should also share your travel plans with your doctor.

Outbreaks and Other Diseases

Malaria

Areas with Malaria:

- All

Recommended chemoprophylaxis:

- Atovaquone-proguanil, doxycycline, mefloquine, tafenoquine

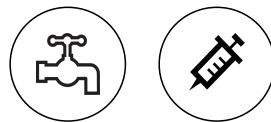
Yellow Fever

There is a risk of Yellow Fever infection in all areas.

Vaccinations, Medicines and Documentation

Note: Requirements and recommendations for vaccines and other medicines as well as Yellow Fever vaccine are based on guidelines from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Yellow Book 2024. All other entry requirements are based on Riskline research.

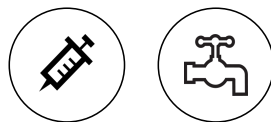
Routine vaccines



Make sure you are up-to-date on all routine vaccines before every trip. Some of these vaccines include

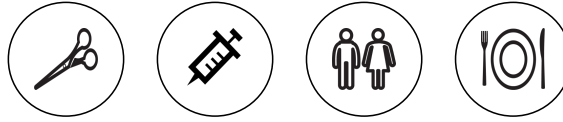
- Chickenpox (Varicella)
- Diphtheria-Tetanus-Pertussis
- Flu (influenza)
- Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR)
- Polio
- Shingles

COVID-19



All eligible travellers should be up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines.

Hepatitis A



Recommended for unvaccinated travellers one year old or older going to Sierra Leone.

Infants 6 to 11 months old should also be vaccinated against Hepatitis A. The dose does not count toward the routine 2-dose series.

Travellers allergic to a vaccine component or who are younger than 6 months should receive a single dose of immune globulin, which provides effective protection for up to 2 months depending on dosage given.

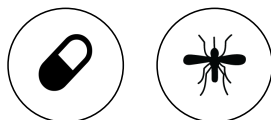
Unvaccinated travellers who are over 40 years old, immunocompromised, or have chronic medical conditions planning to depart to a risk area in less than 2 weeks should get the initial dose of vaccine and at the same appointment receive immune globulin.

Hepatitis B



Recommended for unvaccinated travellers of all ages traveling to Sierra Leone.

Malaria



CDC recommends that travellers going to Sierra Leone take prescription medicine to prevent malaria. Depending on the medicine you take, you will need to start taking this medicine multiple days before your trip, as well as during and after your trip. Talk to your doctor about which malaria medication you should take.

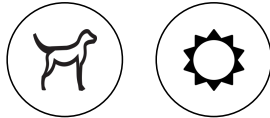
Find country-specific information about malaria.

Measles



Infants 6 to 11 months old traveling internationally should get 1 dose of measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine before travel. This dose does not count as part of the routine childhood vaccination series.

Rabies



Rabid dogs are commonly found in Sierra Leone. If you are bitten or scratched by a dog or other mammal while in Sierra Leone, there may be limited or no rabies treatment available.

Consider rabies vaccination before your trip if your activities mean you will be around dogs or wildlife.

Travellers more likely to encounter rabid animals include

- Campers, adventure travellers, or cave explorers (spelunkers)
- Veterinarians, animal handlers, field biologists, or laboratory workers handling animal specimens
- Visitors to rural areas

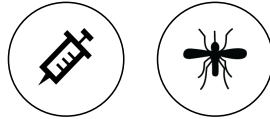
Since children are more likely to be bitten or scratched by a dog or other animals, consider rabies vaccination for children traveling to Sierra Leone.

Typhoid



Recommended for most travellers, especially those staying with friends or relatives or visiting smaller cities or rural areas.

Yellow Fever



Recommended for all travellers ≥ 9 months old.

Required documentation

Yellow Fever entry requirement (Source: USA CDC):

Required for all arriving travellers.

Other entry requirements:

None

Note: Documentation requirements are subject to change. Consult your destination embassy or consulate prior to departure for confirmation.

While you are there

Emergency services

There are no effective emergency services in Sierra Leone.

Evacuation

In the event of minor injury or illness, medical evacuation may be required. Medical evacuation is likely to be required in the event of serious injury or illness.

Routine care

Healthcare facilities are critically under-staffed and under-equipped, with regular shortages of basic and essential medicines. Corruption is endemic, with many local residents paying bribes to receive treatment. Staff are poorly trained. Healthcare facilities are essentially non-existent outside of **Freetown**.

Medicine

Major prescription drugs and essential medicines are often unobtainable, even in urban areas. Hospitals and clinics regularly lack the most basic medicines. Travellers are advised to bring enough prescription and essential medicines to last the duration of their trip.

Payment

Travellers are likely to be required to provide upfront payment for treatment and medication.

Ailments

Traveller's diarrhoea (TD)



Traveller's diarrhoea (TD) is a catch-all term for a number of minor or moderate bacterial, viral and parasitic infections, generally transmitted through infected food or water. In the majority of cases antibiotics or anti-diarrhoeal medication is unnecessary; travellers experiencing TD should ensure that they remain hydrated and well rested until their symptoms dissipate. Most cases of TD last less than three days; if diarrhoea continues for longer periods, travellers should consider consulting a medical professional.

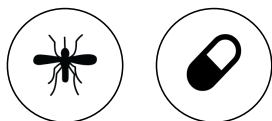
Zika Virus



Zika virus is a viral infection transmitted by the bite of the Aedes mosquito, which is most active during early morning and late afternoon hours and commonly found in urban areas, as well as through sexual contact with an infected person. Most cases of Zika virus are asymptomatic; where symptoms occur they are usually mild and include fever, headaches, conjunctivitis, rash and joint and muscle pain. Zika has

been linked to microcephaly in unborn children. There is no treatment for Zika virus, beyond rehydration and bed rest.

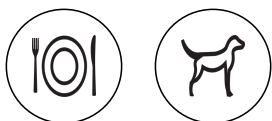
Malaria



Malaria is prevalent across Sierra Leone at all times of year.

Malaria is a serious parasitic infection, transmitted by the bite of the Anopheles mosquito. Symptoms can be flu-like and include a high fever, joint pain, anaemia, chills and headaches; if left untreated, symptoms can quickly complicate and become life-threatening. While pre-departure courses of anti-malarial prophylactics are available, these do not guarantee immunity to malaria. Caught early, malaria can be treated easily with a range of anti-malarial medications.

Lassa fever



The World Health Organisation (WHO) rates Lassa fever as endemic in the country, and it most recently occurred in Kenema, eastern Sierra Leone.

Lassa fever is a viral infection carried by the Mastomys rat, which can be transmitted to humans through direct contact, inhalation of airborne droplets or ingestion of food contaminated by rat urine or faeces. In most cases symptoms are mild and include fever, headaches and fatigue; in severe cases symptoms may include vomiting, hearing loss, haemorrhaging, difficult breathing and organ failure. If caught early, Lassa fever can be treated with a course of antivirals.

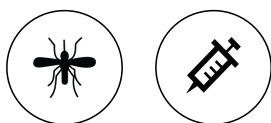
Cholera



There are frequent cholera outbreaks across the country, with these mostly being associated with poor sanitation and water supply. Outbreaks likewise coincide with the rainy season between May and November.

Cholera is a bacterial infection transmitted through contact with infected food or water – usually by infected faeces – and is most prevalent in areas with poor sanitary standards. Symptoms include heavy, watery diarrhoea, vomiting and muscle cramps. If left untreated, cholera can rapidly become fatal. Cholera can be treated with a course of rehydration and antibiotics.

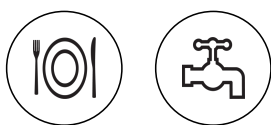
Yellow Fever



Yellow fever is prevalent in Sierra Leone.

Yellow fever is a serious viral infection, transmitted by the bite of the Aedes mosquito, which is most active during early morning and late afternoon hours and commonly found in urban areas. Initial symptoms include a high fever, chills, vomiting nausea and backaches/muscle pain; in some cases those infected may develop potentially fatal complications, including jaundice, severe haemorrhaging and kidney failure. There is no post-infection treatment for yellow fever.

Schistosomiasis

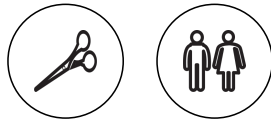


Schistosomiasis is prevalent throughout the country.

Schistosomiasis (also known as bilharzia or katayama fever) is a parasitic infection, transmitted through contact with infected water sources, usually freshwater lakes or rivers. Saltwater and chlorinated pools are not affected by schistosomiasis. Symptoms include a rash, fever, muscle pain, abdominal pain and the enlargement of the spleen and/or liver. The disease can be treated via the administration of praziquantel. If left untreated, schistosomiasis can cause serious chronic

gastrointestinal or central nervous system diseases.

HIV/AIDS



HIV/AIDS infection and prevalency rates are uncertain but believed to be high.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a retrovirus that induces Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and is transmitted through contact with the blood, sexual and rectal fluids of an infected person, usually via sexual intercourse. AIDS weakens the body's immune system, making the body susceptible to numerous other diseases and ailments. There is no cure for AIDS or HIV.

Ebola



An outbreak of Ebola between March 2014 and November 2015 left thousands dead across the country, including in the capital **Freetown**. Transmission of the virus was halted, however, a fresh outbreak remains possible.

Ebola is a contagious viral infection transmitted through close physical contact with an infected person or through exposure to their blood and bodily fluids. Symptoms include fever, fatigue, diarrhoea, stomach and muscle pain, vomiting, headaches and haemorrhaging. Ebola has a high fatality rate. Recent vaccines and effective treatments have significantly improved patients' chances of survival.

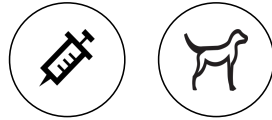
Hepatitis (A, B, C, D and E)



Hepatitis poses a risk to travellers in Sierra Leone.

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. The three main variations (A, B and C) are caused by infections from parasites, bacteria or viruses, but are transmitted by different means.

Rabies



Rabies is present in animals in Sierra Leone.

Rabies is a serious viral infection, transmitted through close contact with saliva from infected animals (i.e. bites, scratches or licks on broken skin and mucous membranes). Travellers who suspect they may have come into contact with a rabies-infected animal should seek immediate emergency attention: post-exposure treatment has a high success rate if administered early. Late-stage rabies (when symptoms begin to occur) is untreatable and fatal.

Mpox



Health officials have detected a small number of cases of the virus since January 2022, but infection rates may not necessarily be low as the country receives little media attention and has an underdeveloped health system, with weak testing and reporting capacity.

Mpox is an infectious viral disease that causes severe headache, fever, back pains and large rashes, which eventually form blisters. The main vectors of mpox are suspected to be rodents, including rope squirrels. Seek medical attention if you believe you may have been exposed to an infected person. The smallpox vaccine is 85 percent effective against mpox. While there is no specific treatment, mpox can be controlled through medicine.

There are no recent incidents

Covid-19: ● Low Risk

Summary

Authorities have lifted all restrictions on international travellers.

What is the current nationwide Policy?: Open

Policy starts: 14 September 2021

Policy ends: indef

Policy explanation:

A mask mandate remains in place for those unvaccinated in crowded, public spaces.

Policy source: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/sierra-leone/coronavirus>

Last update: 18 October 2023

Infection

Infection Level: Low

Infection rate: 0.0 cases per 100k in the last 14 days

As of date: 09 November 2023

Hotspots: -

International Travel

International Flights

Is there a ban on international commercial flights? No

Through what date? indef

Flight Ban Explanation:

Lungi International Airport (FNA/GFLL), Sierra Leone's only international airport has reopened to commercial flights.

Airlines are urged to reschedule flights at airports nationwide, including Freetown (Lungi) Airport (FNA/GFLL), to accommodate passengers outside curfew hours. Officials imposed a nightly curfew to run from 20:00-06:00 local time/GMT nationwide.

Last Update: 13 December 2023

Entry and Borders

Is there a ban on entry for any travellers? No

Through what date? indef

Travellers from where are banned?

Land border: Open

Maritime border: Closed

Entry Rules Explanation:

There are no pre-departure testing or vaccination requirements to enter the country.

Overland borders are open between Guinea and Liberia, but may be subject to sudden closure. Sea borders are closed until further notice.

Entry Rules: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/sierra-leone/entry-requirements>
<https://tourismsierraleone.com/faqs/>

Last Update:

Testing

Do travellers need to take a COVID-19 test No

When?

Is it mandatory or optional?

Test Type:

Minimum age requirement:

Pre-travel test validity, in hours:

After arrival test days:

Testing Explanation:

Testing Rules: -

Last Update: 01 December 2023

Health and Travel Documentations

Do arriving travellers need any health and/or travel documentation? No

Documentation Explanation:

Last Update: 18 October 2023

Tracing App

Do travellers need to use a contact tracing app after arriving? No

Tracing App Explanation:

There is no mandatory national contact tracing app at this time.

Last Update: 18 October 2023

Quarantine on Arrival

Who needs to quarantine on arrival Some travellers

Travellers from where need to quarantine?

How many days is quarantine? 1

Is it self-quarantine or operated by the government? Gov

Quarantine Explanation:

Quarantine Rules: <https://www.travel.gov.sl/travel-advisory>

Last Update: 2023-12-01

Exit

Is there a ban on exit for any travellers? No

Are there special requirements to exit? No

Exit Requirements Explanation:

Exit Requirements

(URL):

-

Last Update:

01 December 2023

Vaccination

Percent vaccinated with at least one dose: 71.156 as of 30 Jul 2023

Percent fully vaccinated: 57.66 as of 30 Jul 2023

Is vaccination mandatory for entry? No

Fully vaccinated are exempt from: -

Minimum age for vaccine requirements for travel:

Exemptions for vaccine requirements for travel:

"Fully vaccinated" is defined by the destination as:

Accepted vaccines, validity and special age restrictions:

Is mixing of vaccine doses authorised? N/A

Are specific combinations of mixed doses required?

"Boosted" is defined by the destination as:

Accepted boosters:

"Recently recovered" is defined by the destination as:

Recovery status is valid from days until after .

Vaccination certificates accepted:

Vaccination certificates accepted in the following languages:

Recent recovery document required:

Recent recovery document accepted in the following languages:

Explanation:

Sources:

Last change to vaccination policy:

Last Update:

01 December 2023

Other International Travel Restrictions

Exit Requirements Explanation:

Last Update:



Domestic Situation

Areas on Lockdown

Last Update:

Areas under Curfew

Last Update:

Domestic Travel

Domestic Travel Explanation:

Last Update:



Other Domestic Restrictions

Social distancing measures are in effect, although there are no other domestic restrictions in effect.

Last Update: 18 October 2023

There are no recent incidents

Local Travel : ● Medium Risk

Travel Safety

Air Travel: An increasing number of airlines connect to **Lungi International Airport (FNA/GFLL)**. There are international and regional routes that connect to **Lungi Airport**, which is located on the opposite side of an estuary from the capital, **Freetown**. There are several options for transferring from the airport to the city centre.

Regular ferry service runs from **Tagrin Terminal** to **Kissy Terminal** and **Government Wharf** in **Freetown**. While local fishermen will offer passengers rides from the airport to the former **Freetown Hovercraft Terminal**, such vessels lack basic safety features and should not be employed. The Sierra Leone Road Transport Corporation (SLRTC) operates public bus service between **Freetown Central Bus Station** and the airport.

Road and sea travel are strongly discouraged after dark. Poor road conditions and a lack of navigational lights on ferries and other boats make these means of transport hazardous. If opting to transfer by road, foreign visitors must arrange for a driver to collect them at **Lungi** prior to their arrival in the country. Most hotels likewise provide transport services to and from the airport.

Airspace: Lungi International Airport (FNA/GFLL), Sierra Leone's only international airport has reopened to commercial flights.

Airlines are urged to reschedule flights at airports nationwide, including Freetown (Lungi) Airport (FNA/GFLL), to accommodate passengers outside curfew hours. Officials imposed a nightly curfew to run from 20:00-06:00 local time/GMT nationwide.

Borders and Entry: There are no pre-departure testing or vaccination requirements to enter the country.

Overland borders are open between Guinea and Liberia, but may be subject to sudden closure. Sea borders are closed until further notice.

Road Travel: Traffic moves on the right. Road conditions are generally poor throughout Sierra Leone. The main roads within **Freetown** are paved. The highway from **Freetown** to **Makeni** is paved as is the road from **Makeni** to **Kabala**. The road from **Freetown** to **Bo** is in a state of disrepair, though the segment from **Bo** to **Kenema** is paved. The remaining roads in Sierra Leone are in very poor condition;

outside **Freetown** few roads are lit. The further east and north one travels in the country, the worse and more inaccessible the roads become. During the rainy season from May to November, many roads become impassable.

Due to the poor conditions of the roads and the general lack of adherence to road rules, it is inadvisable to travel outside **Freetown**, especially after dark. Foreign nationals are further advised to hire a car and driver, and especially if driving outside of **Freetown** is required. The safest and most comfortable form of travel in **Freetown** is by chauffeured car.

A number of police and military roadblocks are common, mainly at district boundaries as well as at country borders with Guinea and Liberia. Roadblocks are likewise at times randomly erected across the country. While bribes are extracted regularly from local drivers, NGO vehicles and foreign nationals are usually but not always waved through. Police have been known to accuse foreign drivers of some sort of vehicle infraction or traffic violation as a means of extracting a bribe from them.

Foreign visitors can usually drive on their foreign licence for up to one month. Plan your journeys and travel in convoy if possible. Report back to trusted individuals with your travel progress and make a plan of what to do in case of an emergency. Beware of travelling at night due to poorly lit vehicles and crossing pedestrians and animals.

There have been reports of children putting a rope on the road and asking for a small donation to fix the road if you stop. These incidents are most common on the weekends and close to beaches in the **Western Area**. The rope will be lifted if you indicate you do not intend to stop.

Public Transport

Buses: Buses provide relatively safe, daily services to and from the main cities, namely **Bo, Kenema, Makeni, Kabala, Kono** and to Conakry in Guinea. These depart from **Freetown Central Bus Station** but only once full. Importantly, buses do not leave for every city every day, and more infrequently during the rainy season.

Motorcycle Taxis: In both **Makeni** and **Kenema**, the best form of public transport is motorcycle-taxi. These are widely available and take people directly to their destination within the city. While cheap and efficient, motorcycle-taxis can be hazardous due to a lack of helmets and high speeds by drivers.

Minibuses: Poda-podas or mini-buses theoretically operate on a fixed route system but this is rarely adhered to, and destinations can be negotiated with passing drivers.

While cheap, they are often overcrowded and poorly maintained. Visitors are advised to use an alternative means of transport.

Taxis: Taxis are a relatively safe means of transport in Sierra Leone. However, they do not operate with meters and fares must be negotiated prior to departing. Shared taxis are also available, and connect all major and minor towns. Taxis are generally not recommended due to high rates of petty crime and poor maintenance.

Movement Control Orders

Foreign visitors are advised to exercise caution when travelling in and around mining areas, especially in **Kono district, Eastern province**, where many of Sierra Leone's diamond mines are located. Visitors should travel only along established roads and tracks, and avoid all travel around mines to reduce the risk of accidentally entering a private mining property.

Recent incidents

20 December 2023 - 21 December 2023

● **Moderate risk: Authorities lift nationwide curfew - Update**

Authorities announced that effective today, the nightly 00:00-06:00 local time/GMT curfew was lifted, but urged the public to remain vigilant during the festive period. The curfew was first implemented on 26 November following a failed coup attempt in Freetown.

11 December 2023 - 13 December 2023

● **High risk: Authorities revise nationwide curfew - Update**

Authorities announced that the nightly 21:00-06:00 local time/GMT curfew nationwide was revised to run nightly from 00:00-06:00 local time/GMT effective from 11 December until further notice following an attempted coup and security breaches at the Wilberforce military armoury and the Freetown Central Prison on 26 November.

Destination Hotspots

Cities, Towns, Villages: Petty crime is a problem in **Freetown**, and foreign nationals are commonly targeted in the downtown markets. While travel in the **Western Area** is relatively safe, the **East Area** is higher risk. Visitors should be wary when walking in the city during the day and are advised against walking after dark.

Regions: Visitors are strongly advised against travel to Sierra Leone's border regions with Guinea and especially with Liberia. Remnants of militia groups remain active in these porous, lawless regions. The borders remain awash with small arms and light weapons and are a primary thoroughfare for illegal trafficking in the region. If travel cannot be avoided, foreign nationals must employ armed security personnel who are very familiar with the area.

Safety

Emergency Numbers

Police	112	
Medical Assistance	999	

Beaches and Public Areas: Foreign visitors are advised to exercise caution when frequenting public places such as beaches, restaurants and bars. Visitors are advised to avoid walking alone on beaches and never after dark, especially **Lumley beach** where a number of muggings have taken place. Also take caution when swimming at **Lumley beach**, as there have been reports of hospital waste, including used needles. There may be strong currents present, with no lifeguards on duty. Get advice from locals before swimming and never swim alone.

Begging: Begging occurs throughout the country. Although the Sierra Leone government forbids begging and soliciting, street children are notorious for harassing foreign nationals for spare change. Visitors are advised to refrain from parting with small change as this is likely to attract crowds. Disclosing one's personal belongings can increase the chances of becoming a victim of petty theft.

Corruption: Foreign visitors are commonly solicited for bribes by public officials, especially those in the police, customs and immigration services. Even small bureaucratic procedures are often accompanied by a request in exchange for services, usually visa concessions of one form or another. Foreign nationals are strongly advised to ensure that all travel and identification documents are in order and carried at all times so as to minimise possible opportunities for bribery.

Various laws and regulations are applied arbitrarily by corrupt officials in order to solicit bribes, particularly at the various police and military roadblocks and security checkpoints across the country. Foreign nationals are likewise frequently offered more efficient service in exchange for a bribe when applying for work permits.

Both domestic and foreign businesses are subjected to extortive practices by corrupt government officials. When applying for government tenders, businesses should avoid offering so-called commissions to officials involved in tendering processes. Business ethics are extremely poor among both local and foreign companies, with many known

to secure licences and government contracts via irregular means. While corruption extends across various industries, Sierra Leone's diamond and other extraction industries are especially open to corrupt and unethical practices.

Drugs and Alcohol: The possession, use and trafficking of narcotics carry heavy penalties in terms of prison sentences.

Food and Drink: Visitors should avoid buying food and drinks from street vendors, and instead adhere to more formal eating establishments. Recommended options include the resident 'cookery' or eating house present in every town. Visitors are advised against sampling the local ginger beer as the water used is rarely boiled, as well as to avoid consuming unpasteurised milk or other products made from unpasteurised milk.

Water Safety: Sierra Leone faces severe problems of safe and adequate water supplies, especially in the dry season. Waterborne diseases are prevalent throughout the country, and cholera outbreaks are common. Visitors are advised to drink only bottled and boiled water and beverages without ice.

Fuel and Electricity: Power outages are frequent, particularly in **Freetown** and during the dry season between December and April. While most hotels have generators, some only run them from 19:00 to 01:00.

Landmines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO): Although landmines were used by both government and rebel forces, all areas that were suspected of contamination have been removed. Nonetheless, visitors are advised to only travel along demarcated roadways and pathways and to avoid venturing across open fields.

Imports and Exports: It is illegal to export precious minerals without a government licence.

Photography: Photography near government buildings, airports, military facilities, bridges or official facilities, including the Special Court for Sierra Leone, is strictly prohibited. Such sites may not always be clearly marked. As a general precaution, photographers should ask permission prior to taking photographs, especially where guards are on duty. Where no guards are visible, caution should be exercised.

Security Services: In general, there are two types of Sierra Leone Police (SLP) personnel patrolling the streets. The more visible of these are the unarmed uniformed officers directing traffic and patrolling assigned areas on foot or motorcycle. The other type are the members of the Operational Security Division. These individuals carry

firearms and are typically deployed to man roadside checkpoints and to serve on emergency response teams. Despite new uniforms, vehicles and relatively better salaries, the SLP continues to lack the training and equipment to combat crime effectively. Many local police stations lack the communication infrastructure and transport capacity to provide assistance when required. Remuneration is likewise largely inadequate.

Culture

Cultural Sensitivities: Sierra Leone is a fairly conservative and traditional society. There exists a system of secret societies in the country which seek to preserve traditional culture. The societies are largely preserved by the Mende and the Temne people, the two largest ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. Foreign visitors should take care when discussing or enquiring after secret societies and traditional practices, and are advised to avoid doing so in public spaces.

Religious Sensitivities: Sierra Leone's population is composed of about 78 percent Muslims, 20 percent Christians and a small population that practises traditional animist beliefs. Sierra Leoneans are deeply religious and their religion often plays a significant role in daily life. Visitors should take care not to offend with blasphemy and are advised to dress and behave respectfully at all times.

Specific Traveller Advice

Female Travellers

Local Customs and Laws: There are some local customs that a female traveller should take into consideration in Sierra Leone. The country is home to large conservative Muslim and Christian communities. Refrain from wearing clothing that could be considered too tight or revealing, including in major cities like **Freetown**. Dress according to the country's culture, especially when visiting places of cultural and religious importance, including churches and mosques. Familiarise yourself with your destination prior to travel, and be respectful and mindful of any cultural sensitivities, which may include dress, behaviour and topics of discussions.

Safety: There are many safety concerns that a female traveller should take into consideration in Sierra Leone. Foreign female travellers may receive unwanted attention from local men, ranging from open displays of catcalling, whistling, stalking and staring to physical groping. It is best to ignore these advances and walk away. In the event public harassment escalates, draw attention to what is happening and someone will likely come to your aid. There are numerous instances of sexual assault of women in isolated areas, including in major cities like **Freetown**, notably in **East Area** and **Central Area** and the **central commercial district**; sexual assaults are also known to happen onboard public transportation, with most cases occurring during the night time. Avoid all forms of public transport and do not hail taxis off the street at any time of the day. Opt for official taxis/chauffeur-driven taxis arranged by a reputed hotel. Avoid sitting in the front seat of the taxi and always take the seat behind the driver to minimise risks of harassment and assaults. Do not travel alone at night. Consider having a hotel shuttle or registered corporate chauffeur meet you at the airport upon arrival, particularly if arriving after dark. When possible stay only in lodgings that have 24-hour onsite security and ensure that they are not situated in an isolated location, as there have been instances of rape reported at remote hotels. Be wary of members of armed forces/security personnel as in some instances they have been instigators of sexual crimes. Police are very corrupt and do not respond efficiently to reports of sexual crime. Female travellers should exercise caution when reporting crimes to local police. Consider consulting your home consulate/embassy for legal advice and ensure you receive a copy of the police report.

Health and Wellness: Women have access to very limited specialised gynaecological and reproductive health services, medicines and products in Sierra Leone, with few

healthcare clinics for women concentrated only in **Freetown**. Female-specific OTC drugs, emergency contraceptives and prescription contraceptives are almost non-existent in the country, while rape kits are not available in most hospitals. Abortion is permitted if it is being done to save a woman's life or preserve her mental health. Consult a health professional prior to travel. Consider bringing an adequate supply of female-specific OTC drugs, feminine hygiene products and oral contraceptive pills, which may not be available locally.

LGBT+

Women's same-sex relationships are legal in Sierra Leone, while men's same-sex relationships remain illegal and a criminal and punishable offence; persons found guilty may be sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour. This law, however, is not enforced. Although the LGBT+ community has become more visible and accepted among the population, there are no legal protections for LGBT+ persons in the country and same-sex relationships remain a taboo subject, with LGBT+ persons frequently victims of insults, harassment and even physical aggression. Same-sex marriage is illegal. LGBT+ travellers are advised to keep their sexual orientation and gender identities private. Prior to travel, review your privacy settings on social media platforms and reconsider the use of dating applications due to the risk of harassment and possible entrapment by local authorities. Refrain from engaging in any conversations about sexuality or LGBT+ issues. Avoid all public displays of affection, including hand-holding. Book separate hotel rooms. Transgender travellers are advised to have a passport and identification changed to reflect their new gender before travelling.

Technology & Communication Risk

Travellers are unlikely to face risks related to information and communication technology (ICT) in Sierra Leone.

Internet access and social media have no restrictions. While there are laws against sedition and libel, such restrictions are unlikely to affect travellers. It should be noted however that the ICT infrastructure in the territory is very underdeveloped. There are no concerns related to device searches or sensitive technology. Device searches and inspections at the border are unlikely. There are no restrictions in relation to bringing or operating sensitive equipment, which may include photo cameras, satellite phones, drones, and other GPS systems, in the country. State or criminal penetration of private data is unlikely. Authorities implement minimal state surveillance of ICT networks in the country. The government announced that social media were temporarily monitored during the 2018 elections.

Travellers should exercise basic ICT safety precautions. However, travellers should note that ICT laws and practices are subject to change on short notice, and travellers are recommended to confirm the legality/appropriateness of their specific ICT needs prior to departure.

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