

## Sierra Leone: The Tropical Paradise of West Africa

There is hardly a better place in West Africa to enjoy the beauty of nature and the magnificent beaches of the Atlantic Ocean than Sierra Leone. On our 12-day trip, watch how people are working in a real diamond mine, experience an unforgettable Mende mask dance, discover the diversity of Sierra Leonean fauna and flora in Tiwai and Banana Islands, and learn about the history of slavery on Bunce Island. The capital Freetown with its Caribbean flair and old colonial buildings awaits you, as do the chimpanzees of Tacugama. Join us on an extraordinary journey to unknown West Africa!

### Tour Highlights:

- Freetown: Caribbean atmosphere
- Bunce Island: History of slavery
- Tacugama: Important chimp sanctuary
- Kenema: Diamonds and mask dance
- Tiwai Island: Highest concentration and diversity of primates in the world
- Bo: Bustling market
- Freetown Peninsula: West Africa's most beautiful beaches
- Banana Islands: Paradise for scuba diving and snorkelling
- River No. 2: Gem of the Freetown Peninsula

### Day 1: Arrival in Freetown

Meet and greet with your tour leader at Lungi international airport. He/she will take you for a water-taxi transfer to Freetown and then to your hotel.

(-/-), overnight in Freetown, Hotel Hill Valley or similar

### Day 2: Freetown

The Tacugama "Chimpanzee Sanctuary" is Sierra Leone's most famous chimpanzee rehabilitation and conservation programme. Founded in 1995, the project, nestled in lush evergreen rainforest vegetation, mainly cares for orphaned young animals and chimpanzees kept as pets. Our guided tour takes one hour which will give us the opportunity to experience a close encounter with the animals and see how they are fed. A knowledgeable staff will provide us with detailed informations about the foundation and the goals of the project. In the afternoon you will have the opportunity to explore the capital of Sierra Leone with its Caribbean flair. The program includes the legendary Cotton Tree, the Gateway to Old King's

Yard, the dock of slave ships at King Jimmy Market, the National Museum and St. John's Maroon Church. (approx. 100km)

(B/D), overnight in Freetown, Hotel Hill Valley or similar

### **Day 3: Freetown: Excursion to Bunce Island**

Bunce Island is situated in the Sierra Leone River, a vast estuary formed of Rokel River and the Porto Loko Creek. The castle, erected in 1670, was one of the largest of its kind. Tens of thousands of African captives were transported from the so-called West African Rice Coast to the southern states of USA after having been kept in the dungeons of Bunce Island for months. Many African-Americans could trace their roots back to the area of modern day Sierra Leone using DNA analysis. The castle has become world famous due to Steven Spielberg's film "Amistad". We visit the overgrown ruins of the fortress where we still can see remains of fortification walls, watchtowers and old gravestones of slave traders who have been buried here. In the late afternoon, you'll return to Freetown. (approx. 330 km)

(B/D), overnight in Freetown, Hotel Hill Valley or similar

### **Day 4: Freetown - Kenema**

Today is a long day travelling east to Kenema on one of the country's best paved roads. Red chilli peppers, green ladyfingers and yellow cereals are laid out in the sun to dry. Along the road cassava and sweet potatoes fields line up and groundnuts are grown. In the afternoon, you'll experience a fantastic masked dance among the Mende, one of the two most important ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. We'll arrive in Kenema in the early evening. (approx. 310 km)

(B/D), overnight in Kenema, Ericson Guesthouse or similar

### **Day 5: Kenema - Tiwai Island**

This morning, you'll visit a diamond mine near Kenema. Sierra Leone is one of the most important diamond exporters in the world. As early as 1930, the mining of diamonds in the region began, which gained sad notoriety during the civil war in the 1990s as blood diamonds were financing weapons. Today, in time of peace, the valuable stones are again largely mined legally. Near the mine you are visiting, a 709-carat stone, one of the biggest diamonds ever found, was discovered in March 2011. This afternoon we'll drive to Tiwai Island. (approx. 170 km)

(B/D), overnight in a tent on Tiwai-Island

### **Day 6: Tiwai Island**

Today is all about wildlife watching. At 12sq kms, Tiwai is one of the most important primate conservation areas and hosts eleven species including rare and endangered ones like Diana monkey, three different colobus monkey species and chimpanzee.

Early in the morning we go on a two-hours' walk (easy) through the fascinating rainforest in search of wildlife. In the afternoon, you'll take an idyllic boat trip on the Moa River to observe crocodiles and hippos in their natural environment. Alternatively, you can relax on a white, fine sandy beach or take another hike through the forest. This evening there will be an option to go for a nocturnal walk in the forest.

(B/L/D), overnight in a tent on Tiwai-Island

### **Day 7: Tiwai Island - Bo**

This morning, you will go on another game walk. Then you'll leave Tiwai Island and continue your journey to Bo. With almost a quarter of a million inhabitants, Bo is the second biggest city in Sierra Leone and a famous university city. Here you'll visit the colourful market. (approx. 80 km)

(B/D), overnight in Bo, Dohas Hotel or similar

### **Day 8: Bo - Banana Islands**

Departing after breakfast, we continue the journey to Kent, a small fishing village at the southern tip of the Freetown Peninsula. Here we board a motorboat for the crossing to Banana Islands located at about 5 km from the mainland. The journey takes about 20 - 30 minutes and provides stunning views both of the mountainous peninsula and Banana Islands themselves. The archipelago comprises three islands, Dublin Island and Ricketts Island, linked by a causeway, and the tiny Mes-Meheux Island which is uninhabited. The white sand beaches and lush tropical forest invite you to relax, swim and explore the islands. There are excellent snorkelling and diving opportunities. The two main islands have a population of about 900 people, most of them descendants of freed slaves. (approx. 250 km)

(B/D), overnight in Daltons Banana Guesthouse or similar

### **Day 9: Banana Islands**

This morning you'll go on a half-day guided walk across the lush forests to view the flora and fauna of the islands. We visit a local village and have the opportunity to meet the friendly villagers. On this trip we also explore a bat cave. In the afternoon, you have time at your own leisure. You can decide to relax on the beach and swim in the sea or walk around on the island. Alternatively, if you're interested in getting out on the water, scuba diving and snorkelling trips are available.

(B/D), overnight in Daltons Banana Guesthouse or similar

### **Day 10: Banana Islands - River No. 2**

The coast and the tropical beaches of the Freetown Peninsula. Sierra Leone beaches are among the best of Africa, if not the world. You'll visit the fishing village of Mama Beach and the picture postcard beach of Bureh which offers a stunning view of the ocean and the lush rolling hills of the Peninsula. Today we'll also meet school children in a village school. This afternoon, we'll arrive at River No. 2. Crystal-clear waters, a turquoise lagoon, fine white powder-like sand dotted with colourful fishing boats, jungle clad mountains rising over the ocean: the scenery at this pristine stretch of coastline could not be more gorgeous. (approx. 80 km).

(B/D), overnight in River No.2 Guesthouse or similar

### **Day 11: River No. 2**

There is plenty to explore in River No. 2. This morning you'll take a boat trip up river which offers you the chance to view monkeys fishing for crabs in the river. With a little luck you can spot crocodiles bathing in the sun. The pristine forest is a paradise for bird-watchers. It is home to a number of bird species including rare ones such as the white-necked picathartes.

The rest of the day is free to relax.

(B/D), overnight in River No.2 Guesthouse or similar

### **Day 12: River No. 2 – End of Tour**

Enjoy your last morning on this beautiful beach. In the afternoon, we'll depart River No. 2. Your tour guide will bring you to the water taxi terminal in Freetown, where you will board a boat which transfers you to Lungi airport. (approx. 20 km).

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Please note that from time to time our itineraries may be amended.