



Sierra Leone Guidebook





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Welcome to Mercy Ships - we're grateful you'll be serving alongside us, joining our mission to bring hope and healing to those who need it most. We are thrilled return to Sierra Leone in 2023-2024.

This guidebook is your addendum to the primary [Volunteer Guidebook](#), with Sierra Leone specific details. Within this guidebook, you'll find all the details you need to prepare for your time with us in Sierra Leone. We're so excited for you to join us, and we hope you are, too!

*Meet Matthew, our Managing
Director*

Sierra Leone Country Information

Sierra Leone is located in Western Africa, bordering the North Atlantic Ocean, between Guinea and Liberia. The country is named after the Portuguese word for "Lion Mountains", which refers to the hills that surround the harbor. It is known for its rich mineral resources and having the third largest natural harbor in the world, the Queen Elizabeth II Quay. In the 17th century, the British set up a trading post near present-day Freetown. The country remained colonized until becoming an independent nation in 1961.

While the Sierra Leoneese are a tolerant people, it is also a fairly conservative nation, and the way we dress and act should show respect to our host country.

Key Details

Capital City: Freetown

Region: Sub-Saharan Africa

Currency: Sierra Leonean leone (SLL Le)

Population: 8.7 million

Population under age 25: 60%

Primary religions: Muslim (77.1%),
Christian (22.9%)

Primary languages: English (official),
Krio, Mende,
Temne

Physicians per 1,000 people: 0.07



Field Service Plans

Mercy Ships plans to be in Sierra Leone until June 2026.

Planned programmatic specialties:

- Orthopedic
- General
- Maxillofacial & ENT
- Pediatrics
- Ophthalmic

Planned education training:

- Nurse Anesthesia
- Residents – PAACS, WACS
- Biomedical
- Multidisciplinary Team at Connaught Hospital
- Peri-operative Nursing
- Sterile Processing
- Ophthalmology

What to Expect in Sierra Leone

Cultural Awareness

Avoid using the following gestures or habits, as they are deemed offensive or insulting:

- Using your left hand to gesticulate, shake hands, greet, wave, collect, or receive items
- Exposing the soles of the feet
- Engaging in public displays of affection
- Using the “thumbs up” gesture

Security

The port is guarded by security, and we also have a security team on board. When ashore, it is important to practice safe habits - travel in groups of two or more, obey the curfew, and utilize common sense in terms of where and with whom you go.

Sierra Leon Security Ratings	
Overall	3 (Moderate)
Crime	4 (High)
Civil Unrest	4 (High)
Terrorism	2 (Low)

Weather

During the “dry season” (Harmattan) between November and May every year, the region is often susceptible to strong dust storms. Those with respiratory concerns such as asthma should bring proper medications, inhalers, etc. to treat their conditions, which can be exacerbated during this time. It may also be helpful to not that May through November is “rainy season,” with the heaviest part of the season falling between July and August.

For any health concern, you can also speak to the Medical Review team if you have specific questions (medical.review.facil@mercyships.org).

Weather in Sierra Leone is fairly warm year-round, however, we advise you to bring warm clothes options to wear on board as it can get chilly. Average temperatures for our time in Freetown, Sierra Leone:

Temperature in Sierra Leone												
Month:	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
High	34 °C	35 °C	35 °C	34 °C	32 °C	30 °C	28 °C	27 °C	28 °C	30 °C	31 °C	32 °C
Low	21 °C	22 °C	23 °C	24 °C	24 °C	23 °C	23 °C	22 °C	22 °C	23 °C	23 °C	22 °C
High	93 °F	95 °F	95 °F	94 °F	90 °F	86 °F	82 °F	81 °F	83 °F	86 °F	88 °F	90 °F
Low	70 °F	72 °F	74 °F	75 °F	75 °F	74 °F	72 °F	72 °F	72 °F	73 °F	73 °F	70 °F

Shore Leave

Our crew are welcomed (and encouraged!) to explore our host country. Shore leave may be restricted at times during the field service depending on local epidemiology or safety concerns. This is always a dynamic situation, so any restrictions or changes will be communicated to crew by the captain.

Crew Clinic

The Crew Clinic provides primary healthcare and urgent healthcare for all Crew on board. The Crew Clinic is staffed by a doctor and nurse that are available to support crew who are feeling poorly. The Crew Clinic functions similarly to a general practitioner or family practice.

What to Expect Upon Arrival

...At the Airport

Upon arrival at Lungi International Airport, you will either walk or take a bus to the terminal where you will go through immigration. Be sure to have any immigration documents provided to you by Mercy Ships along with your passport ready for presentation to the immigration officer. Your passport will be stamped (check for correct dates!).

After Immigration, you'll head to the baggage area. Collect your bags from the belt and proceed to Customs and place your bags through the scanner. When leaving Customs, your bag tags will be checked – make sure you have these available and that the details match!

...Transportation

An employee of Sea Coach Express will greet you at the airport and direct you to the water taxi ticket office where the following will occur:

- The employees will put your bags on a designated baggage bus for you to collect upon arrival (hold on to your bag tags!).
- You'll proceed to the Sea Coach passenger bus, which will take you to the water taxi dock (10–15-minute drive).
- The boat crossing takes about 25-30 minutes, and when you exit the boat, you'll be able to collect your bags.
- A driver sent by the GLM Purser's office will be waiting to pick you up in Aberdeen to take you to the ship, holding a sign with your name and 'Mercy Ships' on it. It's about a 30-45 minute drive (traffic-dependent) to the port from Aberdeen.

Useful tips:

- The whole journey from your arrival at Freetown Airport in Lungi to arrival on board the Global Mercy can take 2-3 hours. There is a small café inside the airport arrival hall, (after customs and before you exit the terminal) but it may not always be open and refreshments there are expensive. You may find water on sale at the water quay. Be sure to have US Dollars handy or you may want to consider bringing your own snacks and water along.
- There are limited flights per week in Sierra Leone and delays will occasionally happen. This means you could be re-routed, or have a new flight re-booked a few days later. Please bring some clothes in your hand luggage in case this happens.
- Luggage trolleys are free of charge.
- If you don't see anyone inside the terminal, take a step outside as your driver might not have been allowed to enter. You can always come back inside if you don't see him/her.
- When you arrive at the airport, log on to the Wi-Fi so you can reach us on WhatsApp if need be. Otherwise please ask Sea Coach Express for assistance – they are on a WhatsApp group with the Pursers Office.
- Don't accept the help of strangers unless they are a Sea Coach Express employee, wearing a Mercy Ships badge, or are part of airport security.



U sabi tok Krio?

Sierra Leone Creole or Krio is the lingua franca and the de facto national language spoken throughout the Sierra Leone. Krio is spoken by roughly 6,250,000 people—nearly all of Sierra Leone’s population. While English is Sierra Leone’s sole official language, Krio is far, far more widespread

We recommend searching the app store on your smart phone or tablet for applications that can kick-start the language learning process in a fun way before your travel. Practicing just 10 minutes a day can make a difference.

Here are some common phrases to know.

Hello Kush / Adu. (koo-sheh / “Ah-do”)

How are you? Aw Di bodi? / Aw di go de go? (Aw Di boh-di ? / “Aw di go day go”)

Thank you T nki. (tehn-kee)

Please (Bo) Duya. ((bo) doo-yah)

Sorry/Excuse me A bayg padin. (ah bayg pahr-din)

Goodbye A de go. (ah day goh)

Yes Yes. (Yehs)

No Nor . (nor)

What is your name? Wetin yu nem? / Wetin yu nem? (weh-teen you nehm? / weh-teen no you nehm?)

My name is... Mi nem ____ / Mi nem na _____. (mee nehm _____. / Mi nehm na _____.)

How much does that cost? m s f am? (oh-mohs foh ahm)

I can’t speak Krio [well.] Ah n sabi t k Krio [fayn fayn]. (Ah nor sah-bi tohk creo [fine fine])

Where is the bathroom? Oosye toilet dey?

Off Ship Dress Code

	Appropriate to Wear	Inappropriate to Wear	More Information
Business/office wear (for non-uniform, internal-facing roles)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart-casual trousers, skirts, and dresses • Smart-casual blouses and shirts, including polo shirts • Suit jackets • Smart-causal shoes. Smart sandals are appropriate for women. Smart trainers/sneakers can be worn during normal office work. • Jeans • Flip-flops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorts • Casual T-shirts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knees should be covered when standing and sitting for both men and women. Dresses and skirts should be mid-thigh or longer. Skirts that fall between mid-thigh and knee should be worn with leggings or opaque tights/hose underneath. • Sleeveless tops with wide straps are fine. • Men are not required to wear business suits and/or neckties but they can be worn if preferred.
Official meetings and functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart trousers, skirts, and dresses • Smart blouses and shirts • Suit jackets • Smart shoes. • Smart sandals are appropriate for women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorts • Flip-flops • Jeans • Casual T-shirts • Trainers/sneakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men should wear a shirt and necktie if the meeting is formal. • Women should generally wear dresses or skirts, rather than trousers. • If African fabrics/styles are worn, they must be suitable for a business environment. Get advice from a local crew member if unsure.
In the Hospital, in Reception, and during patient interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart-casual trousers, skirts, and dresses • Smart-casual blouses and shirts, including polo shirts • T-shirts • Flip-flops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorts (of any length) • Leggings • Sportswear 	
Casual wear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeans • T-shirts • Flip-flops and trainers/sneakers • Shorts should be loose-fitting and knee-length or longer • Leggings where worn with a tunic-style top to mid-thigh or lower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very tight or high-cut shorts ('running' shorts) • Spaghetti-strap tops 	
Exercising in the on board gym and on crew-only decks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lycra/Spandex leggings and tops • Exercise shirts • Basketball jersey-style tops • Short 'running' shorts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compression wear worn without any covering • Sports bras worn without any covering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tight-fitting exercise gear should be covered up when walking through the ship.

Travel to Sierra Leone

Arranging your travel

Once your Staffing Coordinator has given you clearance to do so, use the service dates in your offer letter as your date of arrival and departure for your transport. We recommend flights occur on Fridays, Saturdays, or Sundays. No Monday arrival/departure flights for first time crew. Please refer to the Acceptable Flights List.

Ticket refund policy

Flexibility is key! Please do not book an arrival or departure flight on a date other than what is stated in your offer letter without first receiving approval from your Coordinator. Because the ships' schedules can change, we strongly recommend that all crew purchase changeable and/or refundable tickets.

Mercy Ships cannot offer refunds or financial assistance with extra costs incurred for changing or cancelling airline tickets when caused by a change in the ships' schedules or from unexpected travel restrictions - unless conditions pre-defined by our funded Crew Travel Policy are met. Contact your Coordinator for details.

Arrival by Plane

Acceptable Flights for Sierra Leone

Arrivals:

- Asky Airlines 22, 23
- Air Senegal 213
- Brussels Airlines 241, 245
- Delta 7560, 8605
- Ethiopian 1042, 1043, 942, 943
- Kenya Airways 510
- Turkish 533
- United 9974

Departures:

- Asky Airlines 22, 23
- Air Peace*7761, 7762
- Air Senegal 214
- Brussels Airlines 241
- Delta 7561, 8605
- Ethiopian 1042, 1043, 942, 943
- Kenya Airways 511
- Turkish Airlines 534
- United 9974

*Air Peace flights can only be booked within Nigeria

Questions?

We know arranging travel can be stressful, but it doesn't have to be - our travel team is here to help. Reach out to our team at travel@mercyships.org.

Travel Resources

Registering with Foreign Affairs

Many countries allow travelers to register with the foreign affairs office (or national equivalent) and include the following types of benefits:

Receive the latest safety and security information for your destination country, helping you make informed decisions regarding your travel plans.

Allows your nation's embassy to contact you in an emergency situation - be it natural disaster, civil unrest, pandemic, or family emergency.

We encourage all volunteers to take this step for additional protection and peace of mind while away.

Tips to Avoid Jet-lag

Here are some tricks to reduce the effect it might have on you:

- Prepare at home before your departure - set your watch to match your new time zone and customize your sleep-wake rhythm.
- Don't eat a lot of food (overeat/snack).
- Do drink a lot of water, and avoid other beverages.

- Go out in the sun or move around if you get sleepy during the day.
- Make your room as dark as possible if you have trouble sleeping at night (and remove other distractions - phones, television, etc.).
- Try taking a melatonin tablet before bed during your first week after travel, as it will help induce natural sleep as you adjust to the new time zone.

Emergency Contacts

Save these phone numbers in case you need to contact the ship while you're traveling:

+1 430 235 4535 - Primary WhatsApp number for GLM. Crew and travelers are encouraged to use this as the go-to number

+1 954 932 9800 - satellite, answered 24/7

+232 75 986 780 - local, answered 24/7

If you are ever stopped and asked for any sort of bribe by an official, please immediately call:

+232 76 541 333 (Field Security Officer)

Required Documentation for Travel

Crew must travel with the following documentation in order to get on most flights to Sierra Leone and to enter the country:

- Sierra Leone Protocol*
- Individual Invitation Letter* (issued by Mercy Ships)
- Boarding Authorization & Special Entry Visa Letter* (issued by Sierra Leone Immigration Department)
- Exceptional Leave to Remain Letter* (issued by Sierra Leone Immigration Department)
- WHO Yellow Fever vaccination booklet
- Printed offer letter/acceptance letter from Mercy Ships (recommended)

**Will be sent to you by your Coordinator prior to travel.*



Thank you!

We can't wait to continue Mercy Ships legacy, bringing hope and healing to people just like Houleye! Years of blessing, sacrifice, smiles, hard work, and hope are ahead of us. Thank you for your part!

Looking for more info?

The following info can be found in the General Volunteer Guidebook. To view, click the button below.

- Code of Conduct
- Community Life and Expectations
- Staying in Touch
- Dress Code
- Uniform Guidelines
- Crew Bank
- Packing Lists

[CLICK HERE](#)



meet Houleye