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Africa's Leading Travel and Tourism Magazine

SIERRA LEONE:

Charting a New Path as a
Must-Visit Tourism Haven *pg. 18*

World Tourism Day goes grassroots
as Sierra Leone celebrates in
Pujehun and Makeni *pg. 14*



*Sierra Leone to host 3rd UN Tourism
Gastronomy Forum for Africa pg. 22*

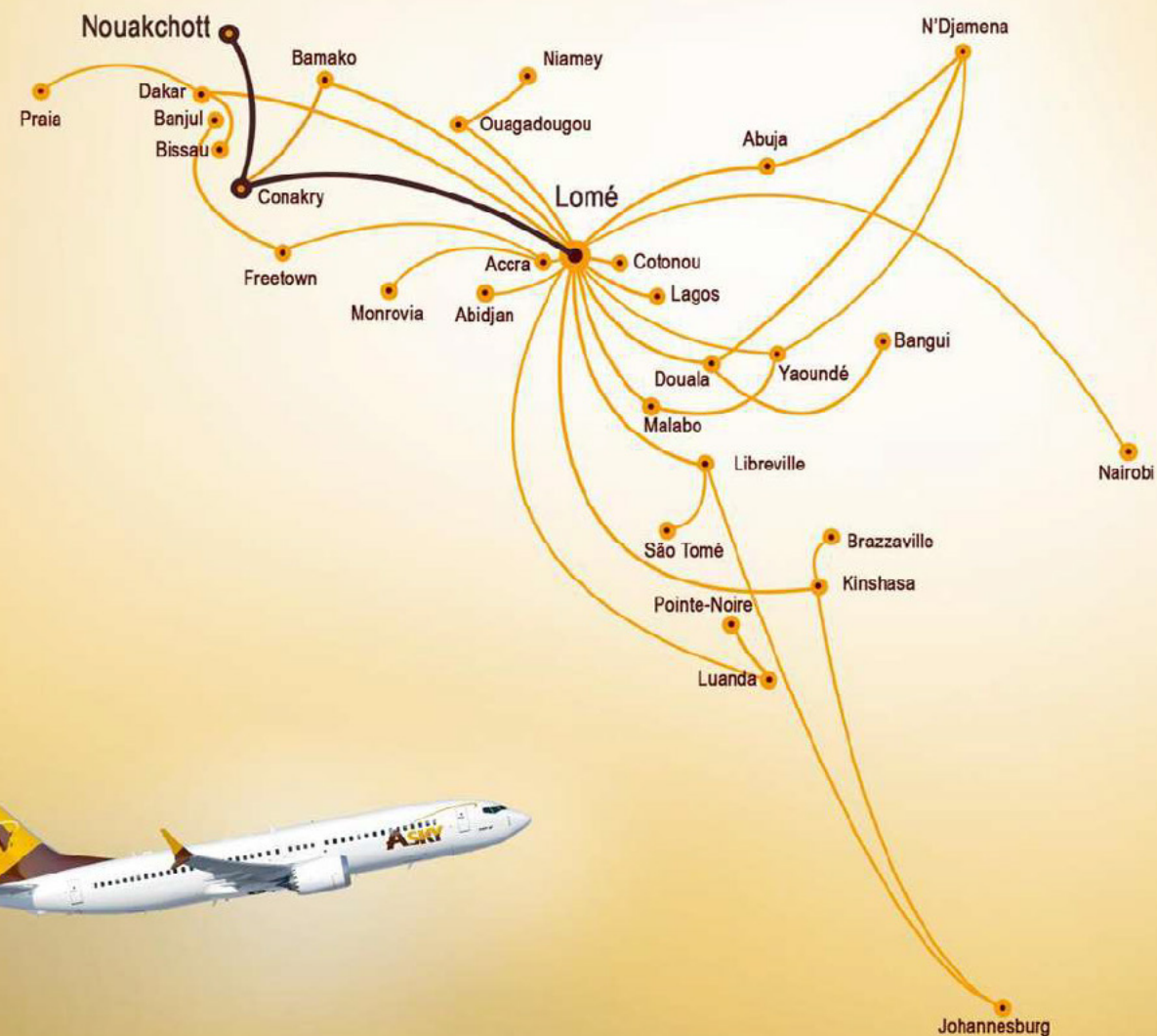
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Contents



- 8 Sierra Leone's Nabeela Tunis pays glowing tribute to outgoing UN Tourism Chief
- 9 Groundbreaking Ceremony of the Canopy Walkway at Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary
- 10 Nabeela Tunis presents Women in Tourism Report at 68th UN Tourism CAF Meeting
- 11 Sierra Leone makes Significant strides in Visa Openness, Boosting Tourism Potential
- 12 Catalysing diaspora investment in Sierra Leone
- 13 Sierra Leone earns UNESCO World Heritage status for Gola-Tiwai Complex
- 14 World Tourism Day goes grassroots as Sierra Leone celebrates in Pujehun and Makeni
- 16 Sierra Leone's Year of Ecotourism Gains Momentum with Presidential Backing and Strategic Action
- 18 Sierra Leone: Charting a New Path as a Must-Visit Tourism Haven
- 21 Sierra Leone's Tourism Minister Engages Coastal Communities to Strengthen Environmental Protection
- 22 UN Tourism Names Sierra Leone as 2026 Host for Gastronomy Forum in Africa
- 23 ITB Berlin: Sierra Leone is the New Kid on the Block-Nabeela Tunis
- 24 Sierra Leone Flights Schedule

- 26 Air Sierra Leone reopens Freetown-Gatwick route
- 27 Idris Elba's Sherbro Island City and Sierra Leone's Strategic Investment Push
- 28 Minister of Tourism Launches Sierra Leone Creative Economy Diagnostic Report
- 29 Cassava Music Café: Redefining Sierra Leone's Culinary Story Through Food and Social Impact
- 32 Cribs International and the Reawakening of Sierra Leone's Entertainment Scene
- 34 Creative Hub Africa: Powering Sierra Leone's Creative Renaissance
- 36 Sierra Leone's Tourism Minister Honoured as Africa's Best and Among Top 100 Industry Leaders
- 37 Bringing Innovation into Sierra Leone's Culinary Tradition – The Treat Food Way
- 38 Sierra Leone Unlocks Its Tourism Renaissance:
- 40 Taste of Sierra Leone: A Journey through Sierra Leone's Unique Gastronomy
- 42 Chapter One Opens in Freetown: A Bold Step in Sierra Leone's Rise as West Africa's Entertainment Hub
- 44 Sierra Leone Tourism: Embracing Freedom, Building the Future
- 46 Salone ON ground support Tourism staff
- 48 Sierra Leone celebrates inclusion and elegance in historic fashion night honouring Persons with Albinism
- 50 Sierra Leone's Creative Awakening: Dr Julius Spencer on Reviving Theatre, Music and the Arts
- 52 Hospitality with a purpose: Hotel Barmoi's role in building a sustainable tourism ecosystem
- 55 Sierra Leone to Host Finish of Rebranded Budapest Bamako Rally with New Logo
- 56 Bureh Beach Surfing Club: Riding Sierra Leone's waves into a global surfing destination
- 58 Mozza Beach Resort: Where women lead, community thrives, and Sierra Leone's hospitality shines
- 60 Tariq's Resort: A green dream in Lungi
- 62 Santorini in Sierra Leone: How The Lead Hotel is redefining luxury by the Atlantic
- 64 The Place to be: Inside Sierra Leone's luxury gem on Tokeh Beach
- 66 Spark putting Sierra Leone on the Global Map through Multimedia and Photography
- 68 Frequently asked questions
- 71 Women in Tourism Congress in Freetown drives innovation and financial inclusion for gender equality
- 74 Top 10 Attractions in Sierra Leone
- 76 Tourism calendar of Events
- 78 One Nation Reggae Festival Marks Sierra Leone's Return as a Cultural Heritage Hub

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Editorial

Dear Readers,

It is with great pride and renewed enthusiasm that we present the another edition of *Destination Sierra Leone* – a special publication dedicated to capturing the vibrant pulse of Sierra Leone's tourism sector, both at home and abroad.

This issue marks a special milestone: one year since our first publication, and just over a year into the transformative leadership of Honourable Nabeela Farida Tunis, Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs.

Over the past year, Sierra Leone has achieved remarkable progress. From successfully hosting the *Women in Tourism Leadership Africa Congress (WITLAC)* to being selected as the host nation for the *3rd UN Tourism Gastronomy Forum in Africa*, the country continues to position itself as a rising force in African tourism.



Kojo Bentum-Williams

In this edition, our reporters have gone beyond events to spotlight the human stories driving the sector – resilient women and inspirational personalities leading positive change across the country. These changemakers are not only championing the Ministry’s *Year of Ecotourism*, but are also leveraging major international platforms to unlock opportunities for communities, businesses, and young people.

We also recognise the contributions of Sierra Leone’s global ambassadors – from internationally acclaimed actor Idris Elba, whose landmark development project recently received cabinet approval from His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio, to a growing network of creatives and entrepreneurs using their influence to promote the destination on the world stage. Elba’s project, in particular, holds great promise for job creation and youth empowerment.

This edition uncovers Sierra Leone’s hidden gems, showcasing the country’s natural beauty, cultural heritage, and the many grassroots initiatives nurturing tourism and its allied sectors. While we celebrate these strides, we also acknowledge the challenges that persist – particularly in customer service, skills development, and the broader human resource capacity within the industry.

Yet, there is every reason for optimism. The launch of Air Sierra Leone, with its mission to strengthen regional and international air connectivity, represents a bold step towards making the destination more accessible and competitive.

As you read through these pages, we invite you not only to witness Sierra Leone’s journey but also to become part of it. The story of this destination is still being written – and it holds space for every voice, every visitor, and every visionary who believes in its potential.



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Africa's leading Travel and Tourism Magazine



Foreword

Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs

It is with immense pride and gratitude that I present this edition of Destination Sierra Leone, a celebration of our country’s remarkable journey toward becoming one of Africa’s most authentic and sustainable destinations.

When we launched the Tourism for All campaign in 2024, our goal was clear—to reposition tourism as a driver of inclusive growth, community empowerment, and cultural pride. Building on that momentum, the declaration of 2025 as the Year of Ecotourism marks a new chapter in our transformation—one that connects culture, conservation, and community as pillars of national development.

Over the past year, Sierra Leone has made history. From the UNESCO inscription of the Gola-Tiwai Complex as a World Heritage Site, to our selection as host of the 3rd UN Tourism Gastronomy Forum for Africa in 2026, our nation is now recognised among the continent’s

rising stars in sustainable tourism. We have also recorded significant progress in visa openness, infrastructure development, and creative industry investment, demonstrating that tourism is not just an economic activity—it is a national mission.

Our beaches, islands, wildlife, and heritage sites tell the story of a land blessed by nature and strengthened by resilience. Yet, the true beauty of Sierra Leone lies in its people—the warmth of our communities, the creativity of our youth, and the determination of our women who continue to redefine the face of African tourism.

As we move forward, our focus remains unwavering:

- To deepen partnerships between government, private sector, and communities;
- To elevate professional standards and skills training across the sector;

- To ensure that tourism benefits every Sierra Leonean, from the coastal villages to the mountain trails.

This is not just a story about tourism—it is a story about hope, innovation, and national pride. Together, we are building a legacy where every visitor becomes an ambassador, every community a partner, and every experience a testament to Sierra Leone’s enduring spirit.

Welcome to Authentic Sierra Leone.

Welcome to the Year of Ecotourism.

Welcome to a nation where culture, conservation, and community thrive as one.

Explore Freedom. Discover Sierra Leone.

Madam Judith C. Jones

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs.

Sierra Leone's Nabeela Tunis pays glowing tribute to outgoing UN Tourism Chief

In a moving tribute during the 68th UN Tourism Commission for Africa (CAF) Meeting, held in Abuja, Sierra Leone's Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Nabeela Tunis, praised UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili for his visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to the global tourism sector.

Addressing delegates from across the continent, Minister Tunis described Pololikashvili's tenure as "transformational," particularly in advancing tourism development across Africa. She highlighted the Secretary-General's role in championing inclusive, sustainable tourism and delivering impactful initiatives that have resonated well beyond the continent.

"As this marks your final CAF meeting, we join our voices with many of our colleagues in celebrating your incredible work and legacy," Minister Tunis said. "You have led with grace, determination, and a clear vision for Africa's place in global tourism."

Tunis emphasized that Pololikashvili's contributions will leave a lasting imprint



Nabeela Tunis, Sierra Leone's Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs

on the sector, noting that his efforts have strengthened partnerships, accelerated regional tourism agendas, and brought renewed focus to Africa's tourism potential.

"Your work will not only be remembered—it will be seen for generations to come. Sierra Leone and Africa will always be your home," she

concluded warmly.

As the tourism sector navigates a new chapter, leaders like Minister Tunis and others across the continent continue to build on the momentum set in motion under Pololikashvili's stewardship—advancing a shared vision of Africa as a thriving, resilient, and welcoming destination.

UN Tourism Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili



Groundbreaking Ceremony of the Canopy Walkway at Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary

The Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary on Tuesday, 26th August 2025, hosted the official groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of a Canopy Walkway, a project designed to boost eco-tourism, conservation, and community development. The project is being implemented with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Founder of Tacugama, Mr. Bala Amarasekaran, described the project as a proud moment for Sierra Leone, emphasizing the importance of protecting Tacugama's natural environment at all costs. He noted that the Canopy Walkway and the planned Innovation Centre reflect the country's commitment to conservation, while also creating jobs, attracting international partners, and bringing pride to the nation.

Councillor Mendi S. Bangura, representing the Western Area Rural District, expressed appreciation to UNDP and Tacugama for bringing such a landmark project to their community. He assured his full commitment to supporting environmental protection in the area.

Mr. Fredrick Ampiah, UNDP Resident Representative, highlighted three key reasons for UNDP's involvement: conserving Sierra Leone's unique ecology, creating both direct and indirect value including livelihoods, and positioning the country as a strong eco-tourism destination on the global map.

Deputy Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Mrs. Kadija Grace Ahene, commended partners for making the project a reality. She noted that the Canopy Walkway is a legacy of

sustainability, harmony with nature, and a milestone in blending conservation with tourism and education. She encouraged all to embrace the vision of Sierra Leone as a premier eco-tourism destination.

Minister of Environment, Mr. Jiwoh Abdulai, thanked UNDP for the initiative and pledged his Ministry's continued support to safeguard the sanctuary. He emphasized that the Canopy Walkway belongs not just to Tacugama but to every Sierra Leonean.

The project, supported by UNDP and undertaken by renowned contractors from Ghana with expertise in canopy walkway construction across West Africa, is expected to be completed by late November 2025.

Nabeela Tunis presents Women in Tourism Report at 68th UN Tourism CAF Meeting

At the 68th Meeting of the UN Tourism Commission for Africa (CAF) held in Abuja, Nigeria, the Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs of Sierra Leone, Nabeela Farida Tunis, addressed delegates in her capacity as Chair of the Women in Tourism Leadership Africa Committee (WITLAC). In her remarks, she outlined recent milestones and shared a forward-looking agenda to advance women's leadership and empowerment in Africa's tourism sector.

"It is a great honour to address you in my capacity as Chair of the Women in Tourism Leadership Africa Committee," she began.

The Minister reflected on progress made across the continent and the momentum generated by the Women in Tourism Congress held in Freetown in October 2024. She described the event as a significant step toward ensuring women are not just included in tourism, but positioned to lead and transform the industry.

"Today, I have the privilege of presenting key milestones from our collective efforts, including the landmark Women in Tourism Congress held in Freetown, and to outline the next steps as we move from momentum to a truly transformative movement across the continent."

WITLAC itself was born out of a deep need to address the gender gap in tourism leadership. Launched in 2019 by African women ministers and tourism leaders, and supported by UN Tourism through its Regional Department for Africa, WITLAC has grown into a strategic platform for dialogue, collaboration, and gender-responsive solutions.

It aligns fully with Sustainable Development Goal 5 and the UN Tourism Agenda for Africa: Tourism for Inclusive Growth with women's empowerment placed squarely at the centre.

The Women in Tourism Congress in Freetown, themed "Beyond Empowerment: Advancing Education,

Innovation, and Finance Access," brought together a vibrant mix of policymakers, entrepreneurs, academics, and grassroots voices. The goal was clear: to turn policies into action and ambition into measurable impact.

"Tourism is one of the most dynamic and promising sectors on our continent," Minister Nabeela Tunis said. "But its full potential will only be realized when women who constitute the majority of the workforce are not only present, but empowered to lead, innovate, and transform the sector at every level."

She extended sincere appreciation to the government of H.E. President Julius Maada Bio and to the private sector for their unwavering support in hosting the Congress. She also thanked UN Tourism for co-organizing the event and compiling the official Congress Report, which she encouraged all stakeholders to explore.

"Sierra Leone extends its deep gratitude to UN Tourism... I encourage you to access the full report which captures the full scope of insights and recommendations."

The Congress generated a bold action agenda structured around four interconnected focus areas:

First, the need to embed gender equality at the heart of tourism policy. This includes enforcing gender parity in leadership, mainstreaming gender considerations in all tourism strategies, and advocating for supportive workplace environments that enable women to fully participate in and thrive within the sector.

Second, a commitment to equipping women with the skills they need to lead. From building partnerships with academic institutions to delivering tailored education and fostering innovation, the focus is on empowering women with tools that match the pace of change in the industry.

Third, unlocking access to finance for women entrepreneurs. This means expanding microfinance and venture



capital channels, building smart and inclusive financial tools like mobile microcredit, and ensuring financial literacy is embedded into every entrepreneurship support program.

And finally, driving digital inclusion. Women must be given the digital and technological tools to thrive whether through AI, mobile tech, or smart tourism platforms; so they can scale their businesses and shape the sector's future.

WITLAC is already moving ahead with key initiatives. These include launching a Pan-African Mentorship Programme that connects emerging women leaders with seasoned professionals; selecting the next host country for the Women in Tourism Congress to maintain momentum; and mobilizing funding from governments, donors, development banks, and the private sector to open new doors for women in the industry.

In a forward-looking announcement, she revealed that Sierra Leone will host the 3rd UN Tourism Forum on Gastronomy Tourism in 2026; a unique opportunity to celebrate both the continent's culinary richness and the transformative role of women in gastronomy.

"This will be an opportunity not only to showcase Africa's rich culinary heritage, but also to spotlight the extraordinary contributions of women in gastronomy; as innovators, custodians, and changemakers."

Minister Nabeela Farida Tunis ended her remarks with a warm and inclusive invitation:

"You are all warmly invited to join us in 2026, as we continue building a tourism sector that is inclusive, resilient, and truly representative of the people who make it thrive."

Sierra Leone makes Significant strides in Visa Openness, Boosting Tourism Potential

Sierra Leone has achieved a remarkable transformation in its visa openness policies, significantly enhancing access for travelers and strengthening its appeal as a tourism destination. Between 2023 and 2024, the country's Visa Openness Index (AVOI) score rose by 0.309 points to reach 0.811, propelling its ranking from 22nd to 13th among African nations. This change demonstrates Sierra Leone's commitment to fostering regional connectivity and global tourism.

Sierra Leone recently granted visa-free travel to citizens of Ghana and Nigeria, both members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Previously, these travelers could only access visas on arrival. This policy shift has contributed to ECOWAS achieving a regional reciprocity score of 99%, making it one of the most accessible regions for African travelers.



Sierra Leone's remarkable progress in visa openness, a testament to our commitment to fostering regional connectivity and tourism growth. Between 2023 and 2024, our Visa Openness Index score rose by 0.309 points to 0.811, propelling us from 22nd to 13th among African nations. This transformative achievement highlights our strategic efforts to foster seamless travel, economic growth, and cultural exchange. By welcoming more travelers with visa-free and visa-on-arrival policies, Sierra Leone is positioning itself as a leading destination, enhancing its appeal across Africa and beyond, and ensuring shared prosperity through tourism-driven development."

Sierra Leone has also introduced reciprocal agreements to exempt citizens of specific African Union (AU) countries from visa fees. Beneficiaries include Botswana, Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, and Mauritius, further reducing barriers to entry for these travelers.

The ease of travel is a crucial factor in destination appeal, and Sierra Leone's

policy changes reflect its broader strategy to attract visitors and bolster its tourism sector. By granting greater visa-free and visa-on-arrival options, the country positions itself as a more welcoming destination for regional and international tourists. This is particularly significant for ECOWAS, whose 15 member states contribute to vibrant cross-border travel and trade.

Sierra Leone's progress signals a commitment to fostering regional integration and tourism-driven economic growth. With only Guinea-Bissau yet to fully reciprocate ECOWAS' visa-free policies, the region is edging closer to seamless travel for its citizens. This bodes well for tourism stakeholders seeking to tap into a growing and interconnected African tourism market.



Today, 20 countries enjoy visa-free access to Sierra Leone, up from just a few previously. While most African travelers still require visas, 35 countries now qualify for visa-on-arrival arrangements. Only three countries—Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, and Ethiopia—still require travelers to obtain a visa before departure.

Commenting on the report, the Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs Nabeela Farida Tunis said "I am proud of





Catalysing diaspora investment in Sierra Leone

How can the human and financial capital of Sierra Leoneans abroad be better utilised to create a sustainable economic future for the country? This was the key question at a recent roundtable on the potential of diaspora investment to play a more significant role in Sierra Leone's economy.

The African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) and the Social Investment Consultancy organised the meeting on behalf of Invest Salone, a UK funded private sector development programme. The virtual event allowed over 40 diaspora investors and experts from around the world to identify barriers to diaspora direct investment and explore support needs and investment opportunities, particularly in real estate, technology, agriculture, renewable energy and tourism.

Participants heard how Sierra Leone's diaspora contributes to the economy through remittances, trade and investment. Remittance figures for 2023 alone indicate a contribution of US\$0.23 billion to the country's economy, slightly below the approximately US\$0.26 billion from foreign direct investment.

Invest Salone's team leader, Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, opened the discussion, saying that the objective of the meeting was to identify how Sierra Leoneans abroad could better contribute to the country's transformation. He highlighted opportunities such as a diaspora bond, establishing angel investor networks, a diaspora chamber of commerce and technology-based investment platforms.

Drawing on pre-roundtable interviews with diaspora investors, which

indicated that technology, real estate and agriculture are the most common sectors for investment, the session went on to hear the challenges facing existing investors in these sectors and potential solutions.

Naomi Sesay, who is fundraising for the Matamp City Project – a smart, sustainable real estate development in Sierra Leone – discussed issues such as the scarcity of essential farm machinery and how these problems could be overcome by sharing resources with other agricultural investors and by servicing and repairing older equipment.

Tamba Lamin, a co-investor in a sustainable housing estate along the Freetown Peninsula, noted that inefficient banking systems often impede the transfer of essential funds for investment projects.

Efayomi Carr from Flourish Ventures, a venture capital firm, has 15 years of experience investing primarily in African tech. He believes technology and skills development can provide solutions: "Cultivating talent can develop local solutions and enable outsourcing to attract additional capital in a global economy."

Ade Freeman, of the Eden Group, highlighted the important role that interpersonal trust plays in diaspora investment choices and the importance of developing more structured financing. He also highlighted the underutilised potential of private equity venture capital in Sierra Leone.

Breakout discussions followed to allow more investors to share their experiences and identify concrete



Invest Salone's Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie

solutions to challenges.

The suggestions included providing technical assistance for entrepreneurs and investors, conducting further research on diaspora bonds and other financing opportunities, exploring the feasibility of establishing an angel investor network and facilitating sector-specific lobbying efforts.

Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie closed the meeting, saying it was important to share lessons with others struggling with issues. "There is clearly a real opportunity for harnessing and scaling up diaspora investment. The test now is for us to build the networks and relationships that will help us drive Sierra Leone's development."

Commenting on the event, Stella Opoku-Owusu, Executive Director of AFFORD, said that African diaspora investors are a vital resource for the continent's growth. "The Sierra Leonean diaspora investors who participated in this exercise demonstrated passion and motivation for development in Sierra Leone. They also demonstrated a focus on sustainable socio-economic impact and a higher risk tolerance compared to foreign direct investment. The increased focus on domestic politics by richer countries calls for urgent action that practically leverages diaspora investment for development, as is being exemplified by Invest Salone."

Credit: Invest Salone



unesco

Gola-Tiwai Complex

Sierra Leone



Sierra Leone earns UNESCO World Heritage status for Gola-Tiwai Complex

Sierra Leone has reached a momentous milestone with the inscription of the Gola-Tiwai Complex on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This recognition places the West African nation among the custodians of globally significant natural heritage and reinforces its commitment to environmental preservation and responsible tourism development.

The newly inscribed serial property comprises the Gola Rainforest National Park and Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary. Both sites form part of the Greater Gola Landscape, nestled within the Upper Guinean Forest, one of the world's most critical biodiversity hotspots. The area is rich in ecological value, supporting more than 1,000 plant species, 113 of which are endemic, alongside 55 mammal species, including 19 classified as globally threatened.

Of particular note are the African Forest Elephant and the Pygmy Hippopotamus, both flagship species emblematic of the region's ecological importance.

Additionally, the complex hosts up to 448 species of birds, among them the endangered White-necked Rockfowl, as well as a remarkable variety of freshwater fish, butterflies, and dragonflies. These indicators collectively reflect the site's exceptional conservation value and ecological integrity.

Beyond its natural richness, the Gola-Tiwai Complex also represents a legacy of collaborative stewardship involving national authorities, local communities, civil society organizations, and international conservation partners. This collective effort has ensured the long-term protection of the ecosystem while empowering surrounding communities through sustainable livelihoods and inclusive conservation models.

This designation is more than symbolic; it affirms Sierra Leone's rising role in global conservation and heritage management. It also unlocks new opportunities for sustainable tourism and cultural diplomacy. By aligning tourism growth with ecosystem

protection, the government seeks to attract eco-conscious travelers and responsible investment, thereby turning conservation into a driver of national development.

Hon. Nabeela Farida Tunis, Sierra Leone's Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, opines that, "This recognition is a proud reflection of our nation's natural wealth and our collective resolve to protect it for generations to come. We invite tourists and investors alike to experience the beauty of the Gola-Tiwai Complex and join us in promoting a sustainable tourism sector that benefits all."

With this listing, Sierra Leone positions itself more strongly on the global tourism map. The Gola-Tiwai Complex stands not only as a sanctuary for rare species but also as a symbol of what nations can achieve through vision, partnerships, and environmental responsibility.

Sierra Leone tourism is open to the world, rich in nature, rooted in culture, and ready to welcome.



World Tourism Day goes grassroots as Sierra Leone celebrates in Pujehun and Makeni



Sierra Leone marked this year's World Tourism Day with a bold move – taking the celebrations out of the capital, Freetown, and into the heart of local communities. On 27th September 2025, the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, together with the National Tourist Board and the Monument and Relics Commission, commemorated the day in Pujehun in the South, while the National Association of Certified Tourist Guides (NACTOG) held simultaneous activities in Makeni in the North.

Under the global theme "Tourism and Sustainable Transformation", the celebration in Pujehun was a landmark event. For many residents, it was their

first encounter with an official tourism delegation, led by Minister Nabeela Tunis herself. The occasion blended education and entertainment, with cultural displays, dance, acrobatics, and sensitisation sessions highlighting both the power of tourism and the district's untapped potential.

The event drew nearly 2,000 participants, including students, traditional leaders, hospitality stakeholders, security heads, and notable figures such as former Vice President Hon. Victor Bockarie Foh, a native of Pujehun. Locals welcomed the initiative, urging government to integrate Pujehun more centrally into national tourism development.

Minister Tunis explained that moving the celebration away from Freetown was a deliberate effort to decentralise tourism and shine a spotlight on the hidden cultural and natural assets of other districts. She described Pujehun as a land of immense, yet underexplored, opportunities for tourism.

The day concluded with live cooking demonstrations featuring southern delicacies, aligning with preparations for Sierra Leone's hosting of the 2026 Regional Gastronomy for Africa festival. The Minister also donated learning materials to schools as part of the country's broader tourism education drive.



Celebrations in Makeni

Meanwhile in Makeni, NACTOG hosted a parallel celebration packed with cultural performances, a children's fun fair, and a symposium led by veteran tour guide Pieter Bassie. The symposium tackled industry challenges, new trends and strategies for sustainability, underscoring the crucial role of tourist guides in delivering quality experiences and positioning Sierra Leone as a competitive destination.

The event saw the attendance of stakeholders from across the North, and highlighted the significance of sustainability as an engine of growth in the industry and the need to place

resilience and inclusivity at the heart of tourism action.

The event underscored the crucial role played by tourist guides in delivering memorable experience, sustaining the industry's growth, and positioning Sierra Leone as a premier destination for tourists. Most importantly, it is evidence of the collective resolve of tourism actors to harness tourism's potential as a vehicle of economic development and a positive agent of social change

Together, the twin celebrations in Pujehun and Makeni reflected a nationwide commitment to inclusivity, sustainability and community empowerment through tourism. They



also reinforced the government's 2025 Year of Ecotourism campaign, which aims to connect community, culture and conservation in pursuit of lasting benefits for Sierra Leoneans.



Sierra Leone's Year of Ecotourism Gains Momentum with Presidential Backing and Strategic Action

Sierra Leone's "Year of Ecotourism 2025" has emerged from planning into practice under clear state backing, with President Julius Maada Wonie Bio positioned as a driving force behind a national effort to reposition tourism as a pillar of economic diversification. The campaign, led operationally by the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs under Minister Nabeela Farida Tunis, builds on a sequence of policy measures, infrastructure investments and targeted partnerships that collectively signal a shift from promotion to delivery.

President Bio's support for the initiative is visible across several dimensions. Tourism is embedded within the administration's broader development agenda, identified among the strategic sectors intended to stimulate investment, create jobs and expand economic opportunity. The government's National Strategic Tourism Plan, launched in 2024 and formally presented with vice-presidential endorsement, offers a roadmap for sector transformation; ministry officials have publicly credited the President for sustained political support that has enabled the plan's adoption and initial implementation.

Infrastructure and access have been central to that strategy. The development of a new international airport, enhancements to the Lungi-Freetown transport corridor and the adoption of visa-on-arrival policies are practical steps intended to reduce friction for incoming visitors. These changes reflect a deliberate effort to make Sierra Leone more navigable and commercially appealing to markets previously deterred by logistical hurdles. In tandem, the administration has emphasized a favorable investment climate, encouraging private sector engagement and recognizing the crucial role of entrepreneurs in building competitive tourism propositions, an approach the President has both lauded and promoted in public appearances.

The Year of Ecotourism initiative itself crystallized in early 2025. Minister Tunis convened a ministerial retreat on 6-7 January to review achievements under



President Maada Bio signs the Eco Tourism pledge

the preceding "Tourism for All" campaign and to identify priorities for the new phase. The retreat shaped a concise set of strategic objectives: strengthen partnerships with local communities and the private sector; promote eco-friendly tourism practices; and elevate Sierra Leone's visibility as a destination for nature-based and cultural travel. The campaign was designed deliberately to be more than symbolic; it prioritizes community empowerment, conservation, and tangible economic benefit for local stakeholders.

Conservation success has provided timely momentum. In July 2025 the Gola-Tiwai Complex, encompassing Gola Forest and Tiwai Island, received UNESCO World Heritage inscription, a major international endorsement that enhances Sierra Leone's credentials for nature tourism. The designation supplies the Year of Ecotourism with a high-value asset around which scientific research, community engagement and sustainable destination development can be structured.

Practical investments in ecotourism sites have proceeded alongside strategic planning. Projects supported by international partners, including the World Bank, have targeted sites such as the Tacugama Eco-Tourism Hub, Bureh Beach and Leicester Peak. Tacugama, the country's established chimpanzee sanctuary, has been highlighted as an anchor for conservation-driven visitor experiences. These investments are intended to demonstrate how environmental stewardship and tourism can be mutually reinforcing, offering replicable models for protected-area management, visitor interpretation and community benefit sharing.

Community engagement is a recurring theme in the campaign's early

implementation. The Ministry and National Tourist Board have prioritized consultations with coastal and rural communities, addressing issues such as waste management, illegal sand mining and beach security, which align with the campaign's core objective of balancing growth with preservation. By focusing on local needs and livelihoods, the initiative seeks to ensure that increased visitation translates into measurable improvements in household incomes, skills development and small business opportunities.

The administration's policy environment also signals alignment across sectors. President Bio's broader green economy agenda, highlighting energy transition projects and environmentally oriented

“ President Bio's support for the initiative is visible across several dimensions. Tourism is embedded within the administration's broader development agenda, identified among the strategic sectors intended to stimulate investment, create jobs and expand economic opportunity. ”

investment zones creates synergies that support ecotourism objectives. Where ecotourism depends on reliable, low-impact infrastructure and resilient local economies, parallel investments in renewable energy and sustainable industrial planning help de-risk private investment and improve destination readiness.

The policy implications are clear. To accelerate impact, Sierra Leone should consider a combination of targeted public investment and incentive structures that catalyse private capital into community-centred ecotourism products; transparent monitoring frameworks that link investment to social and ecological outcomes; and market-specific promotional strategies that use the UNESCO inscription and new infrastructure as cornerstones for international campaigning. Cross-ministerial coordination linking tourism, transport, environment and investment authorities will be essential to translate strategic intent into operational outcomes.

The Year of Ecotourism 2025 represents a consequential pivot for Sierra Leone's tourism sector. With presidential endorsement, a strategic plan in place, UNESCO recognition of flagship sites and active community engagement, the campaign is positioned to deliver both conservation dividends and diversified economic returns. The coming months will test the government's capacity to operationalize the plan at scale, secure investment, and ensure that growth is equitable and sustainable. If the current trajectory holds, Sierra Leone may emerge as a model for how small-state nations can align conservation, culture and commerce to shape a resilient tourism future.



Tourism Minister Nabeela Tunis explain a point to President Bio



SIERRA LEONE:

Charting a New Path as a Must-Visit Tourism Haven

Sierra Leone is steadily emerging as one of West Africa's most intriguing and promising destinations for travellers in search of authentic experiences, pristine beaches, and rich cultural heritage. At the helm of this transformation is Nabeela Farida Tunis, Sierra Leone's Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, who believes the country has all the ingredients to become an enviable ecotourism hub.

"Sierra Leone has a lot to offer in terms of tourism. It's got the beaches, the islands, the wildlife, and a very rich culture and history," Tunis explained in an exclusive interview. "We're working on becoming an enviable ecotourism destination because we believe Sierra Leone is best suited to be one."

A Land of Natural and Cultural Abundance

Sierra Leone's tourism potential rests on the country's extraordinary blend of natural beauty and history. From the famed white sands of Tokeh to the black sands of York, the coastline offers unmatched diversity. "From Lumley Beach down to Mama Beach, you'll find each beach has its own unique characteristic. They are beautiful, pristine, and very diverse, with different shades of sand and distinct atmospheres that appeal to every kind of tourist," the minister said.

She points to No. 2 Beach and Bureh Beach as examples. While Bureh has built a reputation as a surfing hub supported by new World Bank-backed infrastructure, No. 2 Beach provides a more tranquil escape. "We have beaches that are not just stunning but also therapeutic. People seeking wellness and relaxation often find it in Sierra Leone's coastline," Tunis added.

Yet Sierra Leone's appeal goes beyond its shores. The country's deep cultural roots and historical landmarks remain a draw

for heritage travellers. Bunce Island, once a central point in the transatlantic slave trade, stands as a solemn reminder of history. "Sierra Leone was one of the most authentic countries involved in the transatlantic slave trade. Sites like Bunce Island and Rotumba Village tell those stories, and Freetown itself is like a historical centre," Tunis noted.

For wildlife enthusiasts, the Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary provides an opportunity to connect with endangered species, while new ecotourism projects



“We want the world to know that Sierra Leone is open, authentic, and waiting to be discovered. The story of our beaches, culture, and people is one of Africa's best-kept secrets. But not for long.”

at Leicester Peak promise elevated experiences overlooking the capital.

Building Infrastructure and Partnerships

Tunis acknowledges that Sierra Leone's tourism industry is still in recovery and development mode. Many of the country's flagship projects are nearing completion, including new facilities at Bureh Beach and Tacugama. "Bureh is almost completed, except for the jetty, which required redesigning for safety reasons. We expect it, along with other projects, to be ready by October. We've launched expressions of interest for private partners to manage these facilities," she said.

Her ministry is committed to making tourism a private sector-driven industry, with communities playing a central role. "In areas like Bureh, we've introduced a partnership between the private sector and the community. In five years, we plan to hand over management entirely to the community. For us, sustainability is critical, and that's the model we're embedding," she stressed.

Elevating Standards: Training and Professionalism

Despite Sierra Leone's natural beauty and hospitable citizens, Tunis concedes that service standards must improve if the country is to compete globally. "Yes, we're warm and accommodating people, but professionalism needs to be added. We're playing catch-up with the rest of the world," she admitted.

To bridge this gap, the ministry has launched training programmes, from

on-the-spot coaching for hospitality workers to digital initiatives. "We're launching a WhatsApp training programme for 2,500 people and rolling out tailored curriculums where ministry staff go directly into hotels and bars to train staff, from bartenders to waiters," Tunis explained.

In a bold move, the ministry now ties annual licensing of tourism establishments to proof of staff training. "You'll only be eligible to be licensed if you show that your staff have been trained. Professionalism is key," she said firmly.

Tackling Encroachment and Environmental Challenges

Tourism thrives only when ecosystems remain intact. Sierra Leone, however, faces challenges from sand mining and encroachment on protected areas. The government, working with multiple ministries, has stepped up enforcement. "We've had to demolish structures along Lumley Beach that blocked access and facilitated sand mining. We're also promoting the use of river sand in construction to ease pressure on the beaches," Tunis explained.

Encroachment around protected areas like Tacugama has also been a concern. Tunis revealed that President Julius Maada Bio has appointed a special task force to address the issue with a humane yet firm approach. "The President doesn't want to appear heavy-handed,

so he's engaging encroachers while ensuring that the law is respected. Our aim is to preserve ecosystems because Sierra Leone's future as an ecotourism destination depends on it," she stressed.

The Year of Ecotourism

This year, Sierra Leone declared 2025 the Year of Ecotourism, anchoring its strategy around culture, conservation, and community. "We're embedding community at the centre of all our actions. It's less costly to conserve than to deplete, and we're actively engaging local communities to understand this," Tunis explained.

Through awareness campaigns, roadshows, and partnerships with local organisations, the ministry has been spreading the message across the provinces. "We've had people sign up to the Eco-Conscious Trail, where they pledge to live eco-friendly lives. Our tagline is simple: Are You Eco-Conscious? And the response has been encouraging," she said.

Building a Tourism-Centric Future

Tourism only gained strong government backing in Sierra Leone in 2018, but the minister is convinced of its transformative power. "When I authored the first national development plan, we placed tourism as a key sector for economic diversification. It has the potential to transform this country, and that's why we are investing in it so strongly," Tunis recalled.

The vision is clear: Sierra Leone as a leading West African ecotourism hub, powered by its pristine beaches, rich heritage, warm people, and a sustainable community-driven model.

"We want the world to know that Sierra Leone is open, authentic, and waiting to be discovered. The story of our beaches, culture, and people is one of Africa's best-kept secrets. But not for long," Tunis emphasised.



Sierra Leone's Tourism Minister engages Coastal Communities to Strengthen beach conservation

Sierra Leone's Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Nabeela Tunis, led a high-level delegation on a field visit to Lakka and Number 2 Beach as part of efforts to foster partnerships with coastal communities. The visit, which included senior management from the Ministry, the Tourist Board of Sierra Leone, and the Monuments and Relics Commission, underscored the government's commitment to sustainable environmental practices and the protection of the country's prime touristic beaches.

During the engagement, discussions with community stakeholders focused on key environmental challenges, including the detrimental effects of sand mining, waste management concerns, and the need for enhanced safety and security at these popular tourist sites. At Lakka Beach, Minister Tunis and her team witnessed firsthand the severe degradation caused by unchecked sand mining, a problem also evident at Number 2 Beach.

Addressing community members, Minister Tunis emphasized the urgent need for eco-conscious practices to mitigate environmental damage and preserve these natural assets for tourism development. She called on local leaders to collaborate in implementing sustainable measures that align with the government's broader vision for ecotourism.

This initiative is part of the Ministry's 2025 Year of Ecotourism agenda, which seeks to promote responsible tourism while safeguarding Sierra Leone's coastal and natural heritage. By engaging directly with stakeholders, the Ministry aims to reinforce conservation efforts and establish long-term solutions for environmental sustainability.



UN Tourism Names Sierra Leone as 2026 Host for Gastronomy Forum in Africa

Sierra Leone has been officially unveiled as the host of the 3rd UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa, scheduled to take place in 2026 – a major milestone in the country's growing ambition to position itself as a leading player in Africa's gastronomy tourism landscape.

The announcement was made by Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of UN Tourism, during the final cocktail event at the 2nd Regional Forum held in Arusha, Tanzania.

"Thank you to everyone. Tonight, our dear sister Nabila Tunis, the Minister of Tourism for Sierra Leone – she is on a special mission in Washington – I was speaking to her, and I am pleased to announce that she is ready to host the next forum in Sierra Leone," Pololikashvili declared to applause.

Following the successful inaugural edition in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe in 2024, and this year's gathering in Arusha, Tanzania, the 2026 forum in Sierra Leone is expected to build even greater momentum around harnessing Africa's rich culinary traditions as a driver for tourism development, cultural preservation, and inclusive economic growth.

The Forum will once again convene



polymakers, renowned chefs, tourism leaders, entrepreneurs, academics, and influencers from across Africa and beyond. Over three days, participants will take part in vibrant panel discussions, live culinary showcases, immersive knowledge-sharing sessions, and practical workshops – all designed to spotlight Africa's unique gastronomic identity and strengthen its role in sustainable tourism.

Reacting to the announcement, Sierra Leone's Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Hon. Nabila Farida Tunis, expressed her excitement and commitment to making the event a resounding success.

"We are truly honoured to host the

Third UN Tourism Regional Forum on Gastronomy Tourism for Africa in 2026," she said. "This is a fantastic opportunity for Sierra Leone to showcase our diverse culinary heritage, celebrate the talent of our chefs, and play our part in advancing the African agenda to position the continent as a premier global gastronomy destination. We look forward to welcoming the world to experience the authentic flavours and warm hospitality of Sierra Leone."

The 2026 forum will focus on key themes including sustainable food systems, empowering local producers and entrepreneurs, promoting African cuisines on the global stage through branding and storytelling, and fostering stronger linkages between agriculture and tourism. It will also highlight how innovation, education, and entrepreneurship can fuel the next wave of growth in gastronomy tourism across the continent.

As preparations get underway, stakeholders across Sierra Leone are gearing up to deliver a memorable and impactful event. Expectations are high that the forum will serve not only as a celebration of African cuisine, but also as a catalyst for innovation, investment, and collaboration, using food as a powerful bridge between cultures, communities, and economies.



ITB Berlin: Sierra Leone is the New Kid on the Block-Nabeela Tunis

Sierra Leone's Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Mrs Nabeela Farida Tunis, has positioned the country as an emerging and compelling tourism destination on the global stage. Speaking at the ITB High Level Ministerial Global Roundtable: "Next Chances, Next Challenges"—chaired by CNN's Richard Quest—Mrs Tunis described Sierra Leone as "the new kid on the block" in tourism and a model destination worth visiting.

The high-profile panel included Albania's Minister of Tourism and Environment, Mirela Kumbaro; Croatia's Minister of Tourism and Sports, Tonci Glavina; and Eduardo Santander, CEO of the European Travel Commission.

Minister Tunis emphasized that hospitality comes naturally to Sierra Leoneans, making the country a warm and welcoming place for visitors. She highlighted that in 2024, the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs through the Tourism for All Campaign invested heavily in training citizens to preserve their natural resources while ensuring that tourism remains sustainable.

"Every country has its own unique product, and we must focus on our strengths rather than the challenges," she said. "We are aware of connectivity

issues, but each destination offers something special. That's why Sierra Leone is prioritizing ecotourism in 2025—bringing together nature, culture, arts, conservation and people."

On the focus for the next 24 months, Minister Tunis elaborated on the country's aim to attract additional investments in infrastructure as well as rolling out the Public Private Community Partnership model to guarantee sustainability.

Other panelists shared their insights on tourism development:

- Hon. Mirela Kumbaro (Albania) emphasized that her country does not measure success purely by tourist arrivals. "Tourism is policy-making for the government, pleasure for visitors, and profit-making for operators," she noted.
- Hon. Tonci Glavina (Croatia) highlighted Croatia's 110 diverse destinations, stating that the government has implemented a Green Satellite Tourism Account to track tourism expenditures and arrivals.
- Eduardo Santander (European Travel Commission) pointed out that multi-



generational travel is booming across Europe. He cautioned destinations against being overly selective about visitors, stating "Tourism is driven by two factors—time and money to spend. Every destination is obsessed with being the best, but the real key is ensuring a fulfilling experience for all travelers."

Minister Tunis shared that Sierra Leone's key source markets include Canada, the USA, and Europe. She emphasized that visitors are consistently captivated by the authenticity the country offers and often return with more travelers.

The session ended on an exciting note, as Richard Quest and other panelists expressed keen interest in visiting Sierra Leone to witness firsthand the country's untapped tourism potential.

With Sierra Leone actively embracing ecotourism and sustainable development, its emergence on the global tourism map is a journey worth tracking.

Sierra Leone Flights Schedule

Day	SEA COACH	SEA BIRD	FLIGHT	FROM	ARR.	FLIGHT TO	DEP.	FLIGHT NUMBER
SUNDAY	05:00	05:00	ASKY AIRLINES	BANJUL	08:05	FREETOWN-ACCRA- MONROVIA	08:45	KP023
SUNDAY	13:00	13:30	ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA	16:05	FREETOWN-BANJUL	16:45	KP022
SUNDAY	13:30	13:30	BRUSSELS AIRLINES	BRUSSELS- FREETOWN	17:00	FREETOWN- MONROVIA- BRUSSELS	18:15	SN243
SUNDAY	14:30	14:30	KENYA AIRWAYS	ACCRA	17:30	FREETOWN-ACCRA- NAIROBI	18:30	KQ510/11
SUNDAY	20:00		AIR PEACE	LAGOS	23:00	FREETOWN-LAGOS	23:40	P47760/1
SUNDAY	21:00	21:30	TURKISH AIRLINES	INSTANBUL- OUAGAGOUGOU	00:25	FREETOWN- OUAGAGOUGOU- INSTANBUL	01:25	TK533/4
MONDAY	05:00	05:00	ASKY AIRLINES	BANJUL	08:05	FREETOWN-ACCRA- LOME	08:45	KP023
MONDAY	13:00		ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA	15:55	FREETOWN-BANJUL	16:35	KP042
MONDAY		13:30	ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA	15:55	FREETOWN-BANJUL	16:35	KP022
MONDAY			ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA	16:05	FREETOWN		KP040
MONDAY	16:00	16:30	AIR SENEGAL	DAKAR	18:55	FREETOWN-BANJUL	19:50	HC213/4
TUESDAY	05:00		ASKY AIRLINES	FREETOWN	08:05	FREETOWN-ACCRA- LOME	08:45	KP041
TUESDAY		05:00	ASKY AIRLINES	BANJUL		FREETOWN-ACCRA- LOME	08:45	KP023
TUESDAY			ASKY AIRLINES	BANJUL	08:30	FREETOWN-ACCRA- LOME	09:10	KP043
TUESDAY	13:00	13:30	ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA- FREETOWN	16:05	FREETOWN-BANJUL	16:45	KP022
WEDNESDAY	05:00	05:00	ASKY AIRLINES	BANJUL	08:45	FREETOWN-LOME	08:45	KP023
WEDNESDAY			ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA- FREETOWN	16:05	FREETOWN		KP040
WEDNESDAY	13:00		ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA- FREETOWN	15:55	FREETOWN-BANJUL		KP042
WEDNESDAY		13:30	ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA	15:55	FREETOWN	16:35	KP022
WEDNESDAY	14:30	14:30	KENYA AIRWAYS	NAIROBI-ACCRA	17:30	FREETOWN-ACCRA- NAIROBI	18:30	KQ510/11
WEDNESDAY	16:00	16:30	AIR SENEGAL	DAKAR	18:55	BANJUL-FREETOWN	19:50	HC213/4
THURSDAY	05:00	05:00	ASKY AIRLINES	BANJUL	08:10	FREETOWN-LOME	08:45	KP023
THURSDAY			ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA- FREETOWN	08:30	FREETOWN-BANJUL	09:10	KP043
THURSDAY	13:00	13:30	ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA- FREETOWN	16:05	FREETOWN-ACCRA- LOME	16:45	KP022
THURSDAY-FRI	21:00	21:30	TURKISH AIRLINES	ISTANBUL- OUAGADOUGU	00:25	FREETOWN- OUAGADOUGOU- ISTANBUL	01:25	TK533/4
FRIDAY	05:00	05:00	ASKY AIRLINES	BANJUL	08:10	FREETOWN-ACCRA- LOME	08:45	KP023

Day	SEA COACH	SEA BIRD	FLIGHT	FROM	ARR.	FLIGHT TO	DEP.	FLIGHT NUMBER
FRIDAY		13:30	ASKY AIRLINES	BANJUL	15:55	FREETOWN-ACCRA- LOME	16:35	KP022
FRIDAY	13:00		ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA- FREETOWN	15:55	FREETOWN-BANJUL	16:35	KP042
FRIDAY			ASKY AIRLINES	ACCRA	16:05	FREETOWN-ACCRA- LOME		KP040
FRIDAY	13:30	13:30	BRUSSELS AIRLINES	BRUSSELS- FREETOWN	18:55	FREETOWN-ROBERT- BRUSSELS	18:15	SN243
FRIDAY	14:30	14:30	KENYA AIRWAYS	ACCRA	17:30	FREETOWN-ACCRA- NAIROBI	18:30	KQ510/11
FRIDAY	16:00	16:30	AIR SENEGAL	DAKAR	18:55	FREETOWN-BANJUL	19:50	HC 213/4
FRIDAY	20:00		AIR PEACE	LAGOS	23:00	FREETOWN-LAGOS	23:30	P47760/1
SATURDAY	05:00	05:00	ASKY AIRLINES	BANJUL	08:05	FREETOWN-ACCRA- LOME	08:45	KP023
SATURDAY			ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA- FREETOWN	08:30	FREETOWN	09:10	KP043
SATURDAY	13:00	13:30	ASKY AIRLINES	LOME-ACCRA- FREETOWN	16:05	FREETOWN	16:45	KP022
SATURDAY	16:00	16:30	AIR SENEGAL	DAKAR	18:55	BANJUL-FREETOWN	19:50	HC213/4
SATURDAY-SUN	21:00	21:30	TURKISH AIRLINES	ISTANBUL- OUAGADOUGU	00:25	FREETOWN- OUAGADOUGOU- ISTANBUL	01:25	TK533/4
TUESDAY	13:30	13:30	BRUSSELS AIRLINES	BRUSSELS- FREETOWN	17:00	FREETOWN-ROBERT- BRUSSELS	18:15	SN243
TUESDAY	14:30	14:30	KENYA AIRWAYS	NAIROBI-ACCRA	17:30	FREETOWN-ACCRA	18:30	KQ510/11
TUESDAY	21:00	21:30	TURKISH AIRLINE	OUAGADOUGOU	00:25	FREETOWN- OUAGADOUGOU	01:25	THY533/4
TUESDAY	23:00	23:00	ROYAL AIR MAROC	CASABLANCA	02:05	FREETOWN- CASABLANCA	03:05	AT565/4
TUESDAY-WED	23:00		ROYAL AIR MAROC	CASABLANCA	02:05	CASSABLANCA	03:05	AT563/4
WEDNESDAY	20:00		AIR PEACE	LAGOS	23:00	FREETOWN-LAGOS	23:40	P47760/1
THURSDAY-FRI	23:00	23:00	ROYAL AIR MAROC	CASABLANCA	02:05	FREETOWN- CASSABLANCA	03:05	AT565/4
SATURDAY-SUN	23:00	23:00	ROYAL AIR MAROC	CASABLANCA	02:05	FREETOWN- CASABLACA	03:05	AT563/4

Source: <https://www.visitsierraleone.org/sierra-leone-flights-schedule/>

Air Sierra Leone reopens Freetown-Gatwick route

Air Sierra Leone has successfully operated the inaugural flight from London Gatwick to Freetown, Sierra Leone. This marks a re-establishment of direct air connectivity between the two countries after a 12-year hiatus. The historic flight took place on April 26, with the return journey from Freetown on April 27, coinciding with the country's Independence Day.

The inaugural flight carrying members of the United Kingdom's Sierra Leonean diaspora, along with other international guests, restored a vital air link. The last time the two destinations were connected with direct flights was in 2012.

Air Sierra Leone charters Ascend Airways to operate its flights. Ascend Airways is itself a subsidiary airline of Avia Solutions Group – the world's largest ACMI (Aircraft, Crew, Maintenance, and Insurance) operator. It is a UK-registered airline, which has an Air Operator Certificate (AOC) and Type B Operating License from the UK CAA. In 2023, it was acquired by Ireland-headquartered Avia Solutions Group, which operates a fleet of 221 aircraft on six continents.

"It is a true honour to have operated the historic London Gatwick to Freetown flight on behalf of Air Sierra Leone. It took months of hard work to set this



connection up, and we are looking forward to operating this much-needed route during the summer and winter season," said Alastair Willson, CEO of Ascend Airways.

Ascend Airways will operate three weekly services for Air Sierra Leone commencing on June 16. All flights on this route will be operated utilising Ascend Airways-trained cockpit and cabin crew. Ascend Airways is also responsible for all maintenance procedures of the aircraft operating the Gatwick-Freetown flights.

The airline intends to operate a year-round service on the route, with up to three weekly rotations between

Freetown and London Gatwick in the peak season. There is a significant number of Sierra Leone nationals residing in the United Kingdom.

Sierra Leone's newly formed flag carrier operated its maiden flight in January between Freetown and Lagos, Nigeria. The route is operated with an Embraer E145 aircraft.

The inaugural flight was operated by the company's newest Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft, G-CRUX, which was added to the airline's fleet in 2025. It has been freshly painted with the Air Sierra Leone livery.

Source: Aviation Business News



Idris Elba's Sherbro Island City and Sierra Leone's Strategic Investment Push

The Government of Sierra Leone and Sherbro Alliance Partners have formalised a partnership to develop Sherbro Island City, a master-planned "charter city" on the country's southern coast. Signed at a ceremony witnessed by President Julius Maada Bio, the Memorandum of Understanding sets out an ambitious public-private framework for an investable, phased development that officials and project backers say will diversify the national economy, create jobs, and attract long-term capital.

Sherbro Island City is described by its private proponents as an "Afro-dynamic eco-city" that will combine tourism, services and light manufacturing with supporting infrastructure for health, education, energy and logistics. Under the MOU, the project is to operate within an investment and legal regime intended to give investors clarity and protection, while promoting transparent governance and the use of smart technologies to manage services and utilities.

The partnership vehicle, Sherbro Alliance Partners (SAP), was formed by Idris Elba and Siaka Stevens and is supported by an international team. Mr Elba, who holds Sierra Leonean citizenship, has framed his involvement as driven by a desire to generate sustained benefits in his father's homeland. "My commitment to Sherbro Island City is driven by a desire to make a difference, but to do so in a fashion which produces tangible benefits for West Africans that may be sustained over the long-term," he said at the signing. President Bio said the project "will be an economic engine for our country and neighbours" and will demonstrate Sierra Leone's capacity to manage large-scale partnerships with transparency and integrity.

Sherbro Island sits off Sierra Leone's southern shore within Bonthe District. The island spans roughly 600 km² (about 230 square miles), extending some 32 miles in length and up to 15 miles across. It includes extensive coastal areas and mangrove systems, and local livelihoods are anchored in fishing, swamp-rice cultivation and small-scale tourism. Reported population figures vary in public accounts; official and media sources have cited figures in the range of some tens of thousands of residents, underscoring the need for careful demographic and social assessment as the project advances.

Project documents and public statements identify tourism as an initial economic driver, with commitments to develop visitor-facing projects that respect local biodiversity. Early pilot initiatives under consideration include agricultural value-chain projects and aquaculture farms. Energy is a central pillar: media coverage has reported an agreement with Octopus Energy to develop wind power on Sherbro, a move that would introduce large-scale renewable generation to an area that historically lacks mains electricity. The use of clean energy, smart utilities and conservation-minded planning are repeatedly emphasised in project messaging.

Governance, incentives and the "charter city" model

The Sherbro proposal envisages a tailored regulatory and investment regime to accelerate development and attract long-term investors. Such special-status arrangements aim to reduce administrative friction and clarify the terms under which investors may operate; however, they also raise important questions about oversight, accountability and the distribution of economic benefits. For investors and host communities alike, the legal architecture, clarifying land rights, environmental obligations, procurement rules and dispute resolution mechanisms will be decisive in determining feasibility and public acceptance.

Sherbro's mangroves, coastal wetlands and marine habitats host sensitive species; past reporting has highlighted sea turtles and West African manatees among species of conservation concern. The MOU and project literature stress sustainability and compensatory measures, tree-planting campaigns are cited among early mitigation commitments but the scale of the proposal means robust, independent environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs) and public consultation will be essential. Community engagement, local employment guarantees and transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms will be central to any durable social license.

High-profile, celebrity-led development initiatives in West Africa have attracted both enthusiasm and scrutiny. Commentators have drawn comparisons with other "dream city" proposals that faced delays or limited delivery, noting that ambition alone does not ensure execution. Voices in the region have urged clarity on



Idris Elba Source: Wikipedia

timelines, governance arrangements and verifiable milestones. For Sierra Leone, the political and reputational stakes are significant: success could accelerate investment and rebrand the country's economic story; missteps could deepen scepticism and squander public goodwill.

The MOU is a first step. For investors, policymakers and civil society the following will be the immediate indicators of seriousness and viability: publication of detailed master plans and phasing schedules; legally binding agreements that spell out roles, rights and obligations; independent ESAs and community consultation outcomes; clear commitments on job creation and local procurement; and binding arrangements for financing, energy supply and infrastructure delivery. The ratification of enabling legislation or parliamentary oversight mechanisms where applicable, will also signal the government's intent to embed transparency and accountability in the project's governance.

Sherbro Island City represents a high-visibility effort to leverage diaspora engagement and private capital for national development. Its potential to catalyse tourism, renewables and coastal development is real, but realisation will depend on careful sequencing, rigorous environmental safeguards, inclusive stakeholder engagement and credible, enforceable commercial frameworks. For Sierra Leone, the challenge is to convert promise into durable outcomes: to ensure that the island's transformation delivers measurable, locally anchored benefits rather than headline-led expectations alone.

The Sherbro project will be closely watched across the region not only as a test of a new development model in West Africa but as a barometer of how celebrity-led investment, state partnership and community interests can be aligned in practice.

Minister of Tourism Launches Sierra Leone Creative Economy Diagnostic Report

In complementing the Ministry of Tourism's ongoing efforts to rebrand the creative sector and nurture talents to become job creators, innovators, and cultural ambassadors of Sierra Leone, Creative Hub Africa, with support from the World Bank, European Union, C-Jet, and Finance for Development, has officially launched the Sierra Leone Creative Economy Diagnostic Report at Creative Hub Africa in Freetown.

The creative economy in Sierra Leone holds immense potential, already contributing approximately 4.5% to the national GDP and accounting for over 10% of all jobs. The newly launched report offers a comprehensive analysis of the structure, performance, and future opportunities within the sector. It serves as a strategic roadmap for growth, innovation, and investment.

Hon. Nabeela Farida Tunis, Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, who served as both the launcher and keynote speaker, expressed her excitement not only for the launch of the report but also for the 24 young creatives who graduated from the Creatifi Pilot Program—an initiative offering training and mentorship to emerging talents.

In her address, Minister Tunis highlighted the high value placed by the Bio-led government on the creative and tourism sectors. She noted that the 2019–2023 National Development Plan identified tourism as a key pillar for economic diversification and growth. This commitment has been reaffirmed in the 2024–2030 National Development Plan, where the sector is recognized as a critical enabler in achieving the government's five key game changers.

Despite often being overlooked, the Minister reiterated that the creative sector contributes significantly to national development. "The report clearly states that the sector contributes 4.5% to GDP and accounts for over 10% of jobs—this is extraordinary," she noted, emphasizing the untapped potential of the sector.



Minister Tunis also outlined the government's extensive efforts to revitalize the creative industry through policy development, rebranding initiatives, investment in physical infrastructure, capacity building, and community engagement. She underscored the importance of strategic partnerships to drive sustainable tourism and sector-wide growth.

Deputy Minister of Tourism, Khadijatu Grace Kamara, participating in a panel discussion, spoke on the Ministry's continued support for young talents, especially in branding and showcasing



their unique products to broader markets.

Other speakers, including the Creative Director of Creative Hub Africa Isatu Harrison stressed the economic impact of the creative sector and the importance of the diagnostic report in helping creatives reach their full potential.

The launch marks a significant milestone in Sierra Leone's journey towards building a robust, inclusive, and economically vibrant creative industry.



Mamona Jane runs the Cassava Music Café, where guests imbibe the spirit of Freetown's grooves and gastronomic delights

Cassava Music Café: Redefining Sierra Leone's Culinary Story Through Food and Social Impact

In the bustling heart of Freetown, Cassava Music Café is doing more than serving delicious plates of Sierra Leonean food - it is redefining how the country's culinary heritage is experienced, celebrated, and shared with the world. At the helm of this inspiring venture is Mamona Jane, a Sierra Leonean accountant and business intelligence expert turned social entrepreneur, who has woven together food, culture, and philanthropy into one powerful brand.

"My name is Mamona Jane. I am a Sierra Leonean, and I run a dining company here. We've got an outlet at the international airport, and of course, we have Cassava Music Café here in Freetown," she explains with pride.

But beyond being just another restaurant, Cassava is built on a unique purpose: using food as a vehicle for community transformation.



From Crisis to Culinary Enterprise

Cassava was born from tragedy. During the Ebola crisis of 2014, Jane and her family - then living in the UK - felt helpless as the epidemic tore through

Sierra Leone. "We just got frustrated because we didn't know what to do," she recalls. "And yet we could see the impact it was having on our community. One Sunday afternoon we were having lunch,



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the best local cuisine. We provide a street food experience in a safe and presentable way. And it's important for our cuisine to sit right next to world cuisine, not as something othered, but as something equal."

This philosophy is why Cassava's airport outlet is such a powerful statement. "It's a strategic thing for us as a company, as a family, to be at the airport. We are juxtaposed with international brands, and we are claiming our place. We want Sierra Leonean cuisine to be part of the global conversation."

Looking Ahead: Food as Creative Industry

For Jane, the vision goes beyond food. She sees gastronomy as part of Sierra Leone's broader creative economy - intertwined with music, fashion, crafts, and design. "We need to start seeing food as a creative industry. How we use our textiles, our pottery, and our crafts to present food is part of the story. It's about showcasing not just the food, but the whole Sierra Leonean experience."

With Sierra Leone set to host major global gatherings in the coming years, Jane is optimistic: "This is an opportunity for us to tell the world that we're moving forward. We've had a turbulent past, but now we want people to come in and join in the fun. There are so many flavours, so many umamis across Sierra Leone that the world doesn't know about yet. And we want to showcase them all."

The Next Ten Years

Cassava's ambition is bold but deeply

and it struck us - people must need food. Maybe we can serve food."

From that spark came Lunchbox Gift, a grassroots feeding initiative that served 2,600 people across seven communities during the first lockdown. The story caught international attention, and what began as an emergency response grew into a trusted charity.

When donations eventually dwindled, Jane pivoted: "We had created this whole infrastructure to give away food. How about we utilize the same infrastructure to sell food and then use those profits to do work in the community? And that's how Cassava started. Cassava is, if you like, the trading arm of Lunchbox. All the profits we generate go to feeding underprivileged children at school."

A Taste of Sierra Leone on the World Stage

At Cassava Music Café, food is more than sustenance - it is cultural storytelling. The menu celebrates Sierra Leonean and West African classics without diluting their authenticity. "We focus mainly on Sierra Leone and West African cuisine. We don't deconstruct or try to create anything different. What we're trying to showcase is our food - our authentic self," Jane says.

And the world is watching. From hosting events in London to serving international travellers at the airport, Cassava has become an ambassador for Sierra Leone's flavours. "Cassava leaves is top on the menu," Jane reveals. "Whether you're a local or an international traveller, everybody wants to try cassava leaves before they leave or they've heard about it and want it when they arrive. We're right there at the airport

screaming Sierra Leonean cuisine."

Jane is also passionate about giving cassava - the root crop after which her business is named - its rightful spotlight in a rice-dominated food culture. "Here in Sierra Leone, rice is our staple. You can have rice three times a day. But we wanted to showcase another starch. There are so many things we do with cassava - gari, fufu, flour for baking. My family bakery, which is four generations old, now produces bread and pastries using cassava flour and sweet potato flour. It's about celebrating what we have."

Gastronomy as Tourism

Globally, food is becoming a major draw for travellers, and Jane sees Cassava Music Café as part of Sierra Leone's positioning in that space. "Every country sells itself through its food. What we need here is signposting and rating - visitors must know where to go for



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"We believe in Sierra Leone. And we believe we can do this by ourselves."

grounded in purpose. "We started with a 10-year plan. Our ultimate customers are not just the people who come to the restaurant, but the children we feed at school. When you take a hot meal to a child who might not get that at home and see the immediate effect - it's extremely gratifying."

Unlike many NGOs, Cassava prides itself on being donor-free. "Our DNA is donor-free. We don't want grants or aid. We tell people: trade with us. That's the most sustainable way. It was daunting



at the start and unpopular, but we want to prove that Sierra Leone can build something authentic, sustainable, and impactful without aid dependency."

With resilience forged in crisis and vision rooted in community, Cassava Music Café is more than a restaurant. It is a movement - a celebration of Sierra Leone's culinary identity and proof that food, when done with heart, can change lives.

Or as Jane herself puts it:

"We believe in Sierra Leone. And we believe we can do this by ourselves."



Cribs International and the Reawakening of Sierra Leone's Entertainment Scene

Sierra Leone's music, arts and entertainment industry is stirring back to life after years of dormancy, and one company is at the heart of its revival. Cribs International, led by visionary CEO Sho Cole, is fast becoming a powerhouse not just within Sierra Leone but across West Africa.

From the pulsating beats of Bubu music to the modern flair of Afrobeats-inspired sounds, Sierra Leone has long had the raw talent, creativity and cultural vibrancy to rival its neighbours. What it lacked, however, was the infrastructure, business acumen and international reach to transform artistry into a sustainable industry. That is the gap Cole and his company are determined to fill.

"Our vision at Cribs International is to open doors of opportunity for Sierra Leonean artists and put the industry on the international level where it should

be," Cole explains. "At the moment, very few Sierra Leonean artists have crossed over, so we see ourselves as pioneers, acting as catalysts to push young people into the industry and help them see it as a business."

Sierra Leone: Where the Night Comes Alive

Entertainment is not new to Sierra Leone. The country has always been known for its vibrant nightlife and love of celebration. "We are a bubbling set of people who love to go out and stay late," Cole says with a smile. From the bustling Aberdeen area of Freetown to the beaches that come alive at dusk, Sierra Leoneans embrace leisure differently. "Elsewhere, people are leaving the beach at 7 or 8pm. In Sierra Leone, that's the time we're just arriving!" Cole jokes.

It's this carnival-like spirit that makes the

nation's cultural offerings so unique – and so marketable to international visitors. Music and nightlife are already deeply woven into the Sierra Leonean identity. What has been missing, Cole stresses, is a system that rewards creativity and attracts serious investment.

Breaking Barriers: The Business of Music

Despite the abundance of talent, artists face structural challenges. The absence of a royalty collection system in Sierra Leone remains a major obstacle. "We don't have a property rights organisation here," Cole laments. "For me, all my copyright issues are handled in Nigeria. It means money that should support Sierra Leonean artists isn't coming into the country."

Without financial incentives, artists struggle to sustain their careers, and



At the heart of Sierra Leone's burgeoning entertainment industry is Sho Cole, CEO of Cribs International which is helping artistes cross borders with their sound

“*People love our music. We just need to present it properly, invest in it, and allow artists to see it as a career, not just a passion.*”

investors shy away. This, Cole argues, is what led to the stagnation of the industry in years past. "Sierra Leone once had a booming entertainment scene. But when artists and investors saw no returns, it became like a dead end."

The Sound of Sierra Leone

Yet the country has no shortage of distinctive sounds to share with the world. Bubu music, played with bamboo instruments and drums, is infectious and celebratory. "There's a saying that if you don't shake your head when Bubu is played, something must be wrong with you," Cole laughs. Then there's Milo jazz, another Sierra Leonean creation that many insiders consider a precursor to Afrobeats.

Cole believes strongly that packaging these homegrown genres alongside contemporary fusions will give Sierra

Leone a competitive edge. "People love our music," he insists. "We just need to present it properly, invest in it, and allow artists to see it as a career, not just a passion."

Cribs International: A Pillar of Change

Cribs International has quickly become the nucleus of Sierra Leone's entertainment renaissance. Its artists, such as The Therapist - whose hit *Nack* went viral with millions of streams - and actor Peter Komba, now making waves in Nollywood, are proof of the company's impact.

But Cole isn't stopping there. The company is running a nationwide talent search, which drew over 240 hopefuls. After rigorous auditions, 10 semi-finalists remain, now being nurtured with the help of heavyweight producers like Masterkraft from Nigeria and Sierra Leone's own Nashito. The plan is to record, produce and distribute tracks that can compete globally.

"We are passionate about bringing young people up, introducing them to a proper music scene, and helping them develop," Cole says. "This is not just about Sierra

Leone; it's about positioning our artists to stand alongside the best in Africa and the world."

A Call for Partnerships

As Sierra Leone's entertainment scene finds its footing, Cole sees collaborations as essential. Nigerian labels like Emperor Records and international brands have already expressed interest in working with Cribs International. For Cole, such partnerships are the gateway to international recognition.

"We are ready to twin with international brands," he notes. "That's how we will ensure our music is heard globally."

Sierra Leone is at a turning point. With its nightlife buzzing, beaches alive with music, and young talents emerging, the country is poised to re-enter Africa's entertainment map in a big way. But success depends on more than passion; it will take structure, government support, and investment.

Sho Cole remains optimistic. "We have the talent, the culture, and the energy," he says. "Now, with the right systems and partnerships, Sierra Leone's music and entertainment will shine across the globe."



CREATIVE HUB AFRICA:

Powering Sierra Leone's Creative Renaissance

In the heart of Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, a quiet revolution is unfolding. Young artists, designers, musicians, and storytellers are stepping into the spotlight, shaping a new narrative for the country and redefining how creativity can fuel both identity and economic growth. At the centre of this movement stands Creative Hub Africa (CHA), founded just over two years ago by Isatu Harrison, a visionary determined to give Sierra Leone's youth the platform they deserve.

"Creative Hub Africa started with a very simple idea," Harrison recalls. "We just wanted to create a safe space where creatives could come, meet like-minded people, hang out, and feel valued."

That modest idea has since grown into Sierra Leone's first-ever creative incubation and acceleration space, a dynamic ecosystem where raw ideas are nurtured into thriving businesses.

From Safe Haven to Incubator

Initially conceived as a gathering point for young artists, the hub quickly evolved once Harrison and her team recognised a deeper need. "We realised it was really important for us to start helping them develop their creativity, adding value to what they know," she explains.

Today, Creative Hub Africa functions as both an incubator and accelerator for creative enterprises. A young designer might enter with nothing more than sketches in a notebook, but within six months, leave with a registered business employing others. From side hustles to scalable brands, the hub is systematically building a new creative economy in Freetown.

The Hub now supports disciplines ranging from fashion, visual arts, and digital design to music, photography, and filmmaking.



Isatu Harrison is the visionary founder behind Creative Hub Africa

Tapping Into Global Creative Potential

Globally, the creative economy is recognised as one of the fastest-growing



sectors, and Harrison believes Sierra Leone must seize this momentum. "We know what the creative economy is doing elsewhere. In Nigeria, Nollywood alone contributes massively to GDP. We can do the same here by telling our stories through fashion, film, and music," she says.

Tourism, too, stands to benefit. "Tourism and creativity go hand in hand. You cannot develop one without the other. Through cultural expression - our textiles, designs, music, and stories - we can position Sierra Leone as a creative destination," Harrison notes.

Particularly close to her heart is fashion and textiles. With Sierra Leone still cultivating cotton through cottage industries, she sees enormous potential in building a textile value chain that employs thousands while projecting Sierra Leonean culture onto the global stage.

CreatiFi: A Trailblazing Initiative

Among the hub's most groundbreaking projects is CreatiFi, the first structured creative sector programme ever run in Sierra Leone. Funded by the World Bank and the European Union, and piloted through CHA, it supports 20 female-led creative businesses while generating crucial data on how creatives learn, what challenges they face, and which sub-sectors hold the greatest economic promise.

"It's not just about supporting businesses - it's about learning how our creatives think, what methods work best for their



growth and identifying which industries could drive jobs and tax revenue in Sierra Leone," Harrison explains.

Sustaining the Movement

Running such a pioneering initiative comes with its challenges, but CHA has found innovative ways to sustain itself. The hub generates revenue by offering co-working spaces, renting its large 200-capacity venue for corporate and cultural events, and running workshops. Partnerships with international institutions like UNDP, World Bank, and the European Union provide further support for projects that accelerate growth within Sierra Leone's creative sector.

Building a Renaissance

Two years in, the results are evident:

new businesses are being born, young people are earning livelihoods through their art, and a once-overlooked sector is stepping into the national development agenda.

"The time is now," Harrison declares. "The creative sector in Sierra Leone is picking up. We can create jobs, preserve our heritage, and build industries that tell our stories to the world. The possibilities are endless."

As Creative Hub Africa continues to empower young Sierra Leoneans, it stands not only as a co-working space or incubator, but as the beating heart of Sierra Leone's creative renaissance - a place where ideas become industries, and where culture becomes an engine of national pride and economic growth.

Sierra Leone's Tourism Minister Honoured as Africa's Best and Among Top 100 Industry Leaders



Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs Hon. Nabeela Farida Tunis has been awarded two continental honours: Best Minister of Tourism in Africa and inclusion among the Top 100 Travel and Tourism Personalities in Africa. The accolades were presented during the 21st AKWAABA African Travel Market in Nigeria and were formally received by the minister at a press briefing convened at the Ministry's headquarters on King Harman Road in Freetown on 22 September 2025.

The ceremony in Freetown brought together key stakeholders and representatives of the Ministry's agencies to mark the recognition. The awards acknowledge Hon. Tunis's leadership of the sector and the

progress the ministry records under her stewardship, particularly in international profile and visitor growth.

Official ministry figures cited at the briefing indicate a 50 percent increase in visitors from key markets in 2024. The Ministry also highlighted the reach of its 2024 public engagement initiative, the "One Year Tourism for All" campaign, which it reports engaged more than three million people. In addition, Sierra Leone hosted the inaugural Women in Tourism Regional Congress in Freetown during Hon. Tunis's tenure, an event referenced by officials as part of the sector's recent programme of institutional outreach and capacity building.

The ministry has specified ecotourism as the priority for 2025, aligning sector

development with conservation and community-centred growth. The awards presented at AKWAABA cited the minister's contributions toward promoting Sierra Leone as a destination and advancing strategies that aim to balance environmental protection with economic opportunity for local communities.

The AKWAABA African Travel Market, where the honours were first conferred, is a regional industry platform that recognises policy leadership and sector achievement. The ministry's presentation of the awards in Freetown served both as an official acceptance and as an opportunity to brief domestic partners on recent policy outcomes and the ministry's forward agenda.

Bringing Innovation into Sierra Leone's Culinary Tradition – The Treat Food Way

Sierra Leone's food culture is undergoing a quiet revolution, and at the centre of this transformation is Treat Food Sierra Leone – the brainchild of entrepreneur and chef, Susan Senesie. In just two years, Treat Food has become more than a restaurant; it is a movement reshaping how Sierra Leonean cuisine is perceived locally and internationally.

What began as a passion project during her visits home from London has blossomed into one of Freetown's most talked-about culinary destinations. "When I came on holiday, I couldn't find restaurants offering authentic Sierra Leonean cuisine," Suzanne recalls. "That's how Treat Food started. Initially, it was just me on AYV TV promoting our food. But soon, people kept asking, what does Treat Food actually do? So, I brought it to life as a restaurant – turning TRIT (street food) into TREAT, an elevated dining experience."

Elevating Tradition with Style

At the heart of Treat Food is a simple philosophy – celebrate Sierra Leonean ingredients while presenting them with elegance and modern flair. From the much-loved groundnut soup to olele, every dish on the menu is rooted in local tradition but reimagined for a broader audience.

West African food, Suzanne notes, has often been misunderstood as "heavy" or "overwhelming" to outsiders. Her approach has been to refine its presentation without diluting its authenticity. "Imagine groundnut soup, usually piled into a bowl. Now we make it as a canapé – perfect for weddings and receptions. Or take our pink ginger beer – it's Sierra Leonean, but elegant enough to be served at a fine dining event."

The result is a culinary experience

that speaks both to Sierra Leoneans rediscovering their heritage and to international visitors eager for new tastes.

A Culinary Ambassador for Sierra Leone

Food is increasingly recognised as a pillar of cultural tourism, and Treat Food is playing its part in positioning Sierra Leone on the gastronomic map. Suzanne's restaurant has already attracted international guests, including British actor Idris Elba and his wife, who were delighted by the flavours of homegrown dishes like fried plantain and groundnut soup.

"When celebrities come and enjoy our food, it amplifies our story to the world," Suzanne says. "They promote us by sharing their experiences, and that's powerful for Sierra Leone's image."

Her efforts also dovetail with a wider push by Sierra Leone's Ministry of Tourism to showcase the country beyond its history of war and Ebola. With Sierra Leone set to host the UN Tourism Gastronomy Forum in 2026, Suzanne believes the spotlight on food will change perceptions globally. "This is our chance to show that Sierra Leone is not just about its past, but about a vibrant culture where food plays a central role. People will come, taste, and leave satisfied – and that's how tourism grows."

Local Roots, Global Vision

Despite her international ambitions, Suzanne remains deeply committed to local development. She insists on sourcing ingredients from Sierra Leonean farmers and champions farming as the backbone of the gastronomy movement.

"One of the things missing when I came back was farming. But last year, the abundance of fresh vegetables gave me hope. Farming is slowly growing, and with the right push, we can not only supply our restaurants but also start exporting. Imagine Sierra Leone's unique, 100% organic tomatoes on shelves worldwide – that's the future."

Her long-term vision is to expand Treat Food beyond Freetown into other regions such as Kambia, Kenema, Kabala, and Makeni, giving more Sierra Leoneans – and visitors – access to the experience. She also dreams of taking Salon Street Food abroad, from London to Lagos,



Entrepreneur and Chef Susan Senesie is redefining urban culinary experience with Treat Food

making Sierra Leonean flavours part of the global food conversation.

Fine Dining, Medicinal Foods and the Next Chapter

What sets Treat Food apart is its commitment to not just taste but also health. Suzanne has begun exploring the medicinal qualities of Sierra Leone's fruits and vegetables, many of which she believes have untapped potential in addressing conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and even cancer.

"Most of our tropical fruits have healing properties. Our people eat raw carrots and cucumber daily without realising their health benefits. Promoting this side of our food is another way of elevating Sierra Leonean cuisine."

Looking ahead, Suzanne envisions a hospitality landscape where Sierra Leone's food enjoys the same prestige as Italian or Thai cuisine – with fine dining restaurants, export-ready produce, and a culinary identity that boosts tourism.

"I love our plazas of jollof, but in a business meeting, you also want finesse and presentation. That's what Treat Food is about – keeping the soul of Sierra Leonean food intact, but making it elegant, global, and world-class."

A Taste of Sierra Leone's Future

With Treat Food, Suzanne Senesie is proving that Sierra Leone's culinary heritage is not just something to be preserved, but something to be celebrated, refined, and exported. As the world turns its attention to Sierra Leone ahead of the UN Tourism Gastronomy Forum in 2026, restaurants like Treat Food will play a crucial role in telling a new story – one of flavour, innovation, and pride.

For Suzanne, the mission is clear: "We're taking Sierra Leonean food to the next level. Not just for today, but for generations to come. This is our time to shine."



Sierra Leone Unlocks Its Tourism Renaissance:

Minister Nabeela Farida Tunis on Food, Festivals and Future Investments

Sierra Leone's tourism sector is experiencing a renaissance. With its rich cultural heritage, pristine coastline, diverse wildlife and thriving gastronomy scene, the West African nation is repositioning itself as a must-visit destination. At the heart of this transformation is Nabeela Farida Tunis, Sierra Leone's Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, who is determined to place the country firmly on the global tourism map.

In an exclusive conversation, Minister Tunis opened up about the country's strengths, the initiatives underway, and why investors, travellers, and the diaspora should all look to Sierra Leone.

Gastronomy as a Gateway

If there is one element of Sierra Leone's culture currently captivating the world, it is food. From street stalls to fine

dining, Sierra Leonean cuisine is drawing international attention.

"Interestingly, when we did our search engines for last year, we realised that a lot of people were interested in our food and fashion," the Minister explained. "When tour operators from the U.S. and U.K. visited, one thing that intrigued them was the food. They were enthused about groundnut soup and, of course, our jollof rice."

The global popularity of West Africa's most hotly debated dish—jollof—has even sparked conversations about unity. "The Honourable Minister of Arts, Creative Economy and Tourism of Nigeria encouraged us to have a unity jollof rice because there's this fight in the entire region as to who does it best. But the point is, Sierra Leone brings a very unique taste."

From cassava leaves to street delicacies, Sierra Leone's culinary culture is resonating at international tourism fairs. "At ITB in Germany, WTM in London, and the gastronomy forum in Tanzania, people flocked to our stand because of the uniqueness of our cuisine," she added.

The country's rising culinary stars—such as UN Tourism ambassador Chef Fatmata Binta, Chef Maria Bradford in the UK, Chef Niema DeGrazia in the U.S., and local icons like Miata of Cole Street Restaurant—are showcasing Sierra Leonean food to the world. "Cooking used to be a hobby," Tunis noted. "Now young people are taking it to a professional level. We've hosted food festivals and tasting events to



bring our cuisine to life, and we'll be part of the West African Food Festival (WAFFest) in Ghana this September."

MICE Tourism: Building Momentum

Beyond leisure travel, Sierra Leone is positioning itself as a meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) destination.

"MICE tourism started off last year," Tunis said. "We realised it is a driver of what we're looking for as a ministry—to bring the numbers up. With the right facilities, Sierra Leone can be an option for international conferences."

She pointed to the success of recent events: "Starting with the ECOWAS conference, followed by the Tech Summit, Women in Tourism Regional Congress, and the ADPA mining conference, we saw how seamless it can be. We now have partners bringing in domes that can seat 1,000 people. This gives us another product that is in the making."

While infrastructure development remains key, progress is evident. "Last year, we added about 12,000 beds nationwide," she highlighted. "We also handed over the Bintumani Hotel, a 200-bed facility, for refurbishment ahead of our 65th independence anniversary, when we'll host major events like the gastronomy festival and the Budapest Freetown Rally."

Diaspora Connections: Roots and Return

For Sierra Leone, the diaspora is more than a market—it is family.

"We have what we term Roots Tourism," Tunis explained. "Our Find My Roots programme allows people to trace their ancestry. Sierra Leone is part of



that, and we work with the diaspora and embassies to get people actively engaged."

Examples of diaspora investment are already visible. "What you see at Mozza is someone from the diaspora who came back and established that infrastructure. Another gentleman is commissioning a 30-structure eco-tourism destination this December," she said.

Direct flights from the UK, one of Sierra Leone's key markets, are expected to accelerate this engagement. "Whenever we travel, we ensure that we hold targeted programmes to update the diaspora on what we're doing. Many already use social media to highlight the beauty of the country and encourage others to invest," the Minister added.

Investments Taking Root

Tourism is rapidly attracting investment interest both domestically and internationally.

"In the past, mining and agriculture dominated, but now tourism is gaining recognition as the gateway for other sectors," Tunis said.

The government is working with partners such as TAF to develop eco-tourism sites, while existing properties like Bamoi Hotel are poised for expansion. Private investors have also refurbished facilities like the Lungi International Hotel into a



four-star property.

"We've just come back from an investment conference in Turkey, where there was strong interest in Sierra Leone's tourism sector," she revealed. "We're in advanced discussions to rehabilitate and upgrade more hotels, including some of the ministry's own assets like Leicester Peak, the Innovation Centre, and Bureh."



A Unique Proposition

For Minister Tunis, Sierra Leone's appeal lies in its blend of nature, history, and people.

"This is the only country described as the Costa Rica of Africa—but with an added touch: our history and our people," she said proudly. "We have a beautiful coastline, a thriving nightlife with places like Chapter One, a golf course, vibrant entertainment, and improved infrastructure. There's no way you can get enough of Sierra Leone—the air, the people, the culture."

She also emphasised the welcoming spirit of Sierra Leoneans. "The tolerance

“Come to Sierra Leone. We’re not competing with anyone—we’re offering our own unique beauty. The tourism and culture sector is ready to embrace you. The future is bright.”

level in this country is so high that it's infectious. Our dark history has been uncovered and has purified us.



Now we are unleashed, ready to share our beauty and creativity with the world."

Her message to investors and travellers is simple: "Come to Sierra Leone. We're not competing with anyone—we're offering our own unique beauty. The tourism and culture sector is ready to embrace you. The future is bright."

Taste of Sierra Leone:

A Journey through Sierra Leone's Unique Gastronomy

Sierra Leone, a vibrant West African nation, is a goldmine of culinary delights that tantalize the taste buds and offer a rich cultural experience. The country's diverse regions — East, West, South, and North — each contribute unique flavours and cooking techniques to the national cuisine. From the mouth-watering sauces to the hearty stews and vegetable dishes, let's embark on a gastronomic journey through Sierra Leone and explore some of its most iconic dishes.

Salone Jollof: A Festive Staple



No celebration in Sierra Leone is complete without Salone Jollof. This iconic dish, a symbol of West African cuisine, is a flavorful blend of rice cooked in a rich tomato sauce with a medley of spices. The Sierra Leonean version often features either meat or fish, with chicken being a popular choice. A hint of bay leaf and garlic elevates the dish, while precise seasoning brings out its robust flavors. Each bite of Salone Jollof is a harmonious symphony of taste, making it a beloved staple at gatherings and special occasions.

Foofoo and Sawa: A Comforting Combo

Foofoo, a starchy side made from pounded cassava or plantains, is a cornerstone of Sierra Leonean meals. It pairs perfectly with Sawa, a sour, savory soup that can be made with seafood like crabs and shrimps, or meats such as cow and goat. The combination of Foofoo and Sawa is both comforting and satisfying, reflecting the heart and soul of Sierra Leonean home cooking. The tangy notes of Sawa soup, balanced by the neutral, smooth texture of Foofoo, create a delightful contrast that is both nourishing and delicious.



Pemahun and Laffidi: Local Power Cuisines

Pemahun and Laffidi are two traditional dishes that pack a punch with their flavors and nutritional value. Pemahun, a rich blend of potato leaves shredded over the rice interspersed with palm oil and Maggie or pounded herring. Often made with fish or showcases the depth of Sierra Leonean spices and cooking techniques. Laffidi, on the other hand, is a hearty dish made from grains like rice or bulgur, mixed with vegetables and sometimes meat or fish. These dishes are not only delicious but also embody the resourcefulness and creativity of Sierra Leonean cooks.



Cassava Leaves and Potato Leaves: Green Goodness

Vegetables play a crucial role in Sierra Leonean cuisine, with cassava leaves and potato leaves being among the most popular. These leafy greens are typically cooked with fish or meat, resulting in deeply flavorful and nutrient-rich dishes. The cassava leaf stew, often simmered with palm oil, offers a unique, slightly bitter taste that is balanced by the richness of the oil and the umami from the meat or fish. Potato leaves, on the other hand, provide a milder flavor and are often cooked with a variety of spices to enhance their natural taste.

Krain Krain: A Vegetable Delight

Krain Krain, a dish made from jute leaves, is another vegetable-based staple in Sierra Leone. It is commonly cooked with fish or meat and served with rice. The slimy texture of the jute leaves, combined with the savory broth, makes Krain Krain a distinctive and beloved dish. Its unique consistency and rich flavor profile make it a must-try for anyone exploring Sierra Leonean cuisine.

Banka Soup and Peanut Soup: Hearty and Rich

Banka soup, made from palm oil nuts, is a rich and hearty dish that is a true representation of Sierra Leonean culinary tradition. The thick, nutty soup is often paired with fish or meat and served with rice or Foofoo. Peanut soup, another popular choice, is creamy, slightly sweet, and deeply satisfying. Both soups highlight the use of nuts in Sierra Leonean cooking, adding a rich depth of flavor to their respective dishes.

Tola: The Ultimate Comfort Food

Tola, a traditional Sierra Leonean stew, is a comforting and hearty dish that combines meat or fish with a variety of vegetables and spices. The slow-cooked stew allows the flavors to meld together, creating a rich and satisfying meal that warms the soul. Tola is often enjoyed with rice or Foofoo, making it a versatile and beloved dish across the country.



A Beverage to Remember

No meal in Sierra Leone is complete without a refreshing drink. Whether it's a cool Coke, a bottle of Star beer, or a glass of local Palm wine, the right beverage can enhance the dining experience. Palm wine, in particular, offers a unique taste that is both sweet and slightly tangy,

providing a perfect complement to the rich and spicy flavors of Sierra Leonean cuisine.

Sierra Leone's gastronomy is a vibrant tapestry of flavors, textures, and aromas that reflect the country's rich cultural heritage and culinary traditions. From the festive Salone Jollof to the comforting Foofoo and Sawa, each dish tells a story of community, resourcefulness, and a deep love for food. Whether you're savor





Chapter One Opens in Freetown:

A Bold Step in Sierra Leone's Rise as West Africa's Entertainment Hub



President of Sierra Leone, H.E. Julius Maada Bio cuts the sod to officially open Chapter One

On 28th June 2025, Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone, cemented its growing reputation as West Africa's emerging entertainment hotspot with the grand opening of Chapter One, a new luxury entertainment destination officially unveiled by President Julius Maada Bio.

The sprawling multi-level facility, which brings together a fine-dining restaurant, an electrifying nightclub, and a stylish sky bar under one roof, has been described as the most ambitious entertainment project the city has seen in years.

For many in Freetown, the arrival of Chapter One signals more than just another nightlife option - it is a marker of Sierra Leone's cultural renaissance, with the capital increasingly positioning itself as a place where world-class entertainment and hospitality can thrive.

From Bo to Freetown – The Rise of a Brand

The story of Chapter One began in Bo, Sierra Leone's second city, when the CEO transformed his private residence into a casual gathering space for friends. It soon evolved into a local nightlife spot and, encouraged by friends who saw its potential, was developed into a full-fledged club.



According to Tawanda Chinodya, Manager of Chapter One, the Freetown edition represents the brand's expansion and reinvention on a grander scale.

"Everybody believes in starting small. Bo was the beginning, but Freetown is the head office and the vision. This is the bigger version, a place that combines restaurant, nightclub and sky bar into an integrated entertainment ecosystem," he explained.

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A World-Class Entertainment Ecosystem

Unlike typical nightclubs that exist in isolation, Chapter One was designed to provide a seamless flow of experiences. Guests may start the evening at the ground-floor restaurant, migrate upstairs to the high-energy nightclub, and later wind down with cocktails at the sky bar overlooking Freetown's skyline.

This concept, Chinodya says, was built to offer social connection, dynamic interaction, and "immersive experiences."

"When you step into Chapter One, you know you've entered a different world. We've created an ambience that makes you feel like you're in Dubai, while still being in Sierra Leone. That's why we say, whenever you come to Chapter One, you're the 1% of the 1%."

Luxury, Technology and Service

Chapter One is setting new standards in Freetown's entertainment landscape. The nightclub, cooled to a comfortable 16 degrees, uses cutting-edge sound, lighting and visual technology to deliver an atmosphere comparable to global nightlife destinations.

For high-spending clientele, the venue promises VIP treatment and premium beverage options never before offered in Sierra Leone - including Dom Pérignon champagne.

But it is not just the décor or drinks list that management is banking on - it is the people. After nearly a year of intensive staff training, Chapter One is prioritising first-class service as the backbone of its brand.

"Hospitality is everything. If a customer feels well taken care of, they'll come back. We don't compromise on quality - our customers deserve the very best," Chinodya emphasised.

To maintain momentum, Chapter One is planning theme nights, seasonal menus, live DJ sessions, and curated events that keep its atmosphere vibrant and ever-changing. The goal is to establish the club as not just a nightlife venue, but a cultural institution that attracts Sierra Leoneans and international visitors alike.

Boosting Tourism and the Local Economy

The opening of Chapter One is also tied to Sierra Leone's broader push to reposition itself as a tourism destination. With its strategic location and premium offerings, the facility is expected to attract both local elites and international travellers seeking new experiences in West Africa.

"Chapter One is going to be a landing point for people from all over the world," Chinodya explained. "We are already marketing to Europe, and when guests come, they won't just enjoy the nightlife - they will explore our beaches, our resorts, and everything Sierra Leone has

to offer. This will boost tourism, raise revenue, and contribute to the GDP."

Freetown: Africa's New Cultural Playground

In recent years, Freetown has been buzzing with new creative and entertainment ventures - from live music hubs and cultural cafés to multimedia companies and upscale dining spots. Chapter One adds to this momentum, positioning the city as a rising rival to Accra, Lagos and Dakar in the regional entertainment scene.

And the ambition does not stop here.

"The vision for Chapter One is beyond Sierra Leone. The CEO wants Chapter One to be all over Africa," Chinodya revealed.

A New Chapter for Freetown

With the official blessing of President Julius Maada Bio, Chapter One is more than just a building - it is a symbol of Freetown's confidence and ambition. Sierra Leone's capital, once overlooked on the African entertainment map, is now daring the world to take notice.

For locals and international visitors alike, the message is clear: the nightlife and hospitality scene in Sierra Leone has entered a new chapter.



President Maadio Bio in a handshake with Fassally Tarawally, CEO, Chapter One

Sierra Leone Tourism: Embracing Freedom, Building the Future

By Fergus T. MacLaren

Thirty years ago, Dr. Jane Goodall inspired Bala Amarasekaran to establish a chimpanzee conservation area outside of Freetown, after rescuing an injured young chimp named Bruno. Fast forward to the University College London lecture theatre this June, where Dr. Goodall and Bala reminisced over what he had built

over the years, and how the Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary had become a leading tourism destination for Sierra Leone. There were big plans from the fundraising that night, to expand the visitor offer with a canopy walk, ecotourism trail and new innovation and learning centre in Freetown.

Dr. Goodall died unexpectedly a few days ago.

But she had inspired a resiliency at Tacugama, much like with Sierra Leone, that had survived a civil war, pandemics and conservation challenges, to still have the necessary building blocks in place to thrive.

International tourism arrivals to Sierra Leone were reported at 71,000 in 2019, according to the World Bank. In 2022, it was estimated that tourism provides livelihoods for 41,000 people and contributes 2.6% of Sierra Leone's GDP. Most international tourism flows are from the diaspora and business interests, with the UK being the largest source. The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates visitor growth at 5.8 percent annually for the next decade.

Three key factors have supported tourism growth in Sierra Leone: the warm welcome given by its citizens; strong leadership provided through the Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs position; and government and international financial institutions' support to this key economic development growth pillar. The government has also rolled out a new National Tourism Policy and National Ecotourism Policy, emphasizing sustainable development and environmental conservation.

The National Tourism Board has identified ecotourism, community empowerment, culture and nature as its strategic promotional areas. 2026 was declared as the Year of Ecotourism, celebrating places like Tacugama as key protectors and destinations for the country's unique flora and fauna. The tagline "Embracing Freedom" was adopted to reflect both the opportunity to freely explore the country's natural wonders while commemorating the unique cultural heritage of the freedom promised to returning slaves of the Gateway to the Old King's Yard pairing with the dark memories of the Bunce Island internment prison to narrate Sierra Leone's unique slave trade history.

Sierra Leone also has its first World Heritage site, the Gola-Tiwai Complex, inscribed in July 2025. This nomination was in recognition for its rich biodiversity, including endangered species like the pygmy hippopotamus and forest elephant. This designation is expected to boost eco-tourism, scientific research, and sustainable development in the region.

Infrastructure investments have proven beneficial to growing the sector and increasing travel to and within Sierra Leone. This includes the new international airport at Lungi, increasing the volume of flights, while providing modern services and amenities. There have also been significant improvements to major roadways, making it easier to travel around Freetown's Western Peninsula region.

A new national airline, Air Sierra Leone, travels three days a week from London Gatwick and Lagos International Airports with direct flights to Freetown. The airline has plans to expand to other West African capitals, and eventually the United States. This growing wave of visitors will also be greeted by an increasingly trained young workforce in the service and hospitality fields.

The challenges for Sierra Leone's travel and tourism sector moving forward are:

- Building the brand and its unique natural and cultural facets that have been positively reflected around the globe;
- Encouraging quality in all of the tourism offer aspects, to create that memorable destination that people

“International tourism arrivals to Sierra Leone were reported at 71,000 in 2019, according to the World Bank. In 2022, it was estimated that tourism provides livelihoods for 41,000 people and contributes 2.6% of Sierra Leone's GDP. Most international tourism flows are from the diaspora and business interests, with the UK being the largest source. The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates visitor growth at 5.8 percent annually for the next decade.”



Late Dr. Jane Goodall and Fergus MacLaren at an event in London earlier this year

will return to; and

- Expanding services, amenities, infrastructure and capacity building to grow tourism outside of the Freetown area.

As tributes pour in for Dr. Goodall and her legacy in Sierra Leone and elsewhere, it's important to recognize the wisdom

of her words: "what you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make." The building blocks and tourism strategy that Sierra Leone has embarked on and the decisions how best to allocate time, effort and fund them will be the sector's opportunity to "Embrace Success".



Voices of Support for Sierra Leone' Tourism Sector

Sierra Leone's tourism growth and initiatives have received widespread support from all sectors. From dedicated tourism stakeholders to individuals working tirelessly behind the scenes, the goal remains the same: to build an inclusive, sustainable tourism industry that empowers communities and creates jobs for all. In this **Tourism Voices** segment, we highlight the partners and individuals driving this vision forward.



Here in Pujehun, there are numerous touristic attractions that once served as our favorite holiday spots—especially Sawura. From Gbodapee to Bonthe, the country showcases breathtaking and astonishing sites. We extend our sincere thanks to the Hon. Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Nabeela Farida Tunis, for bringing tourism to the provinces and helping our people recognize its importance and potential.

Victor Bockarie Foe-Former Vice President of Sierra Leone was speaking during the World Tourism Day Celebration in Pujehun District on 27th November, 2025.



Tourism offers transformative opportunities, particularly for women, by fostering self-reliance, strengthening communities, and making meaningful contributions to the national economy."

Seraphine Wakana, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sierra Leone



"It's inspiring to see more women stepping into the hospitality industry. Tourism is more than just travel—it enriches individuals, opens doors to meaningful employment for our youth, and equips them with skills that not only transform their lives but also contribute to the broader development of our country."

Isatu Thorlu Bangura, Manager, Posseh Hotel.



In the past, we often thought of tourism only in terms of our culture, history, and beautiful landmarks. But tourism is so much more than that. It generates income, creates jobs—especially for our youth—and boosts the local economy. Here in Kailahun, we have untapped tourist attractions with the potential to raise significant revenue. It's time we invest in and promote these opportunities.

Hassan Sheriff, District Council Representative, Kailahun District



I have seen from my experience in other countries that tourism boosts the economy, I therefore commend President Julius Maada Bio for prioritizing the tourism sector and I urge participants to take tourism seriously, as it has a multiplying effect on national development.

Paramount Chief Gbawun K. Mansaray III of Wara Wara Yagala Chiefdom speaking during the Nature-Based Ecotourism Digital Training in Kabala



I wholeheartedly welcome this Nature-Based Digital Ecotourism Training to Kambia, Tourism has the potential to transform our communities by driving local development, creating jobs, and boosting our district's economy.

Paramount Chief Bai Farama Tass Bubu speaking during the Nature-Based Ecotourism Digital Training in Kambia.



I applaud the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs for bringing such a valuable training to Port Loko. Tourism is a sector that, when properly harnessed, can attract more visitors to our city. I therefore encourage all participants to take the training sessions seriously and put the knowledge gained into practice.

Aminata Bangura, Deputy Mayor, Port Loko City Council, speaking during the Nature-Based Ecotourism Digital Training in Port Loko.



I sincerely applaud the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs for visiting Diamond Lodge Hotel as part of the Nature-Based Ecotourism site engagements in Kono," said John Sahr Francis Yambasu. This visit brings much-needed visibility to our district, and I encourage the Ministry to continue promoting Kono so we can attract more visitors, especially under the commendable Year of Ecotourism Campaign 2025

John Sahr Francis Yambasu, Proprietor Diamond Lodge Hotel, speaking during the Nature-Based Ecotourism visit to Diamond Lodge Hotel in Kono

Sierra Leone celebrates inclusion and elegance in historic fashion night honouring Persons with Albinism

In a night that will be etched in Sierra Leone's cultural history, the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs lit up the Lagoonda Complex in Freetown with an unforgettable celebration of fashion, inclusion and courage. The groundbreaking event, dubbed "Celebrating Inclusion Through Fashion," brought together government officials, fashion industry leaders, and members of the Sierra Leone Association of Persons With Albinism (SLAPWA), shining a bright light on the country's commitment to diversity and unity.

For the first time in the nation's history, a government-led fashion event placed persons with albinism at the very heart of the runway, not just as guests—but as models. From the youngest child to seasoned advocates, SLAPWA members strutted confidently in vibrant, contemporary creations by Sierra Leone's top designers, igniting applause and admiration with every step.

The night reached even more dazzling heights when Ministers—including Nabeela Tunis (Tourism and Cultural Affairs), Haja Ramatulai Wurie (Technical and Higher Education), and Isata Mahoi (Gender and Children's Affairs)—as well as the Mayor of Freetown, Yvonne Aki-Sawyer, took to the runway themselves. Their participation was more than symbolic—it was a strong statement of solidarity with people living with albinism, a group that has long endured marginalisation and superstition.

In her keynote address, Nabeela Tunis underscored the evening's deeper mission beyond glamour and entertainment. "Tonight is a celebration



of fashion and the sheer ingenuity and diversity of our fashion industry. But it is also a celebration of inclusion and identity," she declared.

The Minister drew attention to the historical injustices faced by people with albinism. "Persons with Albinism have for long been denied access to crucial spaces, stigmatized and made to endure all manner of superstition for their skin tone, a reality over which they had no say. Yet... Albinos have never, ever wavered in courage," she stated.



Minister Tunis stressed that the event was not just about spectacle, but about shifting mindsets and dismantling harmful stereotypes. "We must never, ever resign to [biases]," she said firmly. "Rather, we must see it as our constant duty to emphatically reject them in whatever way they may manifest."

In a lively and humour-laced moment, the Minister joked that this time the women were taking the lead on the runway—but assured the men their moment in the spotlight was coming soon.

Organised in collaboration with the Fashion Design and Textile Association and SLAPWA, the show was not only a celebration of human dignity but also

a platform to promote the immense potential of Sierra Leone's fashion and creative industries as vital pillars of tourism and economic growth.

The designers showcased everything from traditional prints reimagined for modern tastes to bold, avant-garde pieces—demonstrating that Sierra Leone's fashion scene is vibrant, relevant, and ready for the global stage.

"This event should not be a one-shot event, held to tick the boxes," Minister Tunis reminded the audience. "It should form part of a continuous effort to restore true equality for everyone."

The night ended not with speeches, but with cheers, music and dancing with the Groovy Colours band in company—fitting for an event that wasn't about talking change, but living it. As the models took their final walks down the runway, many with hands held high in triumph, it was clear: this was more than a fashion show. It was a bold redefinition of beauty, identity, and inclusion in Sierra Leone.

And in the words of the Minister, "Every person has a productive space in Sierra Leone's tourism industry. Together, we can make it happen."



Sierra's Minister of Tourism & Cultural Affairs, Nabeela Farida Tunis participated in the runway activities





Sierra Leone's Creative Awakening: DR JULIUS SPENCER on Reviving Theatre, Music and the Arts

Sierra Leone's creative arts sector is slowly waking up from what Dr Julius Spencer, one of the country's most experienced cultural figures, describes as "a coma." Once vibrant with live theatre, thriving music bands, and influential playwrights, the industry slipped into silence for decades. Today, a quiet but determined revival is underway, fuelled by a new generation of artists and supported by veterans like Dr Spencer.

"Well, it is trying to come back to life," he said, reflecting on the current state of theatre. "In the 80s and 90s it was thriving, a lot of theatre groups performing on a regular basis. Then it seemed to go to sleep. But in the recent past – in the past three, four years – a number of groups have started doing

performances again, some quite good quality."

While traditional community-based performances of dance and music have endured at festivals and ceremonies, formal theatre on stage "virtually ground to a halt." Now, however, Sierra Leone is seeing new sparks of creativity, not only in theatre but across the arts.

Music's Long Journey Back

The musical story of Sierra Leone is no less dramatic. The country once played a key role in shaping West Africa's sound. "If we go backwards in time, Sierra Leone was a major influence in music. Most people don't know that when you're talking about Afrobeat, you have to associate it with Sierra Leone. A man called Gerald Opino [Geraldo Pino],

people like Fela learned from him," Dr Spencer explained.

Live bands from Sierra Leone once travelled to London to record their work, but like theatre, the music industry slipped into decline before bouncing back in waves. "It came back to life in the 90s, early 2000s, when Sierra Leoneans living and working abroad came home. Somebody like Jimmy Bangura set up a recording studio, got some young people together and recorded some good albums. Sierra Leonean music became quite popular," he said.

Today, a new crop of artists is taking Sierra Leonean music to international stages. "Somebody like Drizzy Lick has done concerts in Europe and America. We had a band called Refuge All Stars, which also did big concerts in Europe

and America. So it's coming back to life. Trying to create a Sierra Leonean type of music – Afrobeat, but with a difference. Fusion music is all coming to life now," he noted.

Institutions like Balanta have helped train young talents who are now performing with live bands or recording their own music, contributing to the sector's growing recognition.

Untapped Potential in Arts and Diplomacy

Despite the progress, Dr Spencer is clear-eyed about Sierra Leone's missed opportunities. "The performing arts can indeed be a tool for cultural preservation and diplomacy. But unfortunately Sierra Leone has not quite taken advantage of it," he said.

He pointed to examples across Africa where the arts have become pillars of wealth creation. "If you look at Nigeria, the influence of music and the movie industry in employment creation and wealth creation is clear. We have not taken advantage of that because we have not put in place the enabling environment to make it happen. Those who have been making headway have been doing it basically on their own, without any real support from the establishment," he lamented.

The lack of funding, weak copyright enforcement, and the absence of a dedicated arts and culture council have left Sierra Leone's creative economy underdeveloped. "We do not have a commission or a council for arts and culture in Sierra Leone. It's something one has been arguing for for decades – an institution that can focus on supporting the creative sector, not just the capacity of artists but also in terms of funding and access to opportunities," he stressed.

Building the Next Generation

Through his academy and the institutions he works with, Dr Spencer is trying to close some of these gaps. "What we are trying to do is provide training and provide opportunities for young people to make a living out of their art forms. We now do regular performances, training dancers, training musicians. We've done theatre workshops to provide this kind of training," he explained.

He believes the quality of some recent productions shows Sierra Leone's potential to compete internationally – if structural barriers are addressed. "Some of the productions I've seen in Sierra Leone are of international quality. But these days, I'm not aware of productions from Sierra Leone going to international festivals. Again, the enabling environment – how does one get funding to do these things? That's one of the major obstacles," he said.

The government has recently signalled greater attention to copyright, with plans to amend laws and enforce protections. Dr. Spencer is part of efforts to convene artists for consultations. "Out of that we probably will get more unity among the creative sector so that we can speak with one voice and be taken seriously," he said.

A Vision for the Future

For Dr. Spencer, the near future – the next two or three years – could be transformative if the right support structures are put in place. "My vision is a country where young people with talent, whether in music, dance, theatre, fashion or fine art, can make a living out of their talent. They can get training and grow as artists, making a living locally and internationally," he said.

He contrasted the past, when parents dismissed artistic careers as unserious, with the changing perception of football. "Now footballers are making money internationally. But if a child goes to their parents and says, 'Mummy, I want to be a

“Once vibrant with live theatre, thriving music bands, and influential playwrights, the industry slipped into silence for decades. Today, a quiet but determined revival is underway, fuelled by a new generation of artists and supported by veterans like Dr Spencer”

dancer,' the response is still: you are not serious. People do not see the pathway. You want to study dance, theatre, music in Sierra Leone – then what? Where do you get employed? How do you employ yourself?"

Still, he remains optimistic. "One is hoping that soon it will be possible in Sierra Leone. Maybe not everybody, but the best ones will be able to do that. The creative sector will be more vibrant if we have in place the enabling environment to make that happen," he said.

For someone who has straddled theatre, media, government and now mentorship, Dr. Spencer's words carry both the weight of experience and the urgency of vision. Sierra Leone's creative renaissance, fragile but growing, depends on whether policymakers, financiers, and the public will finally recognise what he and others have long seen – that the arts are not merely entertainment, but a vital pathway to cultural identity, diplomacy, and prosperity.



Dr. Julius Spencer in a shot with the interview team



our arts and cultural scene,” Ms. Kamara explained. “We host art exhibitions, theatre shows, music events, and even film premieres for local Sierra Leoneans. We want our guests to experience not just the beauty of the ocean, but the heartbeat of Sierra Leone.”

The hotel also offers a local cuisine brunch that highlights Sierra Leone’s diverse gastronomy. Ms. Kamara revealed that Hotel Barmoi is set to unveil a new restaurant and menu in the coming months, following rave reviews of its culinary offerings. Looking further ahead, the hotel is preparing to play an active role in the upcoming gastronomy festival in Sierra Leone.

As a beachfront property, Hotel Barmoi takes its environmental responsibility seriously. Ms. Kamara admitted that the journey towards sustainable operations began with simple but crucial steps.

“When I first came to run the hotel, we had staff members who, due to lack of knowledge, were throwing trash over the fence into the ocean. Right away, we had to embark on education. That’s a total no-no,” she said firmly.

Since then, the hotel has introduced a range of initiatives: reducing single-use plastics, replacing plastic straws with paper, switching to paper takeaway bags, and separating waste for proper disposal.

“We have to do it in a way that protects our environment because I believe that’s part of our niche as a tourism and hospitality industry. Guests should be able to come and enjoy an environment that is as natural as possible,” she stressed.

Hotel Barmoi’s roots run deep in its surrounding neighbourhood of Soso Village and the wider Aberdeen area. Over the years, the hotel has become a fixture in community life, offering employment and supporting local initiatives.

“We prioritise, particularly the youth in the community. A number of individuals who live in Soso Village work here,” Ms. Kamara noted. “We also partner with street vendors on clean-up initiatives. For example, we’re providing trash bins so their customers can dispose of waste, and then we ensure the collection is done



properly. It’s a longstanding relationship that we’re very proud of.”

Her memories of community connections are personal as well. She recounted a moment when a Keke driver told her how he remembered meeting her father at the hotel as a boy. “That’s when I realised just how much of a fixture we have become over the past 25 years.”

Despite its successes, the hospitality sector in Sierra Leone faces structural hurdles.

Managing Director, Ngadi Tejan Kamara, Hotel Barmoi continues to thrive



Hospitality with a purpose: **HOTEL BARMOI’S** *role in building a sustainable tourism ecosystem*

For 25 years, Hotel Barmoi has stood as more than just a hotel on the coast of Freetown—it has become a symbol of resilience, community spirit, and cultural pride. Founded by the late Dr. Sheku Tejan Kamara in the wake of Sierra Leone’s civil war, the hotel was envisioned as a haven that could help revive the nation’s tourism industry while creating much-needed employment opportunities. Today, under the leadership of Managing Director Ms.

Ngadi Tejan Kamara, the family-owned establishment continues to thrive, balancing hospitality with sustainability, community development, and a deep commitment to Sierra Leonean culture.

“Hotel Barmoi was founded on the basis of revitalising the tourism industry here in Freetown, but also servicing a specific need,” Ms. Kamara recalled. “At the time, just after the war, there were very limited offerings. My father wanted to create jobs—jobs for Sierra Leoneans. So, we

pride ourselves in being the local hotel. We support our local communities.”

While Hotel Barmoi’s prime oceanfront location offers guests unobstructed views and serenity, what truly differentiates the establishment is its embrace of Sierra Leone’s cultural fabric. Beyond providing accommodation, the hotel has become a hub for the arts and local talent.

“We’re also a big patron and supporter of

“The infrastructural challenges are probably one of the biggest issues for us—electricity, water, internet,” Ms. Kamara admitted. “We also happen to be one of the most expensive jurisdictions to travel to in the region. These are things we’ve been discussing with the public sector.”

She welcomed, however, the recent reintroduction of Sierra Leone Airlines’ direct flights to England, which she described as a “huge game-changer” that could significantly boost inbound tourism.

Collaboration, she stressed, remains key: “I like the fact that the private sector is working more collaboratively and engaging with government. We have to keep working together to make Sierra Leone a viable competitor in the market.”

With its enviable proximity to Lumley Beach—Freetown’s most popular beachfront—the hotel enjoys the benefits of access without the drawbacks of overdevelopment.

“Our guests can walk down to Lumley and enjoy its vibrant energy, but when they return here, they have oceanfront serenity without the boisterousness,” Ms. Kamara said.

Reflecting on Lumley’s evolution, she added: “I almost feel like we’re at a pinnacle of where we’ve developed, maybe even overdeveloped. Now, as a community, we’re asking ourselves: what do we want Lumley to be? I feel optimistic that we’ll find solutions to make it as attractive as it once was.”

At the heart of Hotel Barmoi’s philosophy is an emphasis on genuine hospitality.

“They should definitely come to Hotel Barmoi because here, you’re treated like family,” Ms. Kamara affirmed with a smile. “You get to experience an authentically Sierra Leonean welcome—and that says it all.”

As Hotel Barmoi celebrates 25 years, its story is one of perseverance, community commitment, and cultural celebration. Under Ms. Kamara’s stewardship, the hotel looks poised not only to preserve her father’s legacy but also to push Sierra Leone’s tourism industry toward a more sustainable, inclusive and globally competitive future.



Sierra Leone to Host Finish of Rebranded Budapest Bamako Rally with New Logo



Sierra Leone will host the finish line of the 2026 edition of the Budapest Bamako Rally, organizers and the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs announced in a press release dated 9 May 2025. The decision comes alongside the unveiling of a new name and logo for the rally, long billed as the world’s largest amateur rally and confirms Freetown as the rally’s finish city for 2026, with further commitments to repeat the finish in 2028 and 2030.

The 2026 event is expected to bring the largest finish field to date. Organizers estimate some **1,500 participants from more than 80 countries** will conclude their journey in Freetown, building on Sierra Leone’s previous record as host of four editions that together attracted roughly **2,500 international participants** over the years. The scale of the planned arrival positions the country to benefit from heightened international visibility and visitor spending.

The Ministry frames the rally as a strategic opportunity to advance the country’s rebranding and image-enhancement efforts. Organizers anticipate direct social and economic gains from the influx of participants, including increased tourism revenue, expanded media coverage and strengthened international partnerships. For local businesses and cultural practitioners, the finish-line program offers a concentrated moment of demand, hotels, catering, transport providers and suppliers stand to receive immediate economic benefit, while the broader tourism sector can leverage the exposure for longer-term investment.

Organizers have committed to deepen the rally’s charitable footprint in Sierra Leone. The 2026 programme will include support for local organizations and sustainability initiatives intended to offset the event’s environmental

impact; tree-planting campaigns are explicitly cited as a mitigation measure. These steps signal a deliberate attempt to balance the event’s scope with environmental stewardship and local development objectives.

The finish-line festivities will feature a cultural programme designed to marry international spectacle with local creativity. One of Europe’s prominent rock bands is scheduled to perform and will collaborate with Sierra Leonean artists and cultural groups across two shows hosted at iconic beach locations. Organizers say these performances are intended both as entertainment and as a platform for cross-cultural exchange, creating opportunities for local musicians and production crews to participate in large-scale events.

Securing the finish for 2026, and repeat finishes for 2028 and 2030, gives Sierra Leone a multi-year runway to plan infrastructure, hospitality capacity and legacy programming. The multi-edition commitment moves the engagement beyond a single event toward a medium-term partnership that can support skills transfer, supplier readiness and targeted marketing to incoming markets.

Organizers and the Ministry have said further details including the rally’s new official name and logo, final programme, and the list of charitable partners will be released as planning progresses. For government agencies, private sector partners and community stakeholders, the coming months will be critical for operational planning, coordination on sustainability measures, and maximizing economic returns from the event.

Beyond the immediate economic numbers, the announcement underscores a broader strategic aim: to place Sierra Leone more visibly on the global adventure-tourism map and to use large-scale events as catalysts for international partnerships and local economic activation. With a sizeable finish field expected and a cultural programme designed to showcase local talent, the 2026 rally represents a concentrated opportunity to convert global attention into sustainable outcomes for the destination.



A young surfer rides the waves of Bureh Beach



Bureh Beach into a flagship attraction. For Pratt and his colleagues, this represents an opportunity not only to grow the sport but to build confidence among locals who remain wary of the waves.

“When it’s done, people will know they are safe whenever they come to the beach,” he said with optimism.



Putting Sierra Leone on the global surfing map

Globally, surfing tourism is a fast-growing niche, attracting millions of enthusiasts who spend significantly on travel, accommodation and local experiences. Countries like Senegal and Morocco have already tapped into this market – and Sierra Leone is positioning itself to join their ranks.

Bureh Beach’s blend of community-driven development, natural beauty and government support could make it the country’s defining tourism story. More importantly, it provides a sustainable path to livelihoods for locals while showcasing Sierra Leone as a destination that offers not just history and wildlife, but also thrilling waves.

As Pratt summed it up, “Sierra Leone has some of the best times for surfing. With the right support, people around the world will know that Bureh Beach is the place to be.”



Local artisan Monoh Conteh is hopeful increased tourists will significantly boost livelihoods for those ply their trade on the beach

BUREH BEACH SURFING CLUB:

Riding Sierra Leone’s waves into a global surfing destination

The pristine coastlines of Sierra Leone, long celebrated for their beauty and tranquillity, are steadily carving a new identity – one shaped by waves, boards and an emerging surf culture. At the heart of this transformation is Bureh Beach, a vibrant coastal community just an hour’s drive from Freetown, which has grown into the epicentre of surfing in the country.

With the Bureh Beach Surfing Club leading the charge and bolstered by the government’s partnership with the World Bank through the Economic Diversification Project, the area is poised to become a world-class water sport hub, drawing both local enthusiasts and international travellers.

Community roots of a sport

For Abioseh Steven Pratt, a surfing instructor, lifeguard and youth mentor at Bureh Beach Surfing Club, surfing is more than just a sport – it is a lifeline for the community.

“The surfing club was established from the community,” Pratt explained. “Our fathers surfed before the war, but everything stopped. In 2012, we revived it. Today, about 15 young men work here, not only as surfers, but as instructors, lifeguards, chefs and even bartenders – all united by surfing.”

Surfing, he says, has helped connect Bureh Beach with the wider world. Diaspora Sierra Leoneans return regularly, drawn by the waves and



Lead instructor at the Bureh Beach Surfing Club, Abioseh Steven Pratt, says the sport has helped the community with the wider world

the memories of their youth. Foreign visitors, from Ireland to Senegal, have also contributed to the growth of the sport, helping the community structure itself into a professional surf camp.

“Sierra Leone has some of the best times for surfing. With the right support, people around the world will know that Bureh Beach is the place to be.”

“It’s good for tourism because people travel everywhere to surf. We want surfing to be a national sport in Sierra Leone, with a federation to make it wider and more recognised,” Pratt added.

From sand mining challenges to global waves

Surfing in Bureh has not been without challenges. Sand mining activities shifted the coastline, altering the wave breaks and forcing surfers to relocate their base to a stretch near the local cemetery. Yet, resilience has defined the club’s journey.

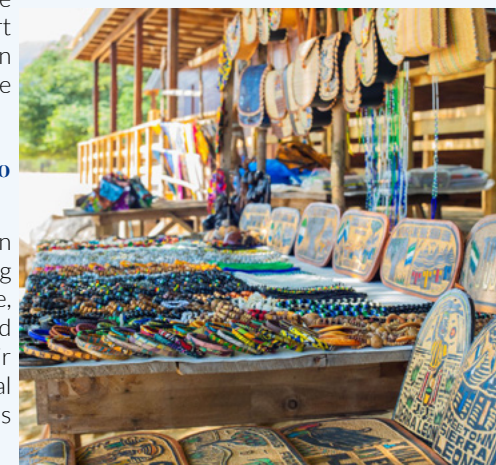
Despite the challenges, Sierra Leone offers something that sets it apart: uncrowded waves. “Some surfers prefer isolated places where they can be almost alone in the water. That’s what Bureh offers – the perfect conditions and space to enjoy the waves,” Pratt said.

With waves rising up to 2.4 metres, the peninsula beaches offer conditions that rival well-known surf destinations, while retaining an unspoiled authenticity.

Economic diversification and surf tourism

The significance of surfing to Sierra Leone’s tourism future has not gone unnoticed. The Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs has identified Bureh Beach as a strategic anchor for the World Bank-supported Economic Diversification Project.

The initiative is set to deliver improved amenities, better infrastructure, and enhanced safety measures, transforming



A community economy riding the waves

Beyond the surfers, the ripple effects of tourism are already visible in the local economy. Monoh Conteh, who crafts and sells handicrafts to visitors, believes the new facilities will significantly boost livelihoods.

“We are souvenir sellers in Bureh Beach. We produce bags, dresses, and artworks ourselves,” Conteh said. “If more tourists come, it will increase our sales and help promote our families’ livelihoods. We want to market Bureh worldwide. It’s a nice beach for everybody.”

The artisans, much like the surfers, have turned their creativity into a means of self-empowerment. They are hopeful that the enhanced surf club will bring year-round visitors, reducing the seasonal gaps that currently affect their trade.

MOZZA BEACH RESORT:

Where women lead, community thrives, and Sierra Leone's hospitality shines

On the golden shores of York, just along Sierra Leone's serene peninsula, stands Mozza Beach Resort — a luxurious seaside escape that is more than just a place to relax. It is a bold statement about empowerment, sustainability and Sierra Leone's rising star in West African tourism.

Lorraine Bash-Taqi, Assistant General Manager of Mozza Beach Resort, captures the essence of the place with infectious enthusiasm. "Mozza Beach Resort is owned by a woman by the name of Zakiatu Swaray-Rowe," she begins

proudly. "She believes in women and empowering women, therefore it's been a unique thing for her to make sure that the team running and leading this place is more of women. For instance, you have finance director, general manager, AGM — all women. So top management is more of women."

This philosophy has trickled down into the fabric of the resort. Swaray-Rowe has invested heavily in training women in the community, ensuring that Mozza Beach not only offers luxury for its guests but also opportunities for Sierra

Leonean women. "She also provides a lot of training for the local women in the community, so a lot of things are done here by women," Bash-Taqi explains. "That's her vision — to empower women and make sure in the future it continues that way, wherein women are the lead here."

Building with the Community

Community empowerment doesn't stop at leadership. The resort's workforce reflects its deep connection to York village. "We've hired 90% of the people



As Assistant General Manager, Lorraine Bash-Taqi is one of a handful of women who have transformed Mozza Beach Resort into a world class facility

working here from York," Bash-Taqi notes. "Some of them had never worked, so this was their first job, and Madam Rowe spent a whole year training people to be able to provide a service in this luxurious resort."

Even the food tells a story of collaboration. Mozza Beach Resort sources fresh produce locally, from vegetables grown around the peninsula to the fruits cultivated in its own gardens. "We shop locally, we buy food from local people. We try to source organic products which enhance the taste of the food on the plate," she says. The result is cuisine that carries the flavour of Sierra Leone's soil, paired with world-class presentation.

The challenge of paradise

Running a beachfront resort, however, is no easy feat. Bash-Taqi doesn't shy away from describing the hurdles. "Being a beachfront location, it's not one of the easiest things to balance the sustainability. Here we have to think about eco sustainability, water conservation, power. Maintaining the beachfront is a job on its own," she admits.

Power, in particular, is a major challenge. "We do not have electricity in the whole of the peninsula area, so we have to live on generators," she reveals. "For the past two or three years, we've lived on generators, which is high cost. Sustainability-wise, we're moving on to solar."

There are also environmental pressures. "The sand is actually disappearing. This happens in the rainy season and the seaweed comes up. These are our lowest

months and we have no tourism at all," she says. Seasonality makes business difficult, with July to September bringing heavy rains and low visitor numbers.

Staff retention in the hospitality industry is another uphill battle. "Retaining staff is high because people want to move to various other places, so there's always this staff movement," she adds.

Yet despite these challenges, the team at Mozza Beach presses forward with optimism and innovation.

Growing into the future

The future of Mozza Beach Resort looks bright. Bash-Taqi excitedly shares upcoming expansions: "By the end of the year, we would have 77 rooms available. We're also expanding — we have a seaside grill now, and we're looking at maybe a jetty where people will come from Lungi and come all the way just straight to Mozza."

The resort's ambition doesn't stop there. "We're looking at building another resort just around the corner from here. It will be a different thing with a different style, and so we have the potential to grow. We see ourselves as the leader in the next couple of years, because Mozza Beach presently has a lot of amenities that other resorts in the peninsula don't have."

From gyms and game rooms to jet skis and football pitches, Mozza Beach Resort offers more than the average beach stay. Guests can even enjoy immersive cultural tours. "We also offer village walks, village tours when people come, so you don't come here and just sleep, wake and eat. We have a lot we do to keep you enthusiastic about staying here and wanting to come again," Bash-Taqi says with a smile.

The warmth of Mozza

At the heart of the Mozza Beach experience is hospitality. "I would like you to choose Mozza if you come to Sierra Leone because of the hospitality, the warmth," Bash-Taqi emphasises. "I'm sure meeting me here this morning, I've shared a lot of warmth, which is what the average person is looking for. Our team has been trained to share that warmth with guests. Because when guests come, they want to feel as if they are welcome and part of us."

For Bash-Taqi, Mozza Beach Resort is not just about luxury, but about meaningful connection. "What you would get here is value for money," she concludes. "You would get value for money here, so I would like you to come."





@VoyagesAfriq

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and conference venues, or couples searching for a beautiful wedding space. That's how our conference centre came into the picture. Over the years, we've catered to all kinds of clientele."

The resort, named after their son Tariq, was designed with both practicality and personality. A 24-hour shuttle makes airport transfers stress-free, whether guests land at dawn or past midnight. But beyond convenience, Hawa insists it's about something deeper: "At minimum, I wanted people like me — Sierra Leoneans abroad — to have a place that feels opulent, eco-conscious, and proudly ours."

Proudly Sierra Leonean, with a Ghanaian twist

Food is one of the resort's biggest draws. "Most of our meals are indigenous Sierra Leonean dishes," says Hawa. "But since my husband is Ghanaian, we also offer Ghanaian favourites. Our kitchen celebrates both heritages."

But the couple's cultural pride doesn't stop at the menu. From employing 90% of their staff from the local community to sponsoring the education of neighbourhood children, the resort is deeply woven into Lungi's social fabric. "We're not just running a business," Hawa notes warmly. "We're part of this community. Whether it's creating jobs, paying school fees, or bringing in locals for extra work, it matters that we give back."

Michael agrees, highlighting the human challenge of hospitality in Sierra Leone. "There isn't a developed workforce waiting to be hired. Most of our team were raw talents we trained from



scratch. Infrastructure is another hurdle. Energy is our biggest expense — nearly 80% of our costs. We run our own generator 24/7. Imagine what could be achieved if government supported solar energy initiatives with matching grants. It would transform the industry."

A green sanctuary

If there's one thing that sets Tariq's Resort apart, it's its eco-conscious design. "We are very green," Hawa explains proudly. "All our buildings were constructed with mud, using local labour and materials. This land was a farm for 80 years before we bought it. We've kept most of its footprint intact, demolishing less than 20% of what was here. You're not just staying in a hotel — you're surrounded by nature, breathing pure freshness."

Michael adds with a chuckle: "Some guests worry about the trees. They say, **What if these trees fall?** And we tell them — the trees were here before us. We're adapting to them, not the other way around."

— through infrastructure, energy, water and marketing. Sierra Leone has everything needed for a vibrant industry. What's missing is support to enable the private sector to thrive."

Hawa nods in agreement but adds her own wish list: "We don't expect government to build hotels, but imagine if they gave grants for renewable energy. That alone would change the game. Right now, our biggest cost is power. With solar, not only would we reduce costs, but we'd also deepen our eco-friendly model."

A family affair

Though the couple pour their hearts into Tariq's Resort, they admit they are thinking about the next generation. "We're not children anymore," Hawa smiles. "Our son Tariq and daughter Moriah have their own ideas. Maybe they'll expand one day with 'Tariq's Resort 2.' For now, Michael and I are focused on maintaining quality and giving guests the best experience possible."

For them, the secret of success is simple: genuine hospitality. "We don't advertise," Michael says firmly. "All our growth has been through word-of-mouth. Guests come, they enjoy themselves, and they tell their friends. That's the best kind of marketing."

And Hawa gives her final pitch with heartfelt sincerity: "Why should someone choose Tariq's Resort? Because when you stay here, you'll meet us. We're hands-on — in the kitchen, in the dining room, everywhere. You'll feel our service, our pride and our joy. You'll breathe freshness. You'll feel at home."



Tariq's Resort: A green dream in Lungi

When you land in Sierra Leone, your first steps on its soil are often at Lungi International Airport. Just four miles away, tucked into a lush green oasis, lies Tariq's Resort — an eco-friendly retreat with the charm of a family home and the standards of a four-star destination. At its heart are its owners, Hawa Dhaniya and Dr. Michael Asante, a dynamic couple whose passion for hospitality is shaping Lungi's tourism story.

"We didn't set out to build a hotel empire," Hawa laughs, recalling the origins of the resort. "I came home in 2015 for my father's 80th birthday. We missed the ferry, and when I tried to find a place to

stay, I was shocked. Nothing I saw was somewhere I'd want to sleep. So I told my husband, *I think I have an idea. We should do an Airbnb or a bed and breakfast at Lungi.* That conversation gave birth to Tariq's Resort."

A vision rooted in necessity

Michael remembers the early planning vividly. "Our initial idea was twofold," he explains. "We wanted a comfortable, decent space for travellers moving in and out of Sierra Leone. But we also saw potential for the local market — families who want a quiet weekend away, organisations looking for seminar



Couple owners of Tariq's Resort, Hawa Dhaniya and Dr. Michael Asante are proud of the facility's eco-friendly feel



The bigger picture: Tourism in Sierra Leone

Having grown steadily since opening in 2019, Tariq's Resort reflects the wider potential of Sierra Leone's tourism sector. Michael is pragmatic about the path ahead: "Tourism should be private sector-driven. Government's role is to facilitate

Santorini in Sierra Leone:

How The Lead Hotel is redefining luxury by the Atlantic

In the heart of Freetown's fast-growing tourism scene, one hotel has distinguished itself not only by design but also by its forward-thinking approach to guest experience and digital innovation. The Lead Hotel, modelled on the iconic architecture of Santorini, Greece, has become one of Sierra Leone's most talked-about destinations. General Manager Alain Hani sat down with us to share the hotel's vision, challenges and its role in shaping the future of tourism in the country.

A unique design that turns heads

For Hani, the hotel's architecture is more than just bricks and mortar—it's a statement. "One of the uniqueness of The Lead is taking into effect the type of design. It's a European design, like the Santorini, which makes it quite different from the traditional hotels we used to have," he explained. "Our design makes us stand

out among other hotels because it's far different from the traditional normal design of hotels in Sierra Leone. It gives us a unique spot among hotels."

That distinctiveness has made The Lead an attraction in itself, drawing visitors curious to experience a slice of Mediterranean elegance on Sierra Leone's golden coastline.

Rebranding in the digital age

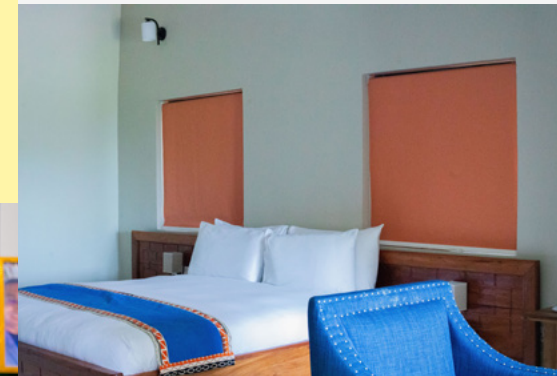
Like many in the hospitality industry, The Lead faced steep challenges during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. But Hani believes the crisis also accelerated innovation. "After COVID, we had to rebrand the image of the country and the tourism sector. We try to make sure we pay more attention to our social media handles and digital channels," he said. "We need to sell again the image of the hotel and the country to the international market. We show the areas where we have



General Manager Alain Hani has no doubts about The Lead Hotel's Santorini attributes

improved and all the facilities we have. We also allay the fears of customers—making them feel comfortable and secure coming to Sierra Leone."

Platforms like Booking.com and Expedia have become crucial channels, and The Lead prides itself on engaging guests directly. "We make sure we engage with our customers every day by answering all questions they have been asking online about security and health," Hani added.



Blending local and international flavours

Food is often the heart of any travel experience, and The Lead has carefully curated a culinary offering that satisfies both domestic and foreign palates. "Our kitchen is comprised of both local and international chefs," Hani explained. "We make sure we recruit more local chefs and blend them with our international chefs. International tourists are very interested in our local dishes, while local tourists are curious about international cuisine. So we provide both."

It's this cultural exchange, served on a plate, that adds to the richness of the guest experience.

Tackling human capital challenges

Despite the progress, Hani is candid about the challenges Sierra Leone's hospitality industry faces. "One of our biggest challenges is the human capital," he admitted. "Most of the staff are not well equipped with the technologies. When you recruit a staff, you have to give training again about how to use the machines, like the POS or property management system."

He believes the solution lies in reforming hospitality education. "Most of the tourism schools need to do more about digital training. The tourism sector should not be for dropouts. It's a professional area, and the schools need to up their teachings. We don't need to go to other countries to bring staff—we have the right people here, but they must be properly trained."

Innovation and the future of The Lead

Looking ahead, The Lead is embracing technology to enhance guest experience. "We are building more conference rooms and digitalising them. You can easily book our conference facilities online. Sierra Leone is a country of many meetings, so

we are focusing on that," Hani revealed. "We also incorporate transport into our services. When guests come, they don't need to look for vehicles—we provide secure, professional transport."

Guests can now book rides and even flights directly from the hotel's platforms. "For us, it's complimentary. We pick you up and drop you off. The digital platform is more of what we take advantage of," he said.

Why The Lead?

When asked why travellers should choose The Lead, Hani's answer is direct: "Coming to Sierra Leone, you may want to take some things into consideration, like security, comfort and professionalism. This is where The Lead Hotel stands out. We prioritize the needs of our guests, not just the business aspect. We make sure all our guests feel secure and comfortable."

With its striking design, commitment to innovation, and passion for blending local culture with global standards, The Lead Hotel has become a beacon of Sierra Leone's tourism revival—a place where Mediterranean aesthetics meet African warmth, and where the future of hospitality is being reimaged.





and growing with demand. “Recently we have added one banquet hall, where conferences happen. We are looking for another hall for meetings, so people will come and have their conferences here. We are definitely going to add some rooms as well – that is our plan.”

When asked why travellers should choose The Place over other resorts, Kumar smiled and kept it simple: “You will get an experience. You will see the place and you will always say, how come this place is in Sierra Leone? Most of the guests, if they see the pictures, they just wonder how this is here, and they always like to visit. People can talk, but no – I don’t want to talk much. I want you to experience it. Then only will you realise why you should be here.”

For those seeking a blend of pristine beaches, luxury comforts, local culture and warm Sierra Leonean hospitality, The Place Resort is more than a destination – it is an experience waiting to be lived.



The Place to be:

Inside Sierra Leone’s luxury gem on

Token Beach

Perched on the sun-kissed sands of Token Beach, The Place Resort has become a shining jewel in Sierra Leone’s tourism crown. Since opening its doors in 2012, the luxury beachfront haven has been drawing in travellers seeking not just a getaway, but an unforgettable experience.

General Manager Shailendra Kumar says the resort’s appeal lies in its unmatched natural setting and dedication to excellence. “You know, any guest, anyone who comes to this place, they are looking for a hideout, a place to enjoy and everyone likes to come here. If you go out in the resort, you will see the white sand – that is

the main unique selling proposition of this place,” he explained. “The sea and the white sand are the main attraction. Obviously, we are one of the luxurious hotels in this whole country. If you go and see our rooms, they are very beautiful and very big ones.”

Kumar stresses that The Place is more than just a scenic location – it is an all-round luxury experience. From spacious, elegantly designed rooms to a rich dining menu, every detail has been carefully curated. “All the amenities that we have, the food and beverages on our menu, they are a very big attraction for guests who want to come and enjoy this place,” he noted.

The culinary offering is also a cultural journey. The resort has made it a priority to weave Sierra Leonean flavours into its world-class service. “If you see our menu, you can see many touches of local food. We even have a dish called the ‘African Dish of the Day,’ where we cook one local dish daily and offer it to our guests. They obviously enjoy and relish it,” Kumar shared.

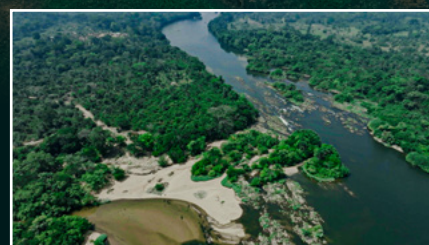
Asked how The Place has adapted in the wake of COVID-19 and the



rise of digital-first travellers, Kumar emphasised that service remains the ultimate differentiator. “We are in the service industry, and service is one of the big factors where everyone is missing out. We are focusing on the right quality, value for money. Whenever your guest is coming, they should be satisfied, they should be enjoying the place. That is what we are always thinking, and we are trying our best to improve day by day, so that guests always know they are in good hands.”

Despite its success, The Place faces challenges common to beach resorts. Kumar points out that weekday





putting Sierra Leone on the Global Map through Multimedia and Photography



Sierra Leone is steadily redefining its image on the global stage. From lush landscapes and vibrant culture to the resilience and creativity of its people, the nation's story is far richer than what has often been portrayed internationally. At the centre of this shift is Spark Media, a dynamic multimedia and photography outfit showcasing the country's beauty, creativity, and potential to the world.

Telling Sierra Leone's Story Differently

Spark Media has emerged as one of the leading storytellers of modern Sierra Leone. Through innovative use of photography, film, and digital content, the team creates powerful narratives that highlight the country's culture, people, and natural assets.



"Spark Media is a shining example of how creativity and innovation can help us tell the true story of Sierra Leone. Their work highlights the beauty of our land and the talent of our people, and this is exactly how we want the world to see us," said Hon. Nabeela Farida Tunis, Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs.

What sets Spark Media apart is its commitment to telling Sierra Leone's



story from within. Instead of allowing external narratives, often dominated by crisis or conflict, to define the nation, the company presents a vision rooted in pride, creativity, and possibility.

Multimedia Innovation and Reach

In an age when digital platforms drive communication, Spark Media has mastered the art of making Sierra Leone's stories resonate at home and abroad. Their work spans:

- **Photography** that captures both intimate moments and sweeping visuals with cultural authenticity.
- **Video productions** from documentaries and promotional films to event coverage that amplifies Sierra Leone's image.
- **Social media storytelling** that instantly connects Sierra Leone with global audiences.

In doing so, they are building a digital archive of Sierra Leone's heritage and contemporary life, accessible to the world.

Domestically, their portfolio includes state functions, cultural festivals, community initiatives, and private sector campaigns, giving Sierra Leoneans fresh

pride in their image. Internationally, Spark Media's content has appeared on global platforms and in campaigns that showcase Sierra Leone as a destination of stunning coastlines, diverse wildlife, vibrant music, and welcoming people.

"Our vision at Spark Media has always been simple: to use the power of images and stories to present Sierra Leone as we know it - a land of creativity, beauty, and opportunity. We want Sierra Leoneans to be proud of their country and for the world to see what makes us unique," said Issadin Kamara, Managing Director of Spark Media.

Changing Perceptions

For decades, coverage of Sierra Leone was dominated by conflict, health crises, and poverty. Spark Media is helping to shift this narrative, consistently producing content that celebrates Sierra Leone's creativity and progress.

"Tourism depends on perception, and perception is shaped by images and stories. Spark Media's work is giving Sierra Leone a new image - one that inspires confidence, curiosity, and pride," added the Minister.

Building the Creative Economy

Beyond content creation, Spark Media plays a vital role in the growth of Sierra Leone's **creative economy**. By training and mentoring young photographers, videographers, and digital storytellers, they are nurturing a new generation of creatives. This not only provides employable skills but also strengthens the country's arts and media ecosystem.

As Kamara noted: "Every photograph, every video, every story we tell is a building block in creating a new Sierra Leonean narrative - one that belongs to us and one that we are proud to share with the world."

Sparkign Sierra Leone's Narrative on the Global Stage

Sierra Leone is a nation of immense promise, with a rich history and vibrant culture. To secure its place on the global stage, it must continue investing in telling its own story. Spark Media is at the forefront of this effort, using multimedia and digital innovation to show Sierra Leone as it truly is - beautiful, resilient, creative, and full of opportunity.

Their work is not only putting Sierra Leone on the map but ensuring the world sees it in its brightest and most authentic colours.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I. Travelling to Sierra Leone

Q: Do I need a passport or visa to enter Sierra Leone?

A: All visitors require a valid passport. It is also necessary to obtain a visa on arrival, at the cost of \$25 for African Union nationals and \$80 for passport holders of other countries. Nationals of the following countries are not charged for visas on arrival due to reciprocal agreements: Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Botswana, eSwatini, Fiji, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Malaysia, Mauritius, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Trinidad & Tobago, St Kitts and Nevis.

Q: How long can I stay in Sierra Leone?

A: Visas on arrival are valid for 30 days and can be extended for a further 30 days from the immigration department in Sierra Leone.

Q: Where can I get more information once I arrive at the airport?

A: There is a tourist information booth at Lungi International Airport in Freetown, open from 10 am to 9 pm.

Q: Are there any fees or taxes I will have to pay when I leave?

A: There is a \$25 exit fee that can be paid via Orange Money, Afrimoney or via the online platform www.securipass.sl

Q: What items are considered 'personal effects' by Sierra Leone Customs?

A: Under the customs regulation of Sierra Leone, personal effects are the personal baggage of visitors and articles contained therein, including clothes, accessories and other items for personal use that travelers may need during their time in the country.

Q: What do I have to declare?

A: It is not necessary to declare personal effects. Visitors can also take 200 cigarettes or 250 grams of tobacco into the country, and 1 L of alcohol (no age limit). Weapons require a permit from the Police Head Office in Freetown and will be held until the



permit is achieved, and pets can enter the country with valid health and vaccination certificates - please contact the nearest Sierra Leone Consulate or Embassy for information.

Q: Are there limits for currency?

A: Nationals are allowed to take 50,000 of local currency and of up to \$5000 worth of foreign currency, while non-residents are allowed up to 50,000 of local currency and an unlimited amount on foreign currency, that needs to be declared upon arrival.

Q: How long does it take to reach Sierra Leone from Europe and North America?

A: Sierra Leone is located in West Africa, bordering Guinea and Liberia. Lungi International Airport in Freetown has direct flights to several European airports including Brussels, Paris and Istanbul - travel time is 6-8 hours. To fly to North America it's necessary to connect at one of the airports mentioned above, Casablanca or Nairobi, and total flight time is between 16/20 hours.

Q: Which are the major airlines that connect Europe and North America to Sierra Leone?

A: Major airlines that fly into Sierra Leone include Air France, Brussels Airlines, Royal Air Morocco, Turkish Airlines and Kenya Airways.

II. Vitals

Q: What does 'Sierra Leone' mean?

A: The name Sierra Leone derives from Serra Leoa, Portuguese for Lioness Mountains, the name given by Portuguese colonizer Pedro da Sintra to the mountains of the Freetown Peninsula.

Q: What's the climate like?

A: Sierra Leone's climate is tropical and hot throughout the year, with maximum temperatures around 28/30°C (82/86°F) and minimum averages around 23/25°C (73/77°F) on the coast. Temperature are usually a few degrees higher in the interior of the country. Sierra Leone has two distinct seasons: the dry season, from November to April, and the dry season, from May to October, and torrential downpours are commonplace. December/February is also harmattan season, a hot wind blowing from the Sahara bringing haze and dry heat, with temperatures sometimes reaching 40°C (100°F).

Q: What clothes should I take?

A: Lightweight, casual clothing can be worn throughout the year. In the interior, it is recommended to wear long sleeves and pants to protect yourself from mosquitoes and other insects, especially at dusk.

Q: What is the voltage in Sierra Leone?

A: In Sierra Leone the standard voltage is 230 V and the frequency is 50 Hz.

Q: Is there electricity and Wi-Fi at all times?

A: Hotels in Freetown usually have reliable electricity and Wi-Fi, but destinations in remote areas may only have electricity on for a few hours a day. Wi-Fi connection outside Freetown ranges from spotty to non-existent.

Q: What is the official language of Sierra Leone?

A: The official language in Sierra Leone is English, but the most common is Krio, an English-based Creole language. Every ethnic group in Sierra Leone also speaks a different language, the



most common of which are Temne and Mende.

Q: What kind of accommodation is available in Sierra Leone?

A: In Freetown you can find a range of accommodation options ranging from luxury hotels to hostels and budget guesthouses. In the interior and remote areas there may only be a few accommodation options available, usually quite spartan.

Q: How expensive is accommodation in Freetown and around Sierra Leone?

A: In Freetown, accommodation ranges from \$25 for budget guesthouses to \$350 for a suite at the Country Lodge, the most luxurious hotel in town. In remote areas of the country accommodation prices also vary, but are usually offered in packages including guides, transport, activities and meals.

Q: How much do I need to spend on a meal in Freetown and around the country?

A: A traditional Sierra Leonean meal including rice and accompaniments can be as cheap as \$4/6, whereas a meal in an upscale Lebanese restaurant can cost up to \$50.

III. Safety and Medical Details

Q: Are there any vaccinations that I need to get before travelling to Sierra Leone?

A: Vaccination against yellow fever is required to enter the country, and visitors will be asked to show proof of vaccination upon arrival. Malaria can be a concern in the wet season, so it is recommended to carry anti-malarial medication.

Q: Is medical help available easily?

A: In Freetown and other major cities there are hospitals, but medical services in remote parts of the country can be hard to come by. All visitors are recommended to have travel insurance.

Some of the major hospitals in Freetown are:

- Choithram Memorial Hospital, Hill Station, tel +232 76 980000
- Life Care Hospital, 198 Wilkinson Road, tel +232 80 220220
- Freetown International Hospital, 28b Lumley Beach Road, +232 33 400400

Q: What are the precautions for drinking water?

A: It is recommended to only drink bottled water, and take water purification tablets or equipment when heading to remote areas where there may not be bottled water available.

Q: Are there any safety precautions that one must take in Sierra Leone?

A: Sierra Leone is a very safe country and people are warm and welcoming. The roads are not always in good conditions, so avoid travelling at night; hiring a local driver is also recommended. Avoid walking around Lumley Beach at night, especially if you're a woman, and always pay attention to your belongings in crowded areas.

IV. Travelling Around Sierra Leone

Q: What modes of transportation can I use to get around?

A: In Freetown, you can use rickshaws, poda poda (minibuses) or moto taxis. Between major cities you can take bush taxis and poda poda, but most visitors hire a 4x4 with a local driver to take them around the country.

V. Handling Money

Q: What's the exchange rate? Where can I exchange my money?

A: Exchange rates may vary, but at the time of writing \$100 were approximately equivalent to NLE 2,050. The best place to exchange money is the airport, offering the most competitive exchange rates, but you'll also find exchange offices around Freetown. Most large hotels will also offer exchange services, but rates may not be as convenient.

Q: Can I use my credit cards/ATM cards in Sierra Leone?

A: In Freetown and other major towns in Sierra Leone there are various ATM machines in operation accepting Visa and Mastercard. They can be found at the following banks: UBA, GTBank, Eco Bank, Rokel Commercial Bank, Sierra Leone Commercial Bank, Union Trust Bank, and Access Bank Sierra Leone.

Q: Are there any alternative methods to withdraw cash?

A: Yes, you can also get cash through Bank Transfer via Moneygram, Orange Money, Western Union, Afrimoney and RIA.

VI. Conveniences

Q: Where can I get a local SIM card?

A: You can easily pick up a local SIM card at your arrival at Lungi Airport. Sellers will approach you offering SIM cards from various companies, and you can also pay them to add airtime. There are four mobile phone operators in Sierra Leone: Orange, Africell, Sierratel and QCell.

Q: Can I get laundry done in Sierra Leone?

A: Most hotels offer laundry services.

Q: Are there convenience stores in Sierra Leone?

A: Yes, in Freetown you'll find well-stocked supermarkets and convenience stores with all the essentials you might need (including toilet paper, sanitary towels, tissues, snacks...). In smaller towns and remote areas you'll find small shops, but they usually only carry a few basic food items - so be sure to stock up before leaving Freetown.



VII. Activities and Culture

Q: What sorts of activities are available to me during my stay?

A: Depending on the length of their stay, visitors can engage in a number of activities. Here are some suggestions:

Visiting historic landmarks in Freetown and enjoying its vibrant nightlife

Exploring beaches in the Freetown Peninsula

Wildlife watching in national parks such as Tiwai or Gola Rainforest

Learning about colonial history in Bonthe Island

Seeing chimpanzees at Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary

Q: What festivals are held in Sierra Leone each year?

A: Several festivals take place in Sierra Leone throughout the year, which may be of interest to tourists. Here are some examples:

Ma Deng Beach Festival (December)

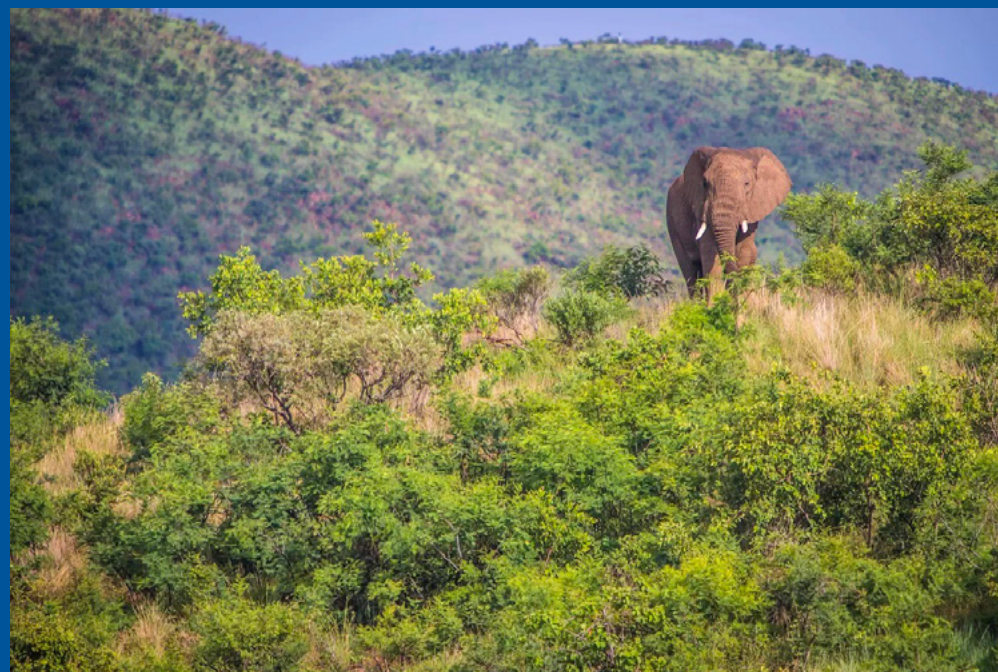
Afro- Caribbean Festival (December/ January)

Monument and Relics Commission Citizenship Conference Ceremony/ Tracing of DNA/Roots Tourism (April)

Eco Fest Sierra Leone (December)

Q: Which are the best places to go birding in Sierra Leone?

A: You can see over 600 bird species in Sierra Leone, including 14 species endemic to the Upper Guinea Forest. The best birdwatching opportunities in Sierra Leone can be found in the country's national parks and reserves, such as Gola, Kambui Hills, and Kangari Hills Forest Reserve.



Q: Which are the best places for wildlife spotting in Sierra Leone?

A: In Sierra Leone it's possible to see a variety of animals, including chimpanzees and other rare species such as pygmy hippos and Western red colobus monkeys. The national parks offering the best chances to see wildlife are Gola, Outamba-Kilimi, Mamunta Mayosso and Tiwai Island.



Women in Tourism Congress in Freetown drives innovation and financial inclusion for gender equality

Opening sentence should be: Sierra Leone hosted the Women in Tourism Regional Congress last year in Freetown, successfully gathering leaders, policymakers and tourism stakeholders to strategize on advancing gender equality within the industry. Under the theme "Beyond Empowerment to Education, Innovation and Finance Access," the three-day event emphasized moving past conventional empowerment efforts to equip women with the tools needed to thrive through education, technology, and financial support.

Elcia Grandcourt, the UN Tourism Regional Director for Africa, highlighted the event's significance as a continuation of the UN's agenda to promote inclusive growth through tourism. Reflecting on

the momentum established during the first Regional Congress in Accra, Ghana, in 2019, she reiterated the importance of positioning women at the heart of tourism's growth.

"Empowering women and youth through tourism is central to our vision for sustainable development," Grandcourt remarked. "This Congress has provided a vital platform for fostering connections and laying the groundwork for partnerships that champion gender equality, ensure equitable access to opportunities, and empower women to rise as leaders."

Grandcourt also praised Sierra Leone's Minister of Tourism for her leadership in advancing tourism's role in community development. She noted the country's



Zimbabwe's Minister of Tourism Barbara Rwodzi and Minister Nabeela Tunis

10-year Tourism Strategic Master Plan, which has created a foundation for growth through public-private partnerships and investment incentives. Additionally, Sierra Leone's national "Tourism for All" campaign, which promotes local participation and pride in the country's natural and cultural heritage, was commended as a key factor in transforming the sector.

"We commend the government and people of Sierra Leone for hosting this event and for their dedication to creating an equitable and inclusive tourism sector," Grandcourt added.



A focus on education, innovation & finance

A core part of the Congress agenda revolved around three pillars: education, innovation, and financial access—considered crucial for sustainable tourism development. Grandcourt emphasized that while women comprise 70% of the tourism workforce, many remain in low-wage roles. To break these barriers, she urged stakeholders to establish comprehensive educational initiatives. “Access to quality education enables women not only to secure better jobs but also to promote education within their communities, creating a cycle of



Minister Nabeela Tunis presents the Online scholarships offered by UN Tourism to the Vice President H.E. Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh

growth and development,” she said. On innovation, Grandcourt encouraged participants to think beyond traditional boundaries, integrating local knowledge and digital solutions to empower women entrepreneurs in developing unique tourism offerings. “We need to harness technology to craft experiences that reflect the richness of our cultures while placing women at the forefront of tourism leadership,” she urged.

Addressing financial inclusion, Grandcourt noted the persistent challenges women

face in accessing capital. “Despite their vast potential, women entrepreneurs in tourism continue to face significant financial barriers. The gender pay gap and limited access to loans are injustices that must be tackled head-on,” she stated.

To address this, the Congress hosted a Technical Workshop on Finance Access, where participants engaged with key industry players, including Mastercard, Invest Salone, and Mercury International. The workshop offered essential business management tools and explored innovative financial solutions tailored to women’s needs.

Grandcourt also highlighted the value of mentorship programs, calling for seasoned professionals to support aspiring women leaders in the tourism sector. “Building a tourism industry that reflects our diversity requires the collective efforts of both men and women,” she noted, encouraging male allies to back gender equality initiatives.

Concluding her remarks, Grandcourt left participants with a call to action to embrace the principles of education, innovation, and equitable finance access. “Together, we can forge meaningful partnerships and create a future where tourism truly serves as a force for inclusive development,” she said.

The Congress, held from 29-31 October 2024, featured panel discussions, networking sessions and policy dialogues aimed at shaping the future of Africa’s tourism industry through the lens of gender equality and innovation.



TOP TEN ATTRACTIONS in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has a variety of attractions that draw tourists to the country. Here are brief descriptions of the ten most visited destinations.

Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary:

Located near Freetown, this sanctuary is dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of chimpanzees. It offers visitors a chance to see these amazing animals up close.



River No.2 Beach:

Known for its beautiful white sand and clear waters, River No.2 Beach is a popular destination for both locals and tourists looking to relax and enjoy the beach.



Tiwai Island:

Tiwai Island is a wildlife sanctuary in the Moa River, known for its diverse flora and fauna, including various primate species. Visitors can take guided tours to explore the island's natural beauty.

Bunce Island:

This historic site was a major hub for the transatlantic slave trade. Today, it serves as a poignant reminder of this dark period in history and attracts visitors interested in learning about Sierra Leone's past.



Warawara Mountains in Kabala:

The Warawara Mountains offer stunning natural landscapes and opportunities for hiking and trekking. The area is known for its lush greenery and picturesque vistas.



The Bintumani Mountains:

The Bintumani Mountains are the highest peak in Sierra Leone and offer adventurous treks for hikers seeking stunning panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.



Banana Island:

This picturesque island off the coast of Sierra Leone is known for its pristine beaches, crystal-clear waters, and opportunities for snorkeling and diving among vibrant marine life.



Sierra Leone National Museum:

Located in Freetown, the museum showcases the country's rich cultural heritage through its exhibits on traditional arts, crafts, and history.



Lumley Beach nightlife:

Lumley Beach in Freetown comes alive at night with a vibrant nightlife scene, featuring beach bars, restaurants, and live music venues where visitors can enjoy local cuisine and entertainment.



Freetown historic city and York village:

Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, is a bustling city with a rich history dating back to the colonial era. York Village, located near Freetown, offers a glimpse into the country's past with its preserved architecture and cultural sites.

Tourism Calendar of Events



SAT 25 OCT.	INTER UNIVERSITY DEBATE COMPETITION State Hall of Parliament of Sierra Leone	FRI 10 OCT.	NIGHT OF ECHOES AND RHYTHMS The View - Hotel, Restaurant & Sky Lounge
SAT 11 OCT.	INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD 159 Circular Road, Freetown, Sierra Leone	THURS-SAT 27-30 NOV.	SIERRA LEONE NATIONAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP SUMMIT 2025 Sierra Leone House of Parliament
SAT. 01 NOV.	DJ & HYPEMAN BATTLE 2025 12 Regent Road off Circular Road, Freetown, Sierra Leone	FRI 07 NOV.	BIRD'S EYE VIEW ALBUM RELEASE CONCERT The View - Hotel, Restaurant & Sky Lounge
MON 13 OCT.	14 DAYS OF FASTING AND PRAYERS Doherty street, Off Murray Town, Freetown, Sierra Leone	FRI 31 OCT.	MANUMIT FEST 2.0 Shell Old Road, Freetown
SAT. 15 NOV.	TRENCHES VIBE Furniture Mayeme Allentown Sierra Leone	FRI 31 OCT.	COMMUNITY FEST Freetown Sierra Leone
SAT. 15 NOV.	ALL MAN USEFUL MUSICAL CONCERTS Kambia Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone	SUN. 02 NOV.	INTER MASJID KIDS PUBLIC LECTURE Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa
FRI 26 DEC.	BUMBUNA WATERFALL CELEBRATION Sierra Leone Police Force	SAT 18 OCT.	SLEDU FOR THE ENTERTAINMENT HEALTH WALK 2025 Cotton Tree Freetown
FRI-SAT. 14-15 NOV.	ONE LIFE FEST VOL 2 51 Soldier Street, Freetown, Sierra Leone	FRI 02 JAN.	HOUSE PARTY Juba, Freetown Sierra Leone
THUR 16 OCT.	RAW TALENT YEEZY FLASH Regent Road, Freetown, Sierra Leone	FRI 21 NOV.	CITY FEST 3.0 59 fourahbay road, Freetown, Sierra Leone
FRI 24 OCT.	CARNIVAL Grafton Freetown	SAT 15 NOV.	EVITA GAMES AND BRUNCH Rawdon street, Freetown, Sierra Leone
FRI 28 NOV.	POSH COOKERY FOOTBALL . MARADE MAN VS PALAMPO COOKERY EATER 50 Berwick Street, Freetown	THUR 16 OCT.	MUSICAL PERFORMANCES 27 Malahma Thomas street, Freetown, Sierra Leone

Tourism Calendar of Events



SAT 22 NOV.	LITTLE HEARTS FOR JESUS KIDS FESTIVAL Sscamp	FRI 19 DEC.	BULLOM AWARDS SHOW Lungi, Sierra Leone
FRI 21 NOV.	AWUJOH CARNIVAL COL 3 Berwick Street	SAT 18 OCT.	ANNUAL NATIONAL AWARENESS WALK RUN CYCLE 2025 Freetown, Sierra Leone
SAT. 01 NOV.	DJ & HYPEMAN BATTLE 2025 12 Regent Road off Circular Road, Freetown, Sierra Leone	SUN 26 OCT.	PARTY WITH RAMISH 50 Bai Bureh Road
MON 13 OCT.	14 DAYS OF FASTING AND PRAYERS Doherty street, Off Murray Town, Freetown, Sierra Leone	FRI-SUN 07-09 NOV.	SOLACE DMV CARNIVAL DECEMBER 5TH AND 19TH PLACE 19A FERGUSON STREET FREETOWN SIERRA LEONE 19A Ferguson Street btw Pike St and Dillette St Junction
SAT. 06-07 DEC.	QUR'AN COMPETITION AND PUBLIC LECTURES Freetown, Sierra Leone, Wellington	SAT 29 NOV.	COME WILD HOUSE PARTY Wilberforce, Sierra Leone
FRI. 26 DEC.	TIKTOK FEST AND AWARD Freetown, Sierra Leone	SUN. 03-07 NOV.	5 DAYS TRANSFORMATION CRUSADE 2025 102b Circular Road, Freetown, Sierra Leone
TUE-SUN 25-30 NOV.	ONE NATION REGGAE FESTIVAL Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone		

SIERRA LEONE NATIONAL EVENTS FOR 2025-2026

1 Jan	Thu	New Year's Day
18 Feb	Wed	Armed Forces Day
8 Mar	Sun	International Women's Day
9 Mar	Mon	International Women's Day Holiday
20 Mar	Fri	Eid al-Fitr
3 Apr	Fri	Good Friday
6 Apr	Mon	Easter Monday
27 Apr	Mon	Independence Day
1 May	Fri	Labour Day
27 May	Wed	Eid al-Adha
25 Aug	Tue	Prophet Muhammad's Birthday
25 Dec	Fri	Christmas Day
26 Dec	Sat	Boxing Day

OTHERS WITH TOURISM AROMA

17th – 23rd December 2025	Gbamgbaode Festival (Week Activities)
25th – 30th November 2025	One Nation Reggae Festival (Shared Roots, Shared Rhythm)
Date To Be Confirmed - December	Meet & Greet Bbq
20th – 21st December 2025	Madeng
28th December 2025	Enjoy Sierra Leone – 5th All White Boat Party – S.L Edition
Date To Be Confirmed	Eco Fest
Date To Be Confirmed	Dance For Health (Exercise Session)
April 2026	Sierra Leone Tourism Gastronomy -UNTourism.



One Nation Reggae Festival Marks Sierra Leone’s Return as a Cultural Heritage Hub

Sierra Leone’s One Nation Reggae Festival returns this November with a renewed focus on cultural connection and tourism promotion. Set to take place from 25-30 November 2025 in Freetown, the festival has been repositioned as “Sierra Leone’s Grand Homecoming”, a cultural bridge linking Sierra Leone and the Caribbean through music, heritage, and shared identity.

The upcoming edition follows a successful preview held on 1 August 2025 at the Family Kingdom Resort along Aberdeen Beach Road. That event, organized under the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs’ “2025 Year of Ecotourism” initiative in collaboration with Olive’s Garden and Reggae Union Sierra Leone, brought together local residents, members of the diaspora, and international visitors. It featured performances from Reggae Union Sierra Leone, Alonso, and other renowned artists.

In attendance were the Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Hon. Nabeela Farida Tunis, the Deputy Minister, Kadija Ahene Kamara, and the Permanent Secretary, Judith Jones, alongside staff of the Ministry and its subvented agencies. In her remarks, Minister Tunis reaffirmed the Ministry’s commitment to fostering inclusive and culturally enriching platforms that unify Sierra Leoneans while promoting the nation’s touristic identity. She described reggae as a universal sound of peace and resilience, aligning with the goals of the “Year of Ecotourism” campaign.

The festival’s repositioning introduces a broader cultural narrative that blends the rhythms of Bubu, Maringa, and Roots Reggae, symbolizing unity, heritage, and empowerment. It aims to showcase Sierra Leone’s evolving cultural identity and strengthen links with the Caribbean and African diaspora.

The One Nation Reggae Festival will unfold in two major phases:

- Pre-Festival Teaser and Launch Party (Early November) – An opening activation designed to generate national awareness and anticipation.
- Main Festival Week (25-30 November) – A full-scale celebration featuring music, art, gastronomy, and cultural exhibitions.

The main festival will feature performances by Arqane, Lucan, Jah Thunder, DJ SKS, Charles Hyatt, and Awadi, among others. The program will include cultural showcases, craft markets, and culinary experiences designed to highlight Sierra Leonean and Caribbean artistry.

According to the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, the One Nation Reggae Festival forms part of its broader vision to position culture as a key driver of sustainable tourism growth, job creation, and diaspora engagement. The initiative will involve inter-agency collaboration and partnerships with the private sector to ensure safety, inclusivity, and measurable community benefit.

The Ministry has indicated that the festival is expected to attract visitors from across Africa and the diaspora. The event is designed to complement the country’s ongoing tourism development strategy, highlighting Sierra Leone’s capacity to host large-scale, culturally rooted events that contribute to national growth.

Preparations are currently underway with an emphasis on effective coordination, logistics, and community participation. The Ministry has underscored its commitment to ensuring that the festival’s outcomes extend beyond the stage, benefiting local businesses, artists, and cultural entrepreneurs.

As Sierra Leone continues its “Year of Ecotourism” campaign, the One Nation Reggae Festival stands as a significant initiative to enhance the nation’s image as a vibrant, welcoming destination for cultural exchange, artistic celebration, and tourism investment.



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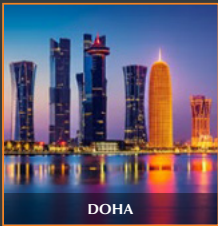
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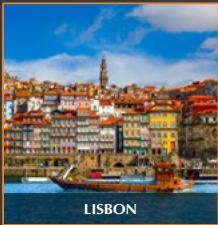
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Portugal | France | Italy



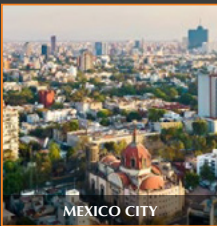
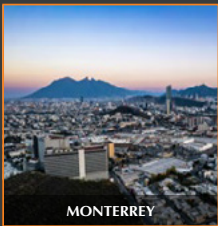
ITB BERLIN

03 - 05 March 2026
Germany



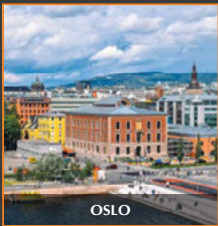
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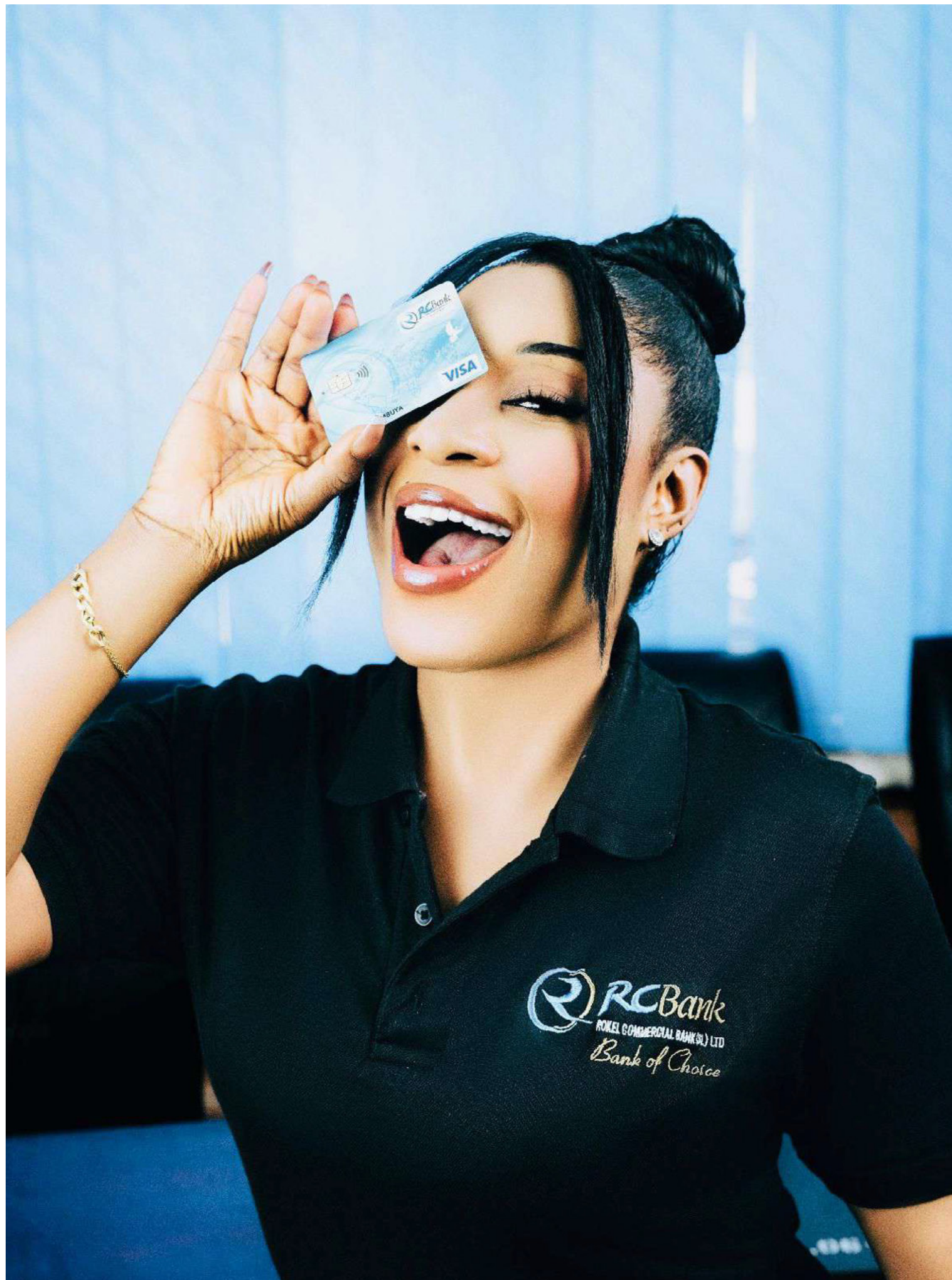
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