

Tiwai Heritage Trail

Discover South-Eastern Sierra Leone's Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage

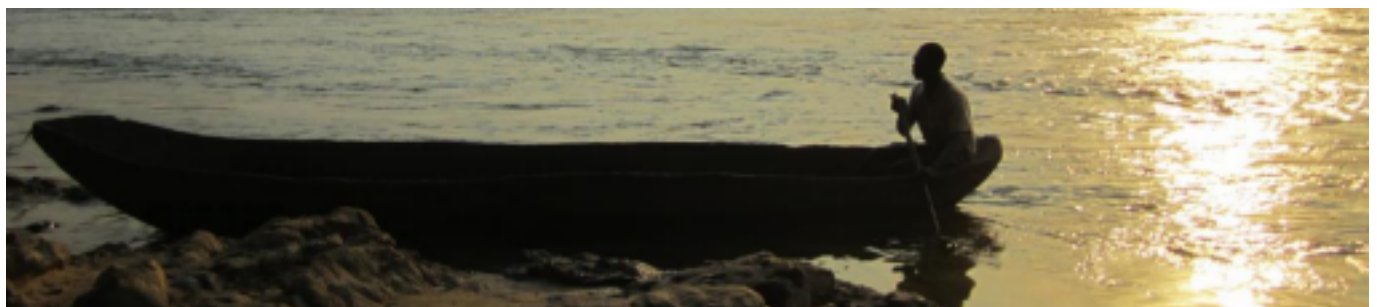


Try your hand at paddling upstream Hike through wild scenery

Description

The Tiwai Heritage Trail will introduce you to the fascinating Mende culture and history, as well as the rich and unique flora & fauna found in the remnants of the ancient Upper Guinea Rainforest, in South-Eastern Sierra Leone. Explore the region's heritage by hiking on bush trails, crossing rivers by dugout canoe and hiking through thick tropical forest. A perfect mix of adventure, culture and nature!

- ✓ Visit [Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary](#), home to 135+ bird species, 11 primate species (7 of which are rare), 700+ plant species (many of which are medicinal), as well as the wild West African Chimpanzee and elusive Pygmy Hippo.
- ✓ Visit and stay in local communities. Learn about the inhabitants daily lives and try your hand at traditional activities (e.g. country cloth weaving, basket making, wood carving)
- ✓ Explore ancient settlements, 'spirit' worship stones, libation pouring sites, caves, resting places of legendary Mende warriors, and other fascinating local cultural and historical sites
- ✓ Enjoy the area's relaxing pace by lying in hammocks, listening to the birds chirp, watching the butterflies flutter by, and by immersing yourself in your natural surroundings.
- ✓ Travel the traditional way by hiking along winding bush paths, through rice fields and over bamboo bridges. Paddle across rivers and tributaries, trek through dense jungle and rest by small waterfalls



Tiwai Heritage Trail Map





Visit hidden beauty spots Witness cultural performances

What to bring

You will be walking along bush trails in humid conditions for about 1-2 hours on average. There will obviously be regular rest/rehydration stops between the villages you will be visiting, but it is worth bearing in mind that the lighter your bag is, the more comfortable you will be so that you can appreciate the experience as much as possible. Also, some of the villages may sell small arts & crafts; therefore you may want to leave some space for souvenirs. Here is a general guide to the items we recommend you put in your rucksack (you can tick the box):

Essentials

- 1 x pair of walking shoes/boots
- 1 x flip-flops (for relaxing and showering)
- 1 x medium rucksack (45l max.)
- 1 x water carrier (1.5l recommended)
- 1 x small first aid kit (for possible blisters)
- 1 x medium sized dry-bag (for river crossings)

Clothes

- 2 x t-shirts (one day-time, one evening)
- 2 x thin long sleeve shirt (for bush walking)
- 1 x hiking trousers (to stop the insects biting)
- 1 x hiking shorts (or trouser/shorts combination)
- 4 x underwear
- 4 x hiking socks
- 1 x Sun hat or cap (against the sun or to fan)
- 1 x swim-wear (for impromptu swims)

Sleeping

- 1 x pair of earplugs (no disturbance)
- 1 x light clothes
- 1 x torchlight / headtorch
- 1 x Roll matt
- 1 x light sleeping bag or cotton liner

Hygiene

- 1 x micro-fibre towel
- 1 x small toothpaste & toothbrush
- 1 x small toiletry bag (soap, flannel, shampoo)
- 1 x small medical kit (anti-malarials, other essential medication)
- 1 x toilet roll (if you don't just want to use water)
- 1 x drinking cup
- 1 x Mosquito repellent (preferably DEET)
- If available:* water purification tablets (we will be drinking local well water – it is very nice and clean, but for peace of mind you may want these)

Creature comforts

We will be bringing small amounts of coffee, sugar, tea and a flask so that you can have hot drinks in the morning, but you may want to stock up on 'creature comforts' before you embark on this journey of discovery. The usual rule of thumb during the development of this tour was '1 x luxury item'... We look forward to learning what yours is.

Note: USD dollars is the easiest currency to exchange for Leones (the local currency). Make sure you bring your pocket money in USD – When exchanging, make sure that you get small currency to be able to make purchases in the local communities e.g. 100 – 200 – 500 – 1000 – 2000 Leones



Responsible Tourism

Why did we choose to develop a heritage trail? Well it is simple really. First, we want to share the fascinating Mende culture with you, and introduce you to the Sierra Leone rural way of life; we want to give you the opportunity to experience the area's natural beauty, an area that has recently been put on the tentative list to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site; and we want to raise your adrenaline levels up a bit with some mild adventure through ancient lands rich in culture and history.

Second, our goal is to make the area surrounding [Tiwai Island Wildlife Sanctuary](#) a better place to live in for the local communities by creating opportunities for development and net benefit gains (economic, social and environmental), and to make the area a better place to visit for future visitors by using sustainability principles; all this through tourism.

Responsible Tourism works on a simple principle: take responsibility for your actions whilst learning and sharing knowledge through unforgettable experiences. Remember, this land is the land of the Mende people, and you are their guests.

Here are some common sense practices that can help you be a responsible tourist:

- ✓ Respect the local culture and customs (e.g. try your best to eat with your right hand – more info below)
- ✓ Ask permission to take photos – it could build a relationship and make for a better 'snap'
- ✓ Be mindful of prices and currency – bargaining is part of the culture, but don't go too far
- ✓ Ask the guide for information if you doubt of anything – it's part of the learning experience
- ✓ Stick to the bush trails to not disturb local wildlife or ruin somebody's crops, unless if asked to by the guide
- ✓ Keep your non-biodegradable litter with you - dispose of it in an appropriate place
- ✓ Keep your bad habits to yourself – most of us have them, but we don't want to share them with the kids
- ✓ Give gifts (e.g. sweets or school material) through the right channels – children pick up begging very easily



Adventure across streams Learn of local history and legends from the elders

Mende culture & customs

The Mende culture is very rich and **it is said that the Mende people travelled from the distant lands of western Sudan**, in waves, between the 2nd and 16th Century, to settle in the East and South East of what is now known as Sierra Leone.

There are four distinct Mende sub-tribes that stretch from Kailahun district, through Kono and Kenema districts, and to Pujehun district, essentially following the course of the mighty Moa River. Each of these sub-tribes have their own dialect, but **the first Mende written language, 'Ki-ka-ku', was invented in a village, called Vaama, just down the road from Tiwai**, by a man called **Kisimi Kamara** (c. 1890–1962).

Before the introduction of Islam, the Mende people were predominantly Animists, and remnants of these beliefs still continue to this day in the form of Secret Societies; the two major ones are called 'Bondo' (Women's Society) and 'Poro' (Men's Society). Devil dances are also a part of everyday life, and usually happen around times of harvest (November-December) and community celebrations (weddings, Easter, etc...). However, it is advised not to ask questions about secret societies; **in Mende culture, the greatest sin of all is to divulge the secrets of their society.**

The Mende are farmers and fishermen. They are extremely proud of their land, and rely on it heavily for sustenance and livelihoods. If a harvest is not fruitful, the whole family will suffer as a consequence. On the Tiwai Heritage Trail, you may come across local villagers in their farms; why not ask the guide if you can go and observe their activities. Fishing is also a form of bread-winning, and local fishermen are experts at finding the right places to catch the biggest and tastiest fish. **There are tales of 4ft long cat-fish, for which you need 2-3 fully-grown men to catch!**

The Mende live in hierarchical societies. The town chief has the final word, and is counselled by the Chair Lady and the Youth Leader, along with a number of Elders. Elders are highly respected and their words of wisdom are heavily relied upon for making the final decision. You will experience this society quite closely and will have a chance to interact with chiefs and elders along your journey. **Don't forget to pack a few Kola Nuts in your pack to give to the village authorities; they will greatly appreciate your gesture of respect.**



Group photo at the Moa River



Witness traditional woodcarving



Help 'Pa Foday' weave Country Cloth in Boma village



Try your hand at 'Gari' making at the Kambama cassava processing center

Useful information

The following tid-bits of information can help you tremendously to immerse yourself into the Mende culture, stay safe along the bush trails and in dugout canoes, and most importantly allow you to experience your journey as much as possible so that you can come away from it having achieved what you set out to achieve.

- ✓ When eating from the same plate as others (this will most likely happen), please remember that eating with your left hand is frowned upon. People do not use toilet paper here, and therefore do not expect you to. The left hand, with water and soap, is the toilet paper.
- ✓ Your guides are just that: guides, and therefore they will be a source of information for your surroundings as well as local customs, and will advise you on your health and safety along the trail. Listen to their instructions, and if you don't understand, ask them questions. They will be happy to help!
- ✓ Gifts are always welcome in this very poor part of the world, but be mindful that there are channels through which these gifts (whether it be clothes, pens & paper, or even tips) should go through to mitigate the development of bad habits (e.g. begging). Always ask your guide for more information.
- ✓ Greetings are part and parcel of the culture, and it is recommended that you learn a small amount of Mende before you start the journey. A Mende Language manual is available to print if you require it (we try and limit our printing), but here are some basic greetings to get you started.

Mende	Krio	English
Ka hui ye na?	Ow di bodi?	How is your health?
Ka in goma.	Tenk god tenki	Thanks be to god
Bi e yi?	Ow yew slip?	How did you sleep? (morning)
Bi e luvei?	Ow di day?	How was your day? (afternoon or evening)
Bi le yi? Or Be da la?	Wat ena yo nam?	What is your name?
Nya la a [your name]	Mi nam i [your name]	My name is [your name]
Bi sie	Tenki	Thank you (said after each greeting)
Bai ka! Or Bai ka we!	Tenki! Or Tenki Padi!	Thank you! Or Thank you friend!
Be va [location]?	Ow di [location]?	How is [location] (Tiwai is most likely)

Note: Most questions are answered by “Ka in goma”. Try it and you will quickly learn how to interact well with the local villagers.

Remember

This will be a new experience for you, but also for the local communities you visit. Bear this in mind when you journey along the road less traveled. You will be setting precedents and therefore you have a responsibility to set realistic and sustainable expectations.

Finally, this tour is supposed to be an experience in itself, and therefore luxury was the last thing that we thought of when organizing the Tiwai Heritage Trail. We concentrated more on making you feel welcome, comfortable in the company of others, and to allow you to immerse yourself in the area you are visiting whether you are looking for adventure, culture or nature. Be prepared to feel a little challenged at times, to not always have your beauty sleep, but to feel like you have really experienced something authentic, new, exciting, meaningful and unique.

The boring stuff (disclaimer)

Liability

This is not a tour that is organized by a tour operator (yet), therefore the organizers and facilitators cannot be held liable for any injuries, accidents, ailments or misdemeanors that may (even though unlikely) occur during the course of the Tiwai Heritage Trail. Nevertheless, your guide will make sure that your health and safety is considered as the highest of priorities and is trained in basic first aid skills.

Insurance

We expect that all participants in this tour are owners of fully comprehensive insurance policies and will be carrying their details with them in case of any mishaps that may befall them. Your guide will have a list of local emergency numbers to call just in case there is a need.

Malaria

The area we will be traveling through is known for being malarial, and therefore we expect you to be carrying prophylactics with you to ensure that you prevent malarial infections. We will not have any spare antimalarials on us, so make sure you pack your own.

Your experience

We hope that, through the Tiwai Heritage Trail, we meet your expectations in terms of the experience that you are looking for; however our goal is for this trail to be a work in progress in which your feedback plays an important role in teaching the community members, guides and organizers involved in the trail's development about how yours, and future participants' experiences, can be improved. We therefore hope that after your departure, you will be in touch to let us know how it all went.

Fitness

Even though the Tiwai Heritage Trail is not a difficult trekking experience, we are aware that the humid climate makes the walking slightly tougher. We will make sure that there are sufficient rest/rehydration breaks but it is important to be mindful about keeping yourself rehydrated. For this trail, you will require to be able to walk on uneven terrain for 2 hours straight whilst carrying a 45l. rucksack. Please bear this in mind when expressing your interest to join the tour, for yours and others enjoyment and comfort.

And finally...

This trail is about having fun, meeting new people, experiencing new things together, and participating in a model of tourism that aims to be responsible and create opportunities for local communities. We therefore hope that you will come on this trail with open minds, open hearts and open to building new relationships; if not, you probably won't enjoy yourself.