

Liberia

After almost two decades of war, Liberia – a lush, rainforested country draped across West Africa’s southern flank – seems at last to have found some breathing room. With Africa’s first woman president at the helm, the peace, while still fragile, is holding and Liberians have thrown themselves with gusto into the work of rebuilding their shattered land.

If Liberia does stabilise and open up for travel, it will offer intrepid adventurers a fascinating glimpse into what was previously a wonderfully hospitable and fascinatingly enigmatic society. Liberia’s artistic traditions – especially carved masks, dance and storytelling – rivalled those of anywhere on the continent, and traditional culture was strong. This was especially true in the country’s interior, where secret initiation societies played a central role in growing up, and today still serve as important repositories of traditional knowledge and life skills.

Liberia’s natural attractions are equally impressive. The country’s dense, humid rainforests – some of the most extensive in West Africa – are alive with the screeching and twittering of hundreds of birds, who are kept company by forest elephants, pygmy hippos and other wildlife padding around the forest floor. Along the coast, deserted white-sand beaches alternate with humid river deltas and tranquil tidal lagoons, while inland plateaus rise to verdant hill country on the borders of Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea.

For now though, most of this cultural and natural wealth remains inaccessible to visitors, and independent travel outside of Monrovia is not considered safe. Expect changes soon, but meanwhile get an update on local security conditions before setting your plans.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 111,370 sq km
- **ATMs** None
- **Borders** Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone
- **Budget** From US\$50 per day
- **Capital** Monrovia
- **Languages** English and more than 20 indigenous languages
- **Money** Liberian dollar; US\$1 = L\$49
- **Population** 3.3 million
- **Seasons** Dry (November to April), wet (May to October)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 231; international access code ☎ 00
- **Time** GMT/UTC
- **Visa** Costs US\$50 to US\$100; must be obtained in advance



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Silver Beach** (p386) Relax on this surf-pounded and palm-fringed stretch of sand just minutes from central Monrovia.
- **Sapo National Park** (p387) Wander under the lush, humid canopy of one of West Africa’s last remaining rainforests.
- **Monrovia** (p386) Stroll through central Monrovia, seeing what street vendors have on offer and getting a feel for the beat on the street.
- **Liberians** (p385) Mingle with the locals over a plate of *fufu* and sauce and a cold Club beer, or cheering on the Lone Stars at a soccer match.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Monrovia is one of Africa’s two wettest capitals (Freetown in Sierra Leone is the other), with annual rainfall averaging more than 4500mm here and along the coast. Temperatures range from 23°C to 32°C in Monrovia, and slightly higher inland, though high humidity often makes it feel much warmer.

The best time to visit is during the November to April dry season.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days:** Three days is just enough time to get a taste of Monrovia (p386), including relaxing at the nearby beaches. In town, don’t miss strolling through Waterside Market (p386) and enjoying a sundowner at Mamba Point (p387).

HOW MUCH?

- **Souvenir basket** US\$2
- **Kilo of bananas** US\$0.40
- **Fufu and soup** US\$2.80
- **Short taxi ride** US\$0.50
- **Soda** US\$0.50

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$3.20
- **1L bottled water** US\$1
- **Large bottle of Club beer** US\$1.50
- **Souvenir T-shirt** You’ll be lucky if you find one!
- **Potato greens sauce with rice** US\$0.75

WARNING

Liberia’s peace is still fragile, and the country is not geared for tourism. In general, independent travel outside of Monrovia is not yet possible. Before setting off, get a briefing from people who know the situation; embassies and resident expats are the best sources.

Given the current travel restrictions, this chapter was updated as a ‘desk update’ from afar, with the generous assistance of various people in Liberia. We’ve tried to make it as accurate as possible, but the perishable information should be treated as a general guide, rather than hard facts.

- **One Week** Security situation permitting, Sapo National Park (p387) is the obvious destination. Allow at least five days for the round trip.

HISTORY

After being populated for a mere few thousand years, Liberia struck American abolitionists as an ideal place to resettle freed slaves. In 1822, the first group stepped off the boat at Providence Island, Monrovia. They saw themselves as part of a mission to bring civilisation and Christianity to Africa, but their numbers were soon depleted by tropical diseases and hostile indigenous residents, who resented being dominated by the new arrivals.

The surviving settlers, known as Americo-Liberians, declared an independent republic in 1847. Yet, fatally for the new republic’s future, citizenship excluded indigenous peoples, and every president until 1980 was of American freed-slave ancestry. For nearly a century, Liberia foundered economically and politically while the indigenous population suffered under a form of forced labour that would have been called slavery anywhere else.

During William Tubman’s presidency (1944–71) the tides began to change. Thanks to the image of stability that Tubman was able to project, foreign investment flowed into the country, and for several decades Liberia sustained sub-Saharan Africa’s highest growth rate. Firestone and other American companies made major investments, and Tubman earned praise as the ‘maker of modern Liberia’.

Yet the influx of new money exacerbated existing social inequalities, and hostilities

between Americo-Liberians and the indigenous population worsened. While indigenous Liberians were finally granted the right to vote in 1963, the concession was too little too late. The government continued to be controlled by about a dozen inter-related Americo-Liberian families, and corruption was rampant.

Coup d'Etat & Years of Darkness

Resentment began to simmer, and in April 1980 William Tubert (who had succeeded Tubman as president) was overthrown and killed in a coup led by uneducated, master-sergeant Samuel Doe. For the very first time, Liberia had a ruler who wasn't an Americo-Liberian, giving the indigenous population a taste of political power and an opportunity

for vengeance. The 28-year-old Doe shocked the world by ordering 13 ex-ministers to be publicly executed on a beach in Monrovia.

While the coup gave power to the indigenous population, it was widely condemned regionally and internationally. Relations with neighbouring African states soon thawed. However, the post-coup flight of capital, coupled with ongoing corruption, caused Liberia's economy to plummet.

Doe struggled to maintain his grip on power, but to no avail. Opposition forces began to gain strength and intertribal fighting broke out.

Civil War

On Christmas Eve 1989, several hundred rebels led by Charles Taylor (former head of

the Doe government's procurement agency) launched an invasion from Côte d'Ivoire. Doe's troops arrived shortly thereafter, indiscriminately killing hundreds of unarmed civilians, raping women and burning villages. By mid-1990, Taylor's forces controlled most of the countryside. Much of Monrovia was under the forces of rebel leader Prince Johnson, and Doe was holed up in his mansion.

Liberia lay in ruins. Refugees streamed into neighbouring countries, US warships were anchored off the coast and a West African peacekeeping force (Ecomog) was despatched in an attempt to keep the warring factions apart. Refusing to surrender, Doe and many of his supporters were finally wiped out by Johnson's forces. With both Johnson and Taylor claiming the presidency, Ecomog forces installed their own candidate, Amos Sawyer, as head of an interim government. Taylor's forces continued to occupy the countryside, while remnants of Doe's army and Johnson's followers were encamped within Monrovia.

Following a series of failed peace accords interspersed with factional fighting, 1996 elections brought Charles Taylor to the presidency with a large majority, in large part because many Liberians feared the consequences if he lost.

Yet the situation remained tenuous. By late 1998, all former faction leaders except Taylor were living in exile, and power was increasingly consolidated in the presidency. In 1999, rebel-led warfare broke out near the Guinea border, followed by devastating outbreaks of fighting in 2002 and 2003. Finally, in August 2003, with rebel groups controlling most of the country, and under heavy pressure from the international community, Charles Taylor went into exile in Nigeria. A transitional government was established, leading to elections in late 2005.

Liberia Today

In a hotly contested run-off vote between former World Bank economist Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and international soccer star George Weah, Johnson-Sirleaf won the presidency, thereby also becoming Africa's first female president. Since then, she has been overseeing Liberia's reconstruction with aplomb. But the tasks facing the country are massive: completion of the disarmament process and refugee resettlement; solidification of the still-fragile peace and rebuilding government, economy and infrastructure. Yet most Liberians are up-

beat. While optimism for the future is tempered by the tragic realities of the country's recent past, the future, on the whole, is looking much brighter these days.

CULTURE

If there's any word that characterises Liberians, it's resilience. Here, in this war-ravaged land, almost half of the Liberians were displaced from their homes during the long years of conflict, and many witnessed unspeakable atrocities. Yet despite all the suffering, there's a remarkable air of peppiness, especially on the streets of Monrovia, and a sense of cautious hope that the time has finally come to start rebuilding.

Want to take a peek inside a typical home? It's not such an easy task these days, as most Liberians are just starting to rebuild theirs. But slowly the rhythms of daily life are returning. Produce from rural areas is making its way to Monrovia's markets, returning residents are seeking zinc to roof their newly rebuilt houses, and the hospitality for which Liberians are renowned is alive and well.

PEOPLE

The vast majority of Liberians are of indigenous origin, belonging to more than a dozen major tribal groups, including the Kpelle in the centre, the Bassa around Buchanan and the Mandingo (Mandinka) in the north. Americo-Liberians account for barely 5% of the total. There's also an economically powerful Lebanese community in Monrovia.

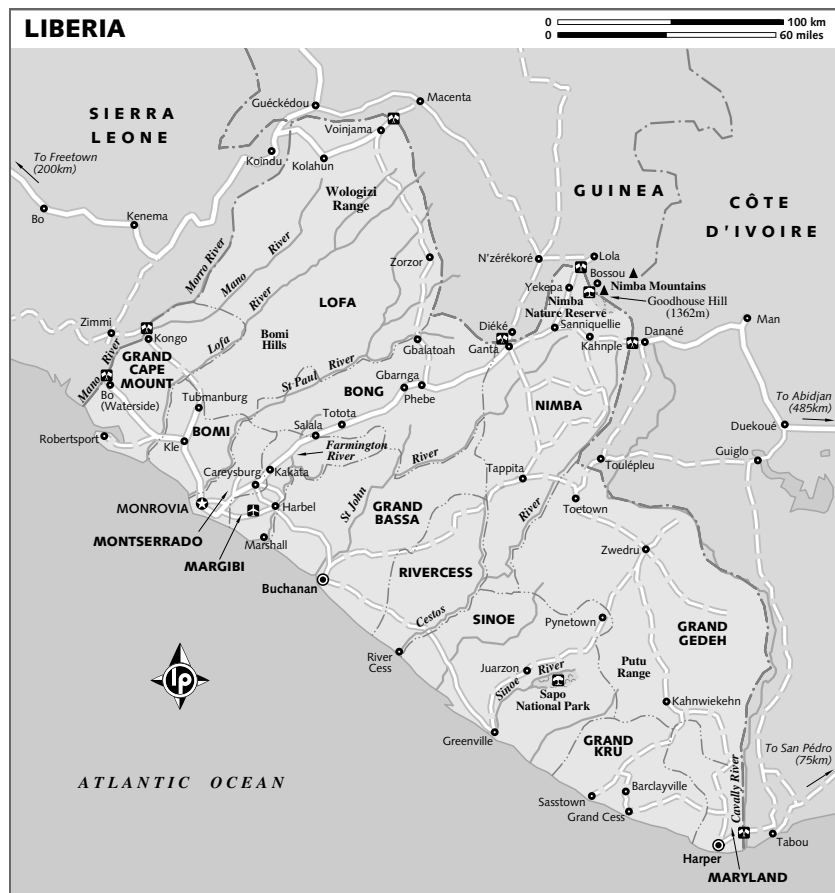
Close to half of the population are Christians and about 20% are Muslim, with the remainder following traditional religions.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Liberia has long been famed for its masks, especially those of the Gio in the northeast, including the *gunyege* mask (which shelters a power-giving spirit), and the chimpanzee-like *kagle* mask. The Bassa around Buchanan are renowned for their *gela* masks, which often have elaborately carved coiffures, always with an odd number of plaits.

ENVIRONMENT

Liberia's low-lying coastal plain is intersected by marshes, creeks and tidal lagoons, and bisected by at least nine major rivers. Inland is a densely forested plateau rising to low mountains in the northeast. The highest point is



SECRET SOCIETIES

Liberia is famous for its secret societies, called *poro* for men and *sande* for women. They each have rites of passage and other ceremonies that are used to educate young people in tribal ways, folklore and general life skills, and they have played an important role in preserving traditional culture. In the countryside you may see initiates, who are easily recognised by their white-painted faces and bodies, and their shaved heads.

Zoes (*poro* society leaders) also wield significant political influence, settling disputes, levying punishments and controlling the activities of traditional medicinal practitioners. A village chief who doesn't have the support of the *poro* on important decisions can expect trouble enforcing those decisions.

Goodhouse Hill (1362m), in the Nimba range bordering Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.

Liberia's rainforests, which now cover about 40% of the country, comprise a critical part of the Guinean Forests of West Africa Hotspot – an exceptionally biodiverse area stretching across 11 countries in the region. In 2003 the Nimba Nature Reserve was declared – contiguous with the Guinean-Côte d'Ivoirian Mont Nimba Strict Nature Reserve (a Unesco World Heritage Site).

FOOD & DRINK

The rice or a cassava-based staple (called *fufu*, *dumbuy* or GB) is traditionally eaten with a soup or sauce made with greens and palm oil, and sometimes also meat or fish. Other popular dishes include *palava* sauce (made with plantain leaf, dried fish or meat and palm oil), *jollof* rice and palm butter (a sauce made from palm nuts).

MONROVIA

pop 1 million

Monrovia, sprawled across a narrow peninsula between the Mesurado River and the sea, has suffered badly during the past two decades. But if you can overlook the bullet-scarred building shells, the city has an unmistakable pep and an unbending determination to rebuild. As African capitals go it's also quite an approachable

place, with an amenable small-town ambience and a lively restaurant and bar scene. Pick a day when it's not raining, find some Liberian friends, and soon you'll forget you're walking around in what was only recently a war zone.

ORIENTATION

The heart of town is around Benson and Randall Sts, and along Broad St, where you'll find most shops and businesses. Southwest of here at Mamba Point is Monrovia's tiny diplomatic enclave. To the southeast is Sinkor, extending several kilometres until reaching Elwa junction and Red Light Motor Park.

INFORMATION

There are internet cafés, foreign-exchange bureaus and banks around Broad St.

Charif Pharmacy (Randall St)

Gritco Travel (☎ 06-514 009, 06-831 174; cnr Broad & Randall Sts) Regional and international flight bookings.

Liberia Telecom (Lynch St; ☎ 8am-10pm) You can make international calls.

Main post office (cnr Randall & Ashmun Sts)

St Joseph's Catholic Hospital (Tubman Blvd) For dire emergencies; about 7km southeast of town.

United World Travel Services (UWTS; ☎ 06-539 366, 06-531 604; Ste 1, 58b Broad St) Regional and international flight bookings.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Use caution when going out in the evening, and get an update on security from your embassy or resident expats when you arrive.

SIGHTS

The **National Museum** (Broad St; admission free; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) is a shadow of its former self, with a handful of dusty masks and drums and a Masonic grand master's throne once used by William Tubman. The **Masonic Temple** (Benson St) itself (now ruined) was once Monrovia's major landmark.

Chaotic **Waterside Market** (Water St) offers almost everything for sale, including colourful textiles. Just opposite is Providence Island, where the first expedition of freed American slaves landed in 1822.

The beautiful beaches south of Monrovia fill up with locals on weekends. Before jumping in, get local advice, as currents can be dangerous. One of the most popular is **Silver Beach**, 15km southeast of town off the airport road, with a restaurant, craft vendors, showers, toilets, and umbrellas for hire.

SLEEPING & EATING

Metropolitan Hotel (☎ 06-510 853; Broad St; r US\$45-75; ☎) One of the few low-end options, with reasonable rooms and TV.

MY Hotels Monrovia (☎ 06-454 068; monrovia@myhotelsresorts.com; cnr Carey & Randall Sts; s/d/ste US\$90/150/200; ☎) New and centrally located, this hotel has a good restaurant and cable TV.

Mamba Point Hotel (☎ 06-544 544, 06-440 000; mambapointhotel@yahoo.com; UN Dr, Mamba Point; s/d/ste US\$120/160/175; ☎) A favourite with journalists and business travellers, this is Monrovia's best, with satellite TV, wi-fi and sea breezes.

Krystal Oceanview Hotel (☎ 06-510 424; UN Dr, Mamba Point; s/d US\$130/180; ☎) Well located and overlooking the sea, with reasonable rooms and a waterside restaurant-bar.

Mama Sheriff (cnr Carey & Lynch Sts; meals US\$1.50-3) A popular local haunt with heaping portions of cassava leaf and other favourites at rock-bottom prices.

Aunty Nana (Robert St; meals US\$7.50; ☎ noon-7pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun) *Fufu* soup, *jollof* rice and other Liberian dishes, plus inexpensive beers.

Beirut (Center St; meze US\$3-8, meals US\$10-26; ☎) A Monrovia institution, with meze and good Lebanese dishes.

Sale Pepe (☎ 06-454 068; MY Hotels Monrovia, Carey St; meals US\$15-20) Fine Italian dining.

For self-catering, try **Abi Jaoudi** (Randall St; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri) or **Stop & Shop** (Randall St).

SAPO NATIONAL PARK

The 1808-sq-km Sapo – Liberia's only national park – protects some of West Africa's last remaining primary rainforest, as well as forest elephants, pygmy hippos, chimpanzees and more. After much wartime devastation, the park is finally getting a chance. Work has started on rebuilding infrastructure and on enforcing the park's protected status.

There are no commercial tours into Sapo, although this is expected to change soon. For updated information, contact the **Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia** (SCNL; scnlib2001@yahoo.com; Monrovia Zoo, Larkpase). **Conservation International** (www.conservation.org) or email fpi@forestpartnersinternational.org.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Roberts International Airport (Robertsfield) is 60km southeast of Monrovia. Arrange a pick-up with your hotel.

Bush taxis for the Sierra Leone border leave from Duala Motor Park, 9km northeast of town. Transport for most other destinations, including the borders of Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, leaves from Red Light Motor Park, 15km northeast of the centre.

Shared taxis operate on a zone system, with prices ranging from US\$0.10 to US\$0.50. Private hire taxis around the centre cost from US\$2.

THE COAST

Once a relaxing beach town, **Robertsport** is now a tiny fishing community with no infrastructure, but some beautiful beaches. The access road often floods during the rains; get an update first in Monrovia.

About 125km southeast of Monrovia, **Buchanan** is Liberia's second port. Southeast of town past the old Lamco compound are some attractive beaches, though take care, as the fringing bush was mined. Bush taxis run daily to/from Monrovia (US\$5, three hours) and several times weekly in the dry season to/from River Cess.

Greenville (also known as Sinoe) is a logging centre, and the jumping-off point for excursions to Sapo National Park (see boxed text, left). The main route to/from Monrovia is via Buchanan along the coastal road.

Surrounded by beautiful countryside at Liberia's southeastern tip, **Harper** is the capital of Maryland (once a separate republic), and boasts the remains of some fine old houses, including former-President William Tubman's mansion. Nowadays it's a shell of what it once was, although the surrounding countryside is attractive. Allow three days for road access from Monrovia via Tappita and Zwedru.

THE INTERIOR

Formerly Charles Taylor's wartime centre of operations, **Gbarnga** became virtually a second capital. About 10km southwest of town along the Monrovia road is **Phebe**, the site of Cuttington College and the ruins of the once-renowned Africana Museum. Also nearby are pretty **Kpatawe Falls** (30km northwest) and

Tolbert Farms, former-President William Tolbert's home (40km north). **Jalk Enterprises Restaurant & Store** (Josephine's; Phebe; r without bathroom US\$20) offers basic rooms and has a restaurant. Frequent bush taxis leave from Gbarnga to Monrovia (US\$10, three hours), Ganta (US\$3, 1½ hours) and Phebe Junction (US\$0.60).

Ganta (Gompa City) is a bustling town 2km from the Guinean border. There's one basic hotel, plus a few chop houses with simple meals. Bush taxis go daily to Gbarnga (US\$3, 1½ hours), Monrovia (US\$13, five hours), Sanniquellie (US\$3, one hour) and the Guinean border (US\$0.30), and several times weekly to Tappita and Zwedru.

Tiny **Sanniquellie** was the birthplace of the Organisation of African Unity. Along the main road you can still see the building where William Tubman, Sekou Touré and Kwame Nkrumah met in 1957. Apart from a basic hotel and a few chop houses, there are no facilities. Bush taxis for the Côte d'Ivoire border (US\$4) depart from north of the market, while those for Ganta (US\$3) and Monrovia (US\$16) leave from the other end.

The now-destroyed, iron-ore mining town of **Yekepa** has a pleasantly cooler climate, and views of Goodhouse Hill and the surrounding Nimba Range. There are no facilities. The Guinean border is 2km away, traversed by foot or *moto-taxis*. To get to Côte d'Ivoire, go first to Sanniquellie.

LIBERIA DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Monrovia has a decent selection of hotels, most are expensive (from around US\$50 for a 'budget' double, US\$80 to US\$100 for mid-range, and from US\$150 for top end). Elsewhere, there's the occasional guesthouse.

PRACTICALITIES

- Plugs are US-style (two flat pins) and voltage is 110V, but this is slowly changing as 220V systems are being installed.
- Local dailies include *The Inquirer*, *The Analyst* and *The News*.
- Weights and measures follow the imperial system.

BOOKS

Journey Without Maps is Graham Greene's classic tale of adventuring across Liberia on foot in the 1930s.

For a gripping take on the war, look for *The Final Days of Dr Doe* by Lynda Schuster (published in *Granta* 48, 1994).

BUSINESS HOURS

See p1102 for standard business hours. Banks are open from 9.30am to noon Monday to Thursday and until 12.30pm on Friday.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The security situation in Liberia is fragile and there are still weapons around. Independent travel outside of Monrovia is not yet possible. Before setting off, get a briefing from your embassy or resident expats.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Liberian Embassies & Consulates

Belgium (☎ 02-414 7317, 02-664 1653; 50 Ave du Château, 1081 Brussels)

Côte d'Ivoire (☎ 20-324636; Immeuble Taleb, Ave Delafosse)

France (☎ 01-47 63 58 55; libem.paris@wanadoo.fr; 12 Place du General Catroux, 75017 Paris)

Germany (☎ 0228-923 9173; Mainzerstrasse 259, 53179 Bonn)

Guinea (☎ 012-676526; Rue DI 258, Landreah)

Sierra Leone (☎ 230991; 2 Spur Rd, Wilberforce)

UK (☎ 020-7388 5489; 23 Fitzroy Square, London W1T 6EW)

USA (☎ 202-723 0437; www.embassyofliberia.org; 5201 16th St NW, Washington, DC 20011)

Embassies & Consulates in Liberia

Diplomatic representations in Monrovia include the following. Canadians and Australians should contact their high commissions in Abidjan (p312) and Accra (p351) respectively.

Côte d'Ivoire (☎ 06-519 138; 8th St, Sinkor)

Germany (☎ 06-438 365; Tubman Blvd Sinkor)

Ghana (☎ 06-518 269; 15th St, Sinkor)

Guinea (cnr 24th St & Tubman Blvd, Sinkor)

Nigeria (☎ 06-527872; Nigeria House, Tubman Blvd, Congo Town)

Sierra Leone (☎ 06-515 061, 06-515 058; 15th St, Sinkor)

UK (chalkleyroy@aol.com; Clara Town, UN Drive, Bushrod Island) Honorary consul, emergency assistance only; otherwise contact the British High Commission in Freetown (Sierra Leone; p509).

USA (☎ 07-705 4826; http://monrovia.usembassy.gov/; 111 United Nations Dr, Mamba Point)

HEALTH

A valid yellow-fever vaccination certificate is required to enter Liberia.

HOLIDAYS

New Year's Day 1 January

Armed Forces Day 11 February

Decoration Day Second Wednesday in March

JJ Roberts' Birthday 15 March

Fast & Prayer Day 11 April

National Unification Day 14 May

Independence Day 26 July

Flag Day 24 August

Thanksgiving Day First Thursday in November

Tubman Day 29 November

Christmas Day 25 December

INTERNET ACCESS

There are internet cafés in Monrovia, but none elsewhere.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the Liberian 'unity' dollar (L\$). US dollars are also widely accepted.

Money can be changed at the airport, foreign-exchange bureaus in Monrovia and banks. Avoid changing money on the street. The best rates are for the US dollar, though other major currencies are also accepted. Travellers cheques are virtually useless. Credit cards are not accepted anywhere, and there are no ATMs.

TELEPHONE

The country code is ☎ 231, and the international access code is ☎ 00. There are no area codes. Rates for intercontinental calls start at US\$3 per minute. The national telephone network is defunct, with mobile phones (prefixes 04, 05, 06 or 07) the main way to connect in Monrovia. Mobile connections are also available in most major upcountry destinations.

VISAS

Visas are required by almost everyone and cost US\$54 (US\$100 for US citizens) for one month single entry. You also need two photos, a medical statement of good health and proof of financial resources.

Visa Extensions

Visas can be extended at the **Bureau of Immigration** (Broad St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) in Monrovia.

Visas for Onward Travel

You can get visas for Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Guinea in Monrovia. Embassies (see opposite) are open from 9am to noon and visas are generally issued within two days.

TRANSPORT IN LIBERIA

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Airlines servicing Monrovia include the following. Gritaco Travel or UWTS (see p386) can assist with bookings.

Astraeus Airlines (www.flyastraeus.com) Twice weekly between London (Gatwick) and Monrovia.

Bellview Airlines (☎ 06-543-133, 06-553 928) Three flights weekly to/from Lagos (Nigeria) via Accra (Ghana) and Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire).

Slok Air International (☎ 06-590 178) Three flights weekly to/from Dakar (Senegal) via Freetown (Sierra Leone) and Banjul (The Gambia); three flights weekly to/from Accra (Ghana).

SN Brussels Airline (☎ 06-590 991, 06-512 147; www.flysn.com) Three flights weekly between Brussels (Belgium) and Monrovia via Freetown (Sierra Leone).

Weasua Air Transport (☎ 06-556 693) Two flights weekly to/from Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire).

DEPARTURE TAX

Departure tax for all flights is US\$25, payable with exact change, US dollars cash only.

Land

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Border crossings include those just beyond Sanniquellie, and east of Harper, towards Tabou (Côte d'Ivoire). However, overland travel, especially on the Côte d'Ivoire side of these borders, is currently not possible unless arranged through a travel agency (which requires an expensive permit on the Côte d'Ivoire side). Before making any plans get an update on the security situation on both sides of the border.

Previously, buses ran several times a week from Monrovia to Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) and on to Accra (Ghana) via Sanniquellie (US\$40 to Abidjan, US\$60 to Accra, plus approximately US\$20 for border fees). However, all cross-border bus services are currently suspended.

Daily bush taxis go from Monrovia to Ganta and Sanniquellie, from where it was possible during better times to continue in stages to Danané (Côte d'Ivoire) and Man (Côte d'Ivoire; 12 to 15 hours). Although here, too, independent travel on the Côte d'Ivoire side of the border currently isn't feasible.

In the south, a road connects Harper with Tabou, where (once the security situation settles down) you cross the Cavally River in a ferry or canoe for taxis to Tabou and onward transport to San Pédro (Côte d'Ivoire) and Abidjan.

GUINEA

The main crossing is just north of Ganta, with smaller borders also at Yekepa and Voinjama.

Bush taxis run daily from Monrovia to Ganta (US\$15), from where you'll need to walk or take a *moto-taxi* 2km to the border. Once across, there are frequent taxis to N'zérékoré (Guinea). Monrovia to Conakry (Guinea; US\$35) takes two to three days.

It's possible to go in the dry season via Voinjama to Macenta (Guinea), changing vehicles at the border. The road from Gbarnga north to Zorzor and Voinjama is under rehabilitation; allow two days.

From Yekepa it's a few kilometres to the border, from where there are Guinean vehicles to Lola (Guinea; US\$1.50, one hour).

For boats between Conakry and Monrovia (at least 36 hours), inquire at Monrovia's port. Fishing boats run sporadically between Harper and San Pédro (Côte d'Ivoire).

SIERRA LEONE

The main crossing is at Bo (Waterside). There are frequent bush taxis between Monrovia and the border (two hours), from where it's easy to find onward transport to Kenema (Sierra Leone; eight rough hours further), and on to Bo (Sierra Leone) and Freetown (Sierra Leone).

GETTING AROUND

Boat

Slow fishing boats link coastal cities, though they're often overcrowded and dangerous. Charter boats from Monrovia sometimes have room for passengers; inquire at the Freeport.

Bush Taxi & Bus

The main form of public transport is bush taxis, which go daily from Monrovia to Buchanan (US\$5, three hours); Gbarnga, Ganta, Sanniquellie (US\$16, six hours) and the Sierra Leone border (US\$5, 2½ hours), and several times weekly between Monrovia and other destinations. Many routes (especially those connecting Zwedru with Greenville and Harper) are restricted during the rainy season. Minivans (called 'buses') also ply most major routes, although they're more crowded and dangerous than bush taxis, and best avoided.

Car & Motorcycle

Vehicle rental can be arranged through better hotels from about US\$100 per day for a 4WD. Expect frequent stops at security checkpoints.