Welcome to Tacugama’s Volunteer Programme. This guide will provide you with the necessary tools to ensure that your stay is meaningful and fulfilling. If you have any more questions, don’t hesitate to contact us by email at info@tacugama.com. We are looking forward to having you join the team at Tacugama!
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About Tacugama

Tacugama was established in 1995 to enforce the law and rehabilitate confiscated, orphaned and abandoned chimpanzees with the aim to release back them into their natural habitat. Although it is illegal to hunt, capture, kill, trade or own chimpanzees in Sierra Leone, sadly such practices still continue.

Chimpanzees are listed as Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This means that they face a very high risk of becoming extinct in the wild. Sierra Leone is home to the Western Chimpanzee subspecies and holds the second highest population after Guinea.

Our story started in 1988 when Bala Amarasekaran and his wife Sharmila bought a weak and sick baby chimpanzee for $20 fearing that if he was left without care and attention for much longer, he would soon die. The young chimpanzee changed their lives forever and led to the opening of Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary. The sanctuary now cares for 79 chimpanzees in eight social groups. We are focused on the protection and conservation of chimpanzees and their habitat and operate a range of community and school education programmes, sensitisation and law enforcement projects, and biodiversity research. Tacugama employs more than 30 staff members from the local communities to take care of the chimpanzees and to carry out our field work and education programmes.

Message from Tacugama’s Founder

Dear Volunteer,

Time is running out for endangered species and wildlife in general. We need all the support we can get!

An integrated approach to wildlife, land management and sustainable development is the most important area where Tacugama can contribute to secure the future of chimpanzees and wildlife in Sierra Leone. Everything we do starts with the chimpanzees and ends with community preservation, environmental protection and educational development.

A once in a lifetime experience awaits you at Tacugama. Come join our efforts and make a meaningful contribution to wildlife and forest protection in West Africa!

Bala Amarasekaran
Founder & Programme Director
About Sierra Leone

Interesting Facts:

- **Sierra Leone is safe.** Sierra Leone is on the path to recovery and really is a very safe country with a small population of 6.3 million, of which 39.1% live in urban areas.

- **Sierra Leone was a British colony.** Many assume from the name that Sierra Leone was a French colony, but in fact the British controlled the country for many decades until granting it independence in 1961. The streets of Freetown still bear British names such as Liverpool, George, Lumley, Bathurst and Leicester.

- **The Portuguese named Sierra Leone.** In 1462, a Portuguese explorer Pedro de Sintra named the hills surrounding today’s Freetown harbour “Serra Leoa” (Portuguese for Lioness Mountains). As time went on, the name was adapted and misspelled into “Sierra Leone”.

Language:

The official language of Sierra Leone is English but there are 23 spoken languages in the country. The most widely spoken is Krio followed by Mende, Temne and Limba.
Culture:

The majority of people in Sierra Leone still have a traditional agricultural way of life. You may come across two or sometimes three people shouting at each other quite aggressively and then stop immediately and hug like they were best friends. This is called “palaver” and is a way of settling disputes to avoid any grudges being held. Casual wear is suitable everywhere. Greetings are very important in Sierra Leonean culture and are expected to be learnt fairly quickly.

A few useful greetings:

(Krio) Ow di bodi? = How are you?
(Krio) Di bodi fine! = I’m fine!

Climate:

The dry season is very hot and humid. During the rainy season, it can be cool at night as the sanctuary is located in the Western Area Peninsular National Park. A sleeping bag, warm clothes and waterproof clothing/footwear are recommended for rainy season (June to September).
Volunteer Programme

Overview:

Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary operates dynamic volunteer, internship and research programs to national and international volunteers and students. Whilst volunteering at Tacugama you will be working as part of a team with other local and international staff. Volunteering at Tacugama will give you the opportunity to develop your skills and expertise, understand more of the challenges facing conservation and development, and learn much about this amazing country.

Activities:

Volunteers participate in all aspects of our work and the volunteer role is varied. Volunteer activities include: assisting with chimpanzee husbandry activities such as preparing food, cleaning enclosures and making enrichment (but no direct contact with chimps); assisting our community outreach team with education and reforestation activities; assisting our rangers on forest anti-poaching patrols; assisting with behavioural data collection and research; marketing and administration; and maintenance tasks. In order to ensure you get the best experience here at Tacugama, we try to match your skill set with our needs whilst ensuring you get the opportunity to conduct a wide range of activities. Tacugama staff members provide full training and supervision but we also encourage you to use your initiative to further your personal and professional development.
**Induction:**

Upon arrival, you will have time to get acclimatized to your environment during the comprehensive induction. You will have a sanctuary tour, orientation session, safety briefing and be provided with your weekly schedule. All volunteers must sign a Volunteer Agreement and Liability Form prior to arrival.

**Leisure:**

Volunteers also get plenty of opportunities to explore Sierra Leone and the array of activities the country has to offer. There are many beautiful beaches, lots of fun nightlife, interesting culture, and wonderful wildlife to see. We endeavour to ensure that volunteers get lots of opportunities on their days off to enjoy these activities.
Prior to Departure

Flights:

There are ten regional airports in Sierra Leone, and one international airport - Lungi International Airport (FNA) located in the coastal town of Lungi in Northern Sierra. FNA is the primary airport for international and domestic flights. Some of the airlines operating are Air France, Air Maroc, Brussel Airlines, KLM, as well as Kenya Airways. Several airlines also fly to Lungi from neighbouring West African countries.

Visas:

A landing visa is required for all non-Sierra Leonean (except ECOWAS) citizens. Please note that the permit only gives you one month’s visa, so you will have to renew your visa while in Sierra Leone, if you stay longer than one month. We will help you organise landing and renewal visas. Cost varies depending on country of origin.

Health Insurance:

Volunteers are required to have their own medical insurance that includes cover for emergency hospital treatment for medical and accidental risks and medical evacuation and repatriation costs. We require evidence that you have this before arrival.

Volunteer Requirements:

Volunteers must be both mentally and physically fit to work in a tropical climate, and capable of living in an isolated environment. Volunteers are required to provide evidence of a negative TB test result or chest x-ray result and vaccinations for tetanus and yellow fever. Extra vaccinations may be required depending on the country of origin.

Please Note: Veterinary volunteers and interns are required to have evidence of the following vaccinations: Tetanus, Yellow fever, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Rabies, Polio, HIV, and a negative TB test result. All volunteers and interns will undergo a 2 week quarantine period before any contact with the chimps is allowed. Following that, surgical face masks will be provided and must be worn at all times. Volunteers are also advised to take malaria prophylaxis. Chloroquine resistant falciparum malaria is reported in Sierra Leone. Please consult with your doctor for advice. If you are on specific medication, you need to make sure that you bring sufficient for the duration of your placement, as supplies of your medication may not be available. We also need to know about any medical conditions in case you may need treatment whilst in Sierra Leone. This should be discussed with us before your departure as, whilst we make every effort to help people during their stay with us, we cannot be responsible if you do not disclose medical conditions to us before you leave your home country.
What to Bring

Here’s a list of essential items to bring with you:

Clothing & Accessories:

- Hiking shoes/sandals
- Long sleeved shirts/t-shirts
- Long trousers for the evenings
- Cropped trousers/Shorts
- Towels
- Headlamp/Torch
- Rain gear
- Swimwear
- Hat and sunglasses
- Water Bottle
- Adapter (we have English three pin plugs)
- Sleeping bag (for rainy season)

Toiletries:

You can buy most toiletries e.g. shampoo and deodorants, in the supermarkets here. They also sell sanitary pads and tampons.

Medication:

You must bring all essential medication with you and bring sufficient supplies for the duration of your stay.

Useful items to include in your personal first aid kit include:

- Metronidazole tablets – 500mg (21 tablets or enough for 7 days)
- Antihistamine tablets
- Anti-diarrhoea tablets
- Insect repellent
- Plasters and band aid
- Multi vitamins
- Throat lozenges
- Sunscreen (high factor i.e. 30+)
- Oral rehydration salts
Upon Arrival

At Lungi Airport:

Make sure that you have a pen with you and your yellow fever certificate with your passport. When you enter the terminal there will be airport staff handing out landing cards. At the passport control they will stamp your passport with a one 1 month landing visa (if you are staying longer than 1 month, we will extend this before it expires and before you leave).

A Tacugama liaison will be waiting to meet you at the luggage area. He will know your name and which flight you are on. If you need to use a luggage trolley there is a small, simple counter with a man who takes the equivalent of US$3 for the use of the trolley. There will be lots of people offering to help you in lots of different ways - the best thing is to smile and refuse politely. Patience and a sense of humour go a long way at the airport! We recommend that you do not change money at the airport but wait until you get to Tacugama.

The liaison will help you to get to the Seacoach Ferry Kiosk to get your ferry ticket. FYI - exit the terminal, turn right and walk alongside the building for about 150 metres, and you will find it – there is another company called ‘Sea Bird’, but make sure you buy tickets for the Seacoach, it is in a small white, single storey building that faces you as you walk along the terminal.

The water taxis are organised to meet the flight times so you do not need to worry about the ferry times. The ticket will cost $40. Once you have your ticket, they will take your luggage and tag it and take it to a bus – KEEP THE TICKET. You will be directed to a separate bus - don’t worry, your luggage will be safe- the bus will then take you to the water ferry jetty, this journey takes about 10 minutes. You will then be advised once the boat is ready to board, the ferry crossing takes about 25 minutes. Your luggage will be waiting for you to reclaim once you leave the boat at Aberdeen, they will ask you for your luggage tag so make sure that you have that ready.

At Aberdeen, one of our drivers, either Gibril or Foday, will be waiting for you at the water taxi jetty with a board showing your name, he will bring you directly to the sanctuary. Depending on the traffic this will take about 45 minutes.
Life at Tacugama

Arrival:

The day after your arrival, we will conduct your induction and orientation and you will have the opportunity to join one of the sanctuary tours to learn more about our work. Volunteers are entitled to 2 days off each week, but must be able to adjust according to the sanctuary's activities. Life is likely to be very different to what you are used to at home! It is important to acclimatize, drink lots of water and get used to the environment. The work can be rigorous and you will need to be flexible and resilient, but we are equally flexible and helpful to all our volunteers.

Living Quarters:

The volunteer living quarters within the sanctuary and are shared by up to 4 volunteers at a time. Each volunteer has their own room and there are 2 shared bathrooms (with a cold shower), a kitchen and dining room, and a rear balcony with a hammock. We provide a mosquito net and bed linen. The house is cleaned weekly by a staff member, but it is the volunteers’ responsibility to make sure that it’s tidy and clean all the time. Please remember that you share the place with other volunteers, so be considerate of others. If anything in the house is not working, please inform management in order to have it fixed. There are two cats that live at the sanctuary, they are very friendly but are not allowed inside the house. Always lock the doors behind you and don’t leave valuables lying around.
Facilities:

The sanctuary runs on solar panels. We don’t have constant electricity and it is important to always think to minimize your electricity use. Please switch of lights when not needed and the power outlets, when not in use. Local mobile phone companies have coverage for the sanctuary. You may bring your phone, provided it is not locked by your current mobile service provider. Local SIM cards are cheap ($3) and easily obtainable. We also recommend you bring rechargeable batteries for your head lamps and other such devices. Limited wifi is available at the office during work hours and in the volunteer house in the evenings. Please do not download large files and download all apps you might want (e.g. WhatsApp) before your arrival. We do not have laundry machines - you can choose to do your laundry yourself or pay a staff members to do it for you, but you must wash your underwear yourself. Please note that the clothes are hand washed in a local fashion, which can be very rough on the clothes, so bring old clothes!!
Food and Water:

We provide breakfast materials, a cooked lunch and a cooked dinner. Meals usually consist of rice, fish and various leaves/vegetables/salads. Some western dishes will also be provided. Imported food items can be found in Freetown and we will provide weekly transport to the local supermarket for you to buy what you want in addition to food provided. The water from the tap is not safe for drinking, but fine for cooking, dish washing etc. Bottled drinking water can be purchased on or off site or you can boil tap water. Be careful not to waste water as we have limited supplies.

Money:

Life in the rainforest is not expensive but you might like to be able to buy personal items or go on local excursions. Volunteers typically spend 200 USD per month for a basic lifestyle. Please make sure that you have sufficient money with you for your stay – bring USD or Leones with you as the cash machines in town are not always working.

Some typical prices:

- Juice: 15,000 LE
- Biscuits: 20,000 LE
- Chicken: 15,000 LE
- Nutella: 40,000 LE
- 6 Pack of 1L Water Bottles: 35,000 LE
Rules:

Volunteers are not allowed to drink alcohol during working hours. In the evening after work, volunteers can drink alcohol in moderation. Volunteers who are drunk or are under the influence of drugs at any time of the day will be asked to leave the project immediately. Tacugama reserves the right to terminate the services of any volunteer should it be considered that they are unsuitable for the task and/or that their attitude is detrimental to our operation. It is important to remember that we work with potentially dangerous animals so you must follow safety protocols at all times.

Safety and Security

Chimp contact:

While you are able to see the chimpanzees in their enclosures, you are not allowed direct contact with the chimpanzees. Many of the chimps have had traumatic pasts and their rehabilitation into social groups is very important for their welfare. The chimpanzees are the reason we are all here and their welfare is our top priority.

In-country safety:

Sierra Leone is a very safe country and there are many activities to enjoy. We have not had major safety or security issues but theft can occur so you should take care of your personal belongings and not leave things unattended when at the sanctuary or out on excursions. We have very comprehensive health and safety policies, which you will receive training on upon your arrival.
Recommended Reading

We recommend that you purchase a travel guide of Sierra Leone before you come out. Bradt has a very good detailed guide of Sierra Leone published in 2009 and updated in 2013 which has lots of great information about this beautiful country.

Lots of useful information can also be found on Visit Sierra Leone’s website.

Other reading options we suggest:

- My Life with the Chimpanzees by Dr. Jane Goodall
- Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex among Apes by Frans de Waal
- Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel by Carl Safina
- In Sierra Leone by Michael D. Jackson