

A charity aiming to improve  
healthcare in Kambia District,  
Sierra Leone

[www.kambia.org.uk](http://www.kambia.org.uk)  
Reg Charity 1014034



## **INFORMATION FOR VISITORS TO KAMBIA**

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## **BEFORE YOU GO**

- VISAS

All visitors to Sierra Leone will need an entry visa. You can download the form from [www.slhc-uk.orgt.uk](http://www.slhc-uk.orgt.uk). The fee at the time of writing is £50.00 and has to be paid into the SL High Commission's bank account at Barclays, and the original receipt stapled to the application form. All the details are on their website. Allow at least 10 days turnaround, longer if travelling at peak times (summer and Christmas). If you are able to drop your passport and application off at the High Commission so much the better, and leave a Royal Mail postage paid envelope for their return, available at all Post Offices. If you are sending your passport in the post, it has to be recorded delivery.

On the visa application form, under 'reason for visit' please put "Voluntary work at Kambia Government Hospital". Contact in SL is The District Medical Officer; address is Kambia Government Hospital, Kambia, SL.

You will need to request a letter of invitation from The Kambia Appeal to enclose with your application.

- IMMUNISATIONS and ANTIMALARIA

See your GP or Practice Nurse well in advance of your trip to make sure you have the necessary vaccinations and a course of anti-malaria pills.

- AIRLINE TICKETS

Via Kevin McPhillips Travel <http://www.sierraleonettravel.com> for the best deals with BMI. If you book direct with BMI you pay more and the baggage allowance is less.

You will need to **re-confirm** your flights at the local office in Freetown **in person**. It rarely works via telephone from Kambia! Re-confirm flights as soon as possible. It can be done anytime after you arrive in Sierra Leone, so if you're in Freetown, it makes sense to go to the offices at Karl Travel on Rawden Street. Instructions will be given to you with your ticket.

Baggage allowance (with Kevin McPhillips) is a generous 40 kilos per person.

- GMC CERTIFICATE

Please scan and email qualification certificates to Moses Kabba in advance of your visit, so that he can present them to the Ministries of Health and

Development. It is vitally important that all such documentation is given to the Ministries prior to your arrival.

- MONEY

Creditcards and travellers cheques are not accepted anywhere in Sierra Leone. For hotels in Freetown you will need to pay in US\$, up to \$130 per night for a double. Sterling is readily exchanged at all banks. There is a Union Trust bank in Kambia Town. If you are concerned about carrying cash during your journey or you are visiting Kambia for a reasonable length of time, you can send money to the bank in Kambia via Western Union for you to collect on your arrival. See [www.westernunion.com](http://www.westernunion.com) for further info. Any money sent in this way has to be collected; unclaimed cash cannot be returned or refunded.

- MOBILE PHONE

Mobile signal is fairly good and reliable in Kambia, but UK phones work or don't work in a fairly arbitrary way. You can purchase local sim cards and pay-as-you-go top-up anywhere in Kambia.

### **ARRIVAL AT LUNGHI AIRPORT**

- IMMIGRATION

Once inside the Airport building you will be asked to fill out an immigration form – NB. There are never any pens, so keep one in your hand luggage! Put 'c/o Kambia Government Hospital' as the address and 'NGO Voluntary work' as the reason for your visit.

- CUSTOMS

After you have collected your baggage from the baggage reclaim carousel (which can take hours!), you will go through Customs. Normally a straightforward process and when asked, explain that you are going to Kambia Hospital as an NGO volunteer. This usually results in smiles and nods and a bit chalk cross being put on your suitcase – we have not yet come across any cases having to be opened. If asked if you have any 'present' for the customs officer, smile sweetly and decline. If approached before customs and offered fast-track clearance (for a fee), please ignore; there's no such thing!

- MONEY CHANGE

Outside of the Customs, there is a TAP Money Change counter, the exchange rate is the same as the banks so a good idea to change some

money here. It might look a bit 'shoddy' but it is OK and they don't rip you off! You will find though that there will be lots of people milling around you offering to take your bags, give you a taxi ride, take you to the ferry/heliport etc. Just say, politely and firmly 'no thank you – I'm being met'. They are very persistent, so if they start trying to wheel your trolley for you, make sure you say 'no' otherwise they'll expect a tip!

However, if you do require a porter it is customary to give a tip – this can either be in Leones (2,000Le) or US dollars if you have any spare (\$1 or \$2). At the time of writing, the exchange rate is around 4,300le to the pound, so if you hand over 10,000 leones, remember that it's only approx. £2.30, but in Kambia most people earn less than 5,000le a day.

You will need enough cash for meals and drinks at the hotel, food and water for your journey to Kambia, and for transportation to Kambia.

- ONWARD TRAVEL TO KAMBIA

The distance is approximately 75 miles on mainly rough track.

You will be met outside the airport by Moses Kabba, who will take you to the Lunghi Airport Hotel, which is about 4 minutes away. In the morning you can either be driven directly to Kambia or be taken to Freetown on the first ferry of the day (7am) to re-confirm flights, buy provisions, visit the Ministry of Health, and then on to Kambia. You should aim to be leaving Freetown before 2pm to reach Kambia before dark. If a second night is needed in Freetown we ask if you would also pay for accommodation for Moses and the driver (usually around 100,000Le).

The Airport Hotel is the Lunghi Airport Hotel and you will need to reserve a room before leaving the UK – send an email. They normally ask for a \$30 deposit but this is taken off the cost of the room, (around \$130 per night for a double). Contact details:

Email: [reservations@lungiairporthotel.com](mailto:reservations@lungiairporthotel.com)

Tel: 00232 76 953969

Web: [www.lungiairporthotel.com](http://www.lungiairporthotel.com)

If you have difficulties contacting the hotel, please contact Moses and he will make the reservation for you.

We ask all visitors to pay for their transportation to and from Kambia. This is currently £120 (528,000Le) for the return trip (not per person), including fuel, driver and one night's accommodation for the driver and Moses. It would be helpful if you could pay 260,000le in cash to Moses when he collects you from the airport to pay for fuel.

## **THE KAMBIA APPEAL BASE**

- DESCRIPTION

The Base comprises a main bungalow with 4 bedroom, a living.dining area, bathroom with a shower (if the well is full and the pump is working you may have the luxury of running water!) and a separate outside loo. There is also the toukel, a large, round thatch-roofed building that is the main outdoor living space.

We have a water purification unit for safe drinking water, or you can buy bottled water in Kambia Town for 5,000Le– 8,000Le per litre.

There is a large fridge at the Base for your use. Soft drinks (coke, fanta, tonic, vimto) beer and saches of local gin (surprisingly good!) are readily available to buy in Kambia. It's cheaper to buy in large quantities from the traders in Check Point, but Moses can organise this if you tell him what you require.

- ELECTRICITY

There is a power generator at the Base for lighting, the fridge, TV/DVD, re-charging of mobiles (take your charger!) and the electric fans. You can take a laptop but make sure you bring your own 'surge protector'. Might also be worth taking a battery radio to tune in to the BBC World Service from time to time.

The Kambia Appeal covers the cost of fuel to power the generator for 2 hours per day. You can decide when you want this to be. If you require additional hours of electricity, we ask you to cover this cost (about 4,300le per hour, or £1) and to pay to Moses on a daily basis.

- COOKING AND FOOD SUPPLY

If you would like someone to cook for you please discuss this with Moses on arrival to agree what you would like each day and a rate. This is currently 5000Le per day for the cooking, plus the cost of the food (about 10,000le per person for breakfast/lunch and dinner), plus the cost of a bag of charcoal (60,000Le). Fruit, eggs and bread are available for breakfast (bring your own cereal and jam!). You can also buy tins of baked beans, tuna and sardines, mayonnaise, tea, coffee and powdered milk from the new local shop. Dinner is generally rice and a stew. Salad and vegetables are fairly difficult to get hold of.

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If you wish to cook yourselves the heat source is a charcoal stove. The 'stove' is best described as a large stone 'pot' that you can rest a pan or kettle on so don't be too adventurous.

Fresh daily bread is available from the baker, our neighbour. Pasta and tomato pure can be bought at the local market stalls. Green veg are rare but fruit available in season (oranges, mangoes, papaya, pineapples).

- LAUNDRY

Check with Moses, but currently Abass is happy to do it for you for a small fee, around 5000Le per load, plus a bag of soap powder.

## **THE HOSPITAL**

- DESCRIPTION

The hospital was re-built in 2003/4 and is in good structural condition, although there is no running water.

No working X-Ray facilities.

The theatre area deals with major dressings from out and in patients in a secondary treatment area. The main theatre has a scrub area mostly without running water – good idea to take 'hand sanitiser' gel, your own disposable gloves and, if operating, your own theatre gowns as the local ones are very thick and hot. There's no air conditioning.

All equipment and drapes etc are sterilised in a large "pressure cooker" type of unit heated by charcoal.

Laboratory facilities are very basic but a blood bank is in operation and maintained by a solar energy system. Electricity supply is normally only available for a few hours a day, or when theatre is opened up for an operation.

The wards are very basic with few facilities. The wards are: female, male, maternity and paediatrics.

Hospital food and drink for patients is provided but patients are highly dependent on relatives being available for general care and extra sustenance.

HIV, TB and Leprosy etc are dealt with by specialist assistants or CHOs (Community Health Officers – see later) on site.

Current policy is that The Kambia Appeal only funds emergency C-sections, which covers fuel for generator, pre and post op drugs, i/v etc and staff costs (theatre staff). All other operations and medical treatment has to be paid for by the patients. We would urge you not to give your own money to cover medical expenses as this sets a very difficult precedent for other UK volunteers and causes confusion about the role of the Kambia Appeal at the hospital.

Patients' relatives are encouraged to donate at least 1 unit of blood per operation. They don't like doing so (superstition) and often disappear leaving only a very elderly person who cannot donate blood. Discuss with local staff how best to proceed on this point.

Patients are expected to pay an admission fee, all drugs and treatment fees are determined by the hospital (see Staff Remuneration, Drug Costs).

- **KEY PERSONNEL**

Moses Kabba – Moses is employed by The Appeal and is our representative in Sierra Leone. Moses is an ex-head teacher and is educated and computer literate. Moses is your first point of contact for everything non-medical. Please consult Moses on a daily basis about your schedule and plans, so that he can make any arrangements for you. He is also responsible for your safety, so needs to know your whereabouts.

There is currently no District Medical Officer in post. Instead, the Medical Officer, Dr David Sesay, is acting DMO as well.

Most of the clinic work is done by Mohamed Kamara, a Community Health Officer.

Sister Conteh – a trained anaesthetic nurse and midwife, who can administer ketamine and spinal anaesthetics. She is also a preacher in one of the evangelical churches, so try to avoid elective operating on a Sunday morning.

There is currently no permanent head midwife at the hospital.

Alusine Kamara – In charge of the HIV/AIDS programme.

Anthony Sesay – the Hospital Administrator.

Frances Pearce – Matron and qualified midwife.

## **TRANSPORT**

- **VEHICLE/DRIVER**

We did have the use of a vehicle in Kambia –but this has now been taken back to be used by the hospital. Vehicles are a rare commodity in Sierra Leone and we are currently awaiting the arrival of our own vehicle in Kambia.

If you need transportation, please ask Moses to make an official request to loan a vehicle from the Hospital. You will need to give several days notice, preferably a week, and cover the cost of fuel and the driver.

- **GETTING TO THE HOSPITAL AT NIGHT**

It's a short walk or bike ride to the hospital from the Base. If you are called in an emergency the hospital may have to send a vehicle out to collect theatre staff – in which case they can collect you also. Check with Moses and the MO to agree a process for night time emergencies.

## **TRANSFERRING FUNDS FROM THE UK**

Transferring money is now a relatively easy process via Western Union. The Union Trust Bank in Kambia is a Western Union depot and funds are instant, as soon as they are sent from the UK they are available to collect in Kambia.

You can deposit some money with the Appeal and we can send it out as and when you require it – we can refund you the balance upon your return or you can ask a friend/colleague to do it on your behalf or you can send it out ahead of your trip ready for you to collect upon arrival in Kambia – but if you chose this last option you won't be able to withdraw it 'bit by bit' as you won't have an account to leave it in. If you go onto the Western Union website you should be able to find all the information you require.

This facility saves you having to take out large sums of cash to cover the duration of your visit. During your stay you will need money to pay for:

Transport to and from and within Kambia  
Bottled Water

Top up units for mobile  
Purchase of food/meals  
Weekly services of cook  
Pay for laundry and cleaning rooms  
Supplement fuel for generator

## **FUNDRAISING BEFORE YOU GO**

Many visitors like to fundraise before setting off for Kambia, either for a specific project or to help the Appeal generally with the ongoing costs of maintaining the base, vehicle, fuel etc. To help you do this we have a facility set up for on-line giving through BeMyCharity – where you can have a personalised page about you and your visit. Here is an example:  
<https://www.bmycharity.com/V2/jonniewake>

This site allows people to donate on-line and post you a message – it also allows us to gift aid all donations.

## **INSURANCE**

Visitors going out with the approval of the Appeal are covered by our insurance policy, but we need you to give us information before you go so you can be added to the policy.

Please contact John Kloer - [john.kloer@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:john.kloer@hotmail.co.uk) - who will get the necessary information from you. You may also want to check out your own personal health insurance policy to see if you are covered whilst in Sierra Leone. I was covered on my annual travel insurance policy in June 2008 as Sierra Leone was no longer on the F&CWO restricted countries list, but individual insurance companies vary, so please check.

## **'SPONSORING' OF STUDENTS/STAFF/LOCALS**

During your time in Kambia you will be approached by someone asking for support. They may well be in need of genuine help – everyone is - but we have found that entering into personal 'contracts' with individuals in Kambia is not advisable. It promotes bad feeling (eg why are you helping him/her and not me) and causes confusion about the role of The Appeal.

Also, we have found that sometimes people in Kambia have unrealistic expectations of how much support you can give – you may agree to pay a minimal amount towards tuition fees but before long you are being asked to supply a laptop, or a motorbike, or funding to come and study in the UK.

We do have a 'scholarship' programme for the training of CHOs and this is useful for people who have returned from Kambia and want to channel support towards people deserving of a chance or for people who just want to help but haven't visited Kambia. We currently have 8 CHOs in training, all will come back to work in Kambia once qualified.

You may well be impressed with a particular member of staff at the hospital, but if they ask you to help them please try not to get involved. Tell them that they need to talk with the MO in the first instance. The DMO and the District Council select candidates for sponsorship, so the decision is not down to an individual.

### **DISCUSSIONS REGARDING 'NEW' PROJECTS**

Please be careful **NOT** to take on, or enter into discussions about, any new commitments for which The Kambia Appeal could be liable without prior discussion. You may see a need for something out there – we are sure you will, but we only have funds to support existing projects and cannot take on new ones without consultation and Trustee approval and funding. If you enter into discussions with staff at the hospital about ideas for projects they will often take that as a sign that it is going to happen. Please make sure you always make it clear that you cannot make any decisions on our behalf. If in doubt, refer them to Moses who is used to managing their expectations.

### **SETTLING IN/BECOMING ACCEPTED**

It is generally advisable to take things slowly and 'help' rather than 'takeover'.

This is easier said than done – the nursing methods and general care are very different to what we would be used to in a UK hospital. It can be very frustrating and it's very tempting to try and get the local staff to replicate the way things are done in the UK, but this is not only unhelpful it's also impossible. All that happens is you alienate the local staff – you would probably feel the same if someone came in from outside and tried to take over whatever you were doing!

If you adopt the attitude "I'm here to help you, what can I do" you'll soon end up with a willing team assisting you rather than being thwarted every time your back is turned!

Having said all that, you must do whatever you feel most comfortable with, and we are not suggesting for one moment that you do anything different to your normal methods of work here in the UK in terms of procedures – this is just something to bear in mind to try and make the transition easier

for you. We recommend that you spend at least the first three or four days of your visit getting to know the staff you will be working with and observing their work, and assuring them that you are not there to assess their skills or to be critical, but to be supportive, to learn and to share medical experience.

### **STAFF REMUNERATION/COSTS OF TREATMENT & DRUGS**

Many staff are not paid but work as volunteers – most of the staff you will see in green uniforms working on the wards are volunteers, who may or may not have had any basic nurse training.

The Appeal funds all emergency C-Sections and a percentage of the fee involved goes to the staff who assist in theatre. Be aware that this may influence the decision to go for a C-Section!

Unfortunately, many people do not seek treatment at the hospital until very late in their condition. This means that treatment becomes costly – patients are often brought to the hospital by relatives, who then abandon them, literally, as they cannot afford the treatment. They hope that by leaving the patient at the hospital they will be taken in and treated.

In some cases – emergency C.Sections, paid for by us – this happens, but often patients are denied vital procedures and drugs because they cannot afford to pay. Unfortunately, this is a fact of life, which can be difficult when faced with patients in an emergency for whom you know that an operation could be life-saving.

You may have to say the same thing several times over to make sure the message gets through – we have found that drugs are left in bedside lockers and the nurses (many of whom are volunteers as previously mentioned) did not understand that they were supposed to check that the patient took them, or the nurse will charge the patient to administer the drugs.

Bear in mind that drugs do ‘disappear’ and turn up for sale at the local pharmacy – or are sold to patients privately. If you prescribe drugs to an in-patient, it’s probably advisable to check that they are being given. It is also common practice for more expensive versions of drugs to be prescribed when cheaper ones are available.

### **COMMUNITY HEALTH OFFICERS (CHOs)**

The Appeal has a sponsorship programme – we are currently funding the training of 8 CHOs. This qualification is similar to our Paramedic but with more emphasis on tropical diseases.

Unfortunately many Doctors, once qualified, leave Sierra Leone to work overseas, but the CHO qualification is not recognised outside Africa, so it means our ‘investment’ should stay in the country – even if only in the short term.

A good CHO will be invaluable to you and they will be eager to learn from you also.

### **PERIPHERAL HEALTH UNITS (PHUs)**

PHUs are the primary health centres in the district. In Kambia there are 52. They are generally very basic and are found in varied states of structural repair. Those run by Maternal and Child Health Aides provide antenatal care, facilities for normal delivery and basic first aid. At the moment none of the PHUs can provide emergency obstetric services, however it is planned that 6 will become Basic Emergency Obstetric Centres in 2010.

### **PERSONAL MEDICAL KIT**

Basic medical equipment is not always available for UK visitors to use, so we recommend that you take your own, such as: scissors, stethoscope, digital sphygmo, auro/ophthalmoscope set, extra clinical torch and headlamp (essential in case generator fails during op). Don't leave this equipment at the hospital. It is best to carry it around with you at all times.

## **USEFUL WEBSITES, SOURCES OF INFORMATION:**

BMyCharity <https://www.bmycharity.com/V2/kambiaappeal>

Kevin McPhillips Travel <https://www.sierraleonetravel.com>

The Kambia Appeal <https://www.kambia.org.uk>

Sierra Leone High Commission (visas etc) <https://www.slhc-uk.org.uk/>

## **USEFUL CONTACTS FOR ADVICE**

If you have your own medical contacts who are happy to let you have their mobile phone numbers, so much the better as you can text them and ask them to call you with advice.

The following people have offered to give advice if required. When in Kambia you can email.

There is also a library of medical reference books at the Base.

Paediatrics:

Dr Mike Webb

email: [mike.webb@glos.nhs.uk](mailto:mike.webb@glos.nhs.uk) with copy to secretary:  
[fionna.warwick@glos.nhs.uk](mailto:fionna.warwick@glos.nhs.uk)

Obstetrics:

Mr Richard Hayman

email: [richard.hayman@glos.nhs.uk](mailto:richard.hayman@glos.nhs.uk)

General medicine:

Dr Elaine Smith

email: [elaine.smith@glos.nhs.uk](mailto:elaine.smith@glos.nhs.uk)

NB this is Elaine Smith (Rheumatology) not Elaine Smith (Gynaecology)

Surgery:

Mr Mark Whyman

email: [mark.whyman@glos.nhs.uk](mailto:mark.whyman@glos.nhs.uk)

## **THINGS TO TAKE WITH YOU**

A few suggestions:

Head Torch + Batteries (available from camping stores and useful for night time work when no electricity as well as reading in bed!

Normal torch

Charger for your mobile

'Crocs' to wear in theatre/around the hospital – otherwise there are flip-flops to wear in theatre, but they may not be your size.

Open footwear – it's always hot, in the rainy season it's hot & wet

Personal toiletries

Suntan Cream

Towels and a spare bed sheet

Re-chargeable razors can be used and topped up – 2 pin adaptor

NB All electric sockets are UK style 3-pin. Otherwise your chance to grow a beard!

First aid and general personal medication. Scissors are a prized item. Consider a 'needle stick injury' treatment pack for HIV prophylaxis.

Tooth temporary repair cement and spectacle repair kit.

Spare pair spectacles.

Pens, paper, reading material.

Alarm clock if not one incorporated in your mobile phone.

Ear plugs. The Mosque feels very close by at 5am.

Coffee, Tea bags, powdered milk, cereal bars, nuts and raisins.

Anti-bacterial surface cleaner spray