

Title:

An Overview of Liberia for Travelers

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Summary:

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Article Body:

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An Overview of Liberia for Travelers

Liberia means the land of the free. It is a fitting name considering the country was established by freed slaves from the United States in 1820. Referred to as Americo-Liberians, the freed slaves established Monrovia which is named after U.S. President James Madison.

Although there were minor disputes throughout Liberia's history, it was generally saved the problems faced by much of colonized Africa. Indeed, Liberia was known for its hospitality, strong education system, booming rubber industry and strong liberal arts. Unfortunately, political unrest led to a brutal civil war from 1989 till 1996 during which the country fell apart and over 200,000 Liberians were killed.

Prior to 1980, the country was ruled by the True Whig Party, which consisted ostensibly of descendents from the freed slaves. On April 12, 1980, Samuel Doe led a military coup, executed the elected President and put the People's Redemption Council in power. The new leaders increasingly pursued ethnic policies favoring the indigenous Krahn peoples. This led to massive resistance from non-Krahn peoples.

In 1989, full blown civil war broke out between various factions. The country

was ripped apart and Doe was ultimately defeated and killed on September 9, 1990. One of the rebel leaders, Charles Taylor, was put in charge of an interim government. Instead of uniting the country, he more or less declared himself dictator and continued the factional fighting.

A cease fire was worked out in 1997 and rebel groups agreed to disarm. Taylor won elections in 1997 under questionable circumstances. Once again, he failed to do anything to heal the country, instead funding a guerilla attack on neighboring Sierra Leone. Under massive international pressure of the "don't make us come there" type, he resigned and fled into exile on June 4, 2003.

On October 11, 2005, free elections were finally held. After a runoff, Liberia elected Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf the first female president of Liberia. She took office in January of 2006. Her election is viewed as a very positive step by Liberia to get back on track.

As to basic information, Liberia covers roughly 43,000 square miles. The capital is Monrovia and the total population is 3.24 million. Liberia has 40% of West Africa's rain forest. Liberia is the second-largest maritime licenser in the world with more than 1,800 vessels registered under its flag, including 35% of the world's tanker fleet.

The people of Liberia are known as Liberians. The ethnic breakdown is Kpelle 20 percent, Bassa 16 percent, Gio 8 percent, Kru 7 percent and 49 percent spread over 12 other ethnic groups. Religious break down is Christian 30 percent, Muslim 10 percent, and animist 60 percent. English is the official language, but there are also 16 indigenous languages. Life expectancy is 47 years and the literacy rate is 56 percent.

Liberia has gone from a stable, beautiful country to civil war and back. Although the war is over, it isn't entirely stable at this time. Travelers seeking an extreme experience may find it to be a good destination, but it is still a very dangerous country.