



BET Founder Robert Johnson's Liberian Resort: An Oasis of Calm

By [EMILY SCHMALL](#)

Posted 9:00 AM 02/19/11 | [Company News](#), [Columns](#), [People](#)

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Follow the signs for Bones Beach down a newly paved road in Monrovia, Liberia, and an octagonal structure the color of the sand emerges in front of the sea, surrounded by poppies, tiger lilies, hibiscus, lemongrass and bougainvillea.

Inside, Nigerian musician Fela Kuti plays on the stereo, and guests lounge on high-backed bar stools or on the zebra-striped dining room chairs. Painted wooden masks adorn the walls. It's Saturday night, and out on the deck, the first flames of the fire pit for the weekly barbecue begin to flare. Guests watch the sun disappear behind the huge crash of ocean waves.



Emily Schmall

While much of Monrovia is on the mend seven years after the end of more than a decade of civil war, just out of town there's an oasis of calm -- Kendeja, a resort built by African-American multimillionaire and Black Entertainment Television founder Robert Johnson, who's also chief executive of The RLJ Companies.

A five-star resort, Kendeja is the first new hotel to be built in Liberia in a decade, providing a glimpse of how the tropical West African country could begin to look if its fragile political stability and fast-growing economy remain intact.

A Responsibility to Support Liberia

After hearing Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf speak in 2006 at a Clinton Global Initiative conference in New York, Johnson was moved to create a business that would establish a connection between the African-American community and Liberia.

"I believe passionately that African Americans have a responsibility to support Liberia, much like Jewish Americans support Israel," Johnson said in a statement. "Given the long historical relationship between our two countries, we have a special responsibility to do whatever we can to ensure that President Sirleaf succeeds in her effort to rebuild the country. There is a window of opportunity, and we have to be sure that the opportunity is realized."

Kendeja represents Johnson's "continued support for President Sirleaf," RLJ's Corey Printup tells *DailyFinance*. Sirleaf is running for a second term in elections scheduled for next October. Johnson, also partnered with the U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corp. to create a \$30 million development fund for small and midsize businesses in Liberia.

Tapping Pent-Up Demand

Since opening in March 2009, the resort has become the place to stay in Liberia for U.N. personnel, visiting government officials and celebrities -- Emma Thompson, Tony Blair and President Sirleaf herself. It's also attracting wealthy Liberians returning for the first time since the civil conflict forced them to flee the country.

<http://www.dailyfinance.com/story/bet-founder-runs-oasis-of-calm-in-liberia/19844430/>