

## MALAWI COUNTRY INFORMATION



*In preparation for your Malawi Sojourn please find below some interesting facts about Malawi. For further information you can visit the official Malawi Tourism Authority's website: [www.malawitourism.com](http://www.malawitourism.com)*



**The country:**

Malawi shares borders to the north and northeast with Tanzania, to the south, east and southwest with Mozambique and to the north and northwest with Zambia. Lake Malawi, the third-largest lake in Africa, is the dominant feature of the country, forming the eastern boundary with Tanzania and Mozambique. The scenery varies in the different regions: the Northern Region is mountainous, the highest peaks reaching to over 3000m, with the rolling Nyika Plateau, rugged escarpments, valleys and the thickly forested slopes of the Viphya Plateau. The Central Region is mainly a plateau, over 1000m high, with fine upland scenery. This is the country's main agricultural area. The Southern Region is low-lying with the 2100m-high Zomba Plateau south of Lake Malawi and the huge, isolated Mulanje Massif in the southeast. The variety of landscape and the wildlife it supports make this relatively unspoilt country particularly attractive to visitors. The capital is Lilongwe. The current population stands at 12 million with an average density of 84.7 people per square km. Blantyre, with a population of 332,000 is the largest city in the country.

**Currency**

The Malawian currency is the Malawi kwacha (MWK) which is divided into 100 tambala. We suggest you take USD, GBP or South African Rand in small denominations, as these are the most easily exchangeable currencies in the country and are most readily accepted.

Visitors can exchange currency at banks or official bureaux de change (be careful of doing this on the street market). Visa and MasterCard are accepted in the cities but not in the rural areas. However, the new chip/ pin credit cards may not always work! There are ATM machines in the large towns/cities however they do go offline so we do not recommend you rely on these to draw local cash. No traveller's cheques are accepted in Malawi. Only small amounts of MWK can be exported from Malawi on departure but there is no limit to the amount of foreign currency you can bring into the country.

**Passport and visa:**

All visitors must be in possession of a passport with a minimum of 2 blank pages and valid for at least six months beyond their date of return home. Most citizens, except South African, British and USA passport holders, require a visa to enter Malawi. However, always check the latest regulations with your nearest Malawian Embassy before travelling.

**Health:**

Most of Malawi is considered a malaria risk area so pre-cautions must be taken.

Bilharzia is a disease, which is common in most large bodies of water in the southern half of Africa. Lake Malawi has always had bilharzia, but only in certain parts of the lake where there is minimal wave action. Most camps around the lake test on a regular basis to ensure the protection of their guests. In the unlikely event of bilharzia being contracted, it is easily diagnosed by a simple blood test and easily and effectively treated with biltracide.

Immunization against polio, tetanus, typhoid and hepatitis A is recommended. A Yellow Fever vaccination certificate is only required for travellers coming from – or who are in airport transit for more than 12 hours within – a country with risk of Yellow Fever transmission. A risk of Yellow Fever transmission exists in these African countries: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana,

*Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Sudan, Togo, Uganda.*

**Power:**

*Electric Power is 220/240 volts AC running at 50Hz. The plug type used is a square three-pin plug. In some camps there is no electricity so a 220V generator supplies power with 12V solar lighting in the rooms. In this case there will be no plug points in the rooms.*

**Communications:**

*The telephone system in Malawi is erratic and expensive. Cellular phone coverage is fairly good throughout the country but roaming is expensive. Internet and e-mail facilities are available in most tourist areas. Most hotels and offices can be contacted by e-mail. If you intend to hire a car and drive around Malawi, then we suggest that you purchase a local sim card for your phone from Airtel or TNM Networks to use during your stay.*

**Access:**

*Travel around Malawi is either by road or by light aircraft flights.*

*For light aircraft flights there is a luggage restriction of 15 - 20kgs (44lbs) per person in soft-sided bags (no hard framed suitcases) on these flights. If an individual weighs over 100kgs (220lbs) please ensure you have advised us due to aviation rules for safety on these flights.*

*Car-hire companies have desks at the major airports and in most major centres. Most of the main roads are tarred but are narrow and can be peppered with potholes. Always watch out for livestock cross the road, especially goats, as well as lots of people walking and on bicycles! Visitors are advised to avoid driving at night. Driving is on the left side of the road. Petrol is not always readily available and drivers are advised to guard against the petrol gauge dropping below the halfway mark. An International Driving Licence is not required if you have a driving licence in English with a photograph.*

*Road transfers may be substituted for flights in case of poor weather conditions.*

**Language**

*Although English is the official language, the national language is Chichewa (Chinyanja). Bantu and other tribal languages, such as Yao and Tumbuka, are widely spoken.*

**Time:**

*Malawi is two hours in the advance of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT+2). As Malawi doesn't operate daylight saving time, there's no time difference between the winter and summer months.*

**Dress code:**

*Although no formal dress is required during your holiday, the rural areas of Malawi are still conservative and ladies are advised to dress modestly. If you wish to visit the local villages ladies should wear a simple wrap/skirt (locally called a chitenje), which is available in any market in Malawi at a very reasonable price.*

*For holidays on Lake Malawi pack casual beach wear as well as a rash top for sun and wind protection. Most of the lodges supply snorkels, masks and fins and life jackets but if you are unsure please check with us.*

**Climate:**

Malawi's climate is largely tropical, tempered by the altitude on the plateau and in mountainous regions. The Zomba area and Nyika National Park are at altitude and will always be chilly in the evenings, no matter what time of year. Lake Malawi and Liwonde National Park are at an altitude of 400 meters and are much warmer for most of the year. Remember that predicting weather even in this day and age is at best a calculated guess so take the following as a guideline only.

- January to March: Hot and wet
- April to May: Warm days and cool evenings; clear skies after the rains. It should be calm on the lake. Possibility of light rains.
- June to July: Warm days; cool to cold evenings. By July the lake can become windy.
- August: Warm to hot days; cool nights and winds on the lake.
- September to October: Hot to very hot days; lake calming down; warm evenings.
- November to December: Either hot and wet or hot and dry.

*Lake Malawi climate data provided by Weather2Travel.com*

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Precipitation (mm)</b>	244	219	334	280	122	32	32	6	3	17	115	257
<b>Temperature (°C)</b>	29	29	29	29	27	26	26	27	29	30	31	29

**Diving on Lake Malawi:**

- Easy access to dive sites, no tides, no major currents, no salt water; warm, fresh clear water.
- Abundant fish, fascinating species, interesting rock formations, a variety of different dive sites, suitable for beginners through to advanced divers.
- Coolest water temperatures: 23° C; Average water temperatures: 27° C; Warmest water temperatures: 33° C
- Average visibility: 15 metres to 25 metres
- When to visit: All year round. Best time to dive: All year but September to early December are the best times.

**Shopping:**

European-style shops are almost exclusively found in Blantyre and Lilongwe. Shops and offices open and close around 1700 during the week; 1200 on Saturdays and are closed on Sundays. Markets and roadside vendors offer average to excellent woodcarvings and straw goods. In the markets, bargaining is expected.

**Public Holidays:**

The dates of certain public holidays change from year to year. If a public holiday falls on a Sunday, then the Monday is also declared a public holiday.  
 01 January, 15 January, 03 March, 01 May, 14 May, 06 July, 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday in October, 25 December and 26 December.

## **MALAWI**

### **Places To Go**

#### **Cape Maclear**

*Cape Maclear is a small fishing village situated on Lake Malawi and was named after David Livingstone's friend, Astronomer Royal, Thomas Maclear. The village covers the areas from Monkey Bay to the east and Kasankha Bay in the west, forming the Nankhumba Peninsula.*

*Cape Maclear was also the site of the first mission station, the original Livingstonia. Little of the mission station, however remain, except for a few neglected graves. Lake Malawi National Park, the first freshwater National Park in the world and a World Heritage Site, is also situated in the area and is home to several fish species.*

*Getting around in the village should not be a problem as the village is small and a short stroll should get visitors to where they need to go.*

#### **Salima and Senga Bay**

*Salima is an important service and trading centre and like many towns in Malawi, Salima was an Arab trade centre in Livingstone's time. Today Salima is a busy town with an interesting market and all of the usual services.*

*Northwest of Salima is Malawi's first wildlife breeding station, Kuti Ranch. The ranch was established by the Game Breeder's Association in 2001 on an ex-government cattle ranch. Visitors to the ranch can look forward to seeing Nyala, Zebra, Waterbuck, Sable, Warthog, Impala, Wildebeest, Ostrich, Kudu, Genet, Bushbuck, Porcupine, Duiker, Bush baby, Reedbuck, Aardvark, Oribi, Baboon, Jackal, Hyena, Serval, Vervet monkeys, Civet and Genet. The ranch is also one of the few places where giraffe can be seen, since they do not naturally occur in Malawi.*

*Kuti also offers a wide range of activities, which can be tailored for individuals or for groups of different sizes as day visitors or longer term guests. Activities include game walks, game drives, night drives, horse riding and school tours. Facilities at Kuti include a sunset deck overlooking Kuti's wetlands, a bar, braai facilities and an extensive road network to maximise game viewing.*

*Eighty kilometres south of Salima visitors will encounter life-sized figures of Angoni Warriors dressed in full battle attire. The figures are the work of craftsman trained at the Mua Mission about 50 kilometres from Salima and are worth the visit. Mua Mission was the first Roman Catholic Mission in Malawi established in 1899. Today, the mission is famous for the wood carvings produced and sold there. The mission is also the site of the KuNgoni Centre of Culture and Art which offers visitors insight into the history and culture of Malawi through the Chamare Museum, the carving centre and the research centre and library. Chamare Museum describes the Chewa, Ngoni and Yao cultures, their rites of passage, interaction with each other as well as their encounters with Islam and Christianity. The museum also hosts a display of Gule Wamkulu masks, text and images.*

*Another site worth visiting in Central Malawi is Senga Bay, situated approximately 15 kilometres from Salima. The bay has numerous resorts offering accommodation, restaurant and bar services.*

### **Lilongwe**

*Lilongwe became Malawi's capital in 1975 and is divided into two distinctly different sections named Old Town and the Capital City (city centre). Old Town has the appearance of a traditional African city, while the city centre is filled with modern buildings and appears to have much in common with other contemporary developments worldwide. Services and facilities in Lilongwe are of a high standard and there are a number of hotels, guest houses and lodges situated throughout the city.*

### **Nkhotakota**

*Nkhotakota situated about 190 kilometres from Lilongwe, is a lively market town and is believed to be the largest African settlement in central Africa. The town offers some of the most beautiful beaches, lagoons, a spit and also serves as a gateway to Likoma and Chizumulu islands on Lake Malawi on specific days when the ships dock at the port.*

*The town is also home to Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve, one of two large game areas in the Central region. The reserve consists mostly of miombo woodland with large patches of tall grass and occasional areas of rainforest. Nkhotakota Reserve is, however, difficult to access due to the few and quality of roads. The environment also makes game viewing difficult, but the reserve is ideal for walking safaris, fishing, bird watching and climbing. Visitors to Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve can also visit a rural village situated near the game reserve to experience and learn more about the different aspects of village life. Locals will explain their traditional initiation ceremonies and guests will be able to watch or participate in local dances. The villagers will also accompany guests to a nearby waterfall where the water has etched extraordinary figures in to the rocks.*

### **Dedza**

*Dedza situated south-east of Lilongwe is known as the highest town in Malawi. Resting at the foot of Dedza Mountain – on of the highest peaks in Malawi – Dedza is the ideal place to find old and new artistic traditions.*

*At Dedza Pottery and Lodge, operated by Paragon Ceramics, visitors can view craftsmen in the workshops or factory, producing items such mugs, dinner services, table lamps and tiles. The items are normally decorated in bright coloured designs or local sights and are sold at the factory shop. The pottery also offers accommodation in en-suite chalets, overlooking the mountains.*

*In the hills surrounding Dedza Pottery, visitors will find the Chongoni Rock Art Area and World Heritage Site. Several natural shelters house ancient rock paintings reflecting the rare tradition farmer rock art and BaTwa hunter-gatherers. The symbols in the art are associated with women and still have a cultural relevance amongst the locals.*

*Dedza Mountain, one of the highest peaks in Malawi, rises approximately 2 200 metres above the Great Rift Valley and is well worth the visit. From the mountain's summit visitors will have splendid views of Lake Malawi and bird watchers can look forward to unique bird sightings.*

## **Dzalanyama**

*Dzalanyama is a working forestry area with gum and pine plantations. The area carries great significance as some locals believe that this is the site of the creation of man – according to the locals the footprints of the first man are still visible in the rocks where God set him down.*

*The Dzalanyama Forest Reserve is situated approximately 40 kilometres south-west of Lilongwe in a range of hills. The area is ideal for exploring, trekking and mountain biking, bird watching and is also famous for its interesting flora.*

## **Ntchisi Forest Reserve**

*Not recommended as a trip for beginners, Ntchisi Forest Reserve is rather tricky to get to, but well worth the effort. The reserve includes a rain forest filled with butterflies and trees hung with lianas and green bulbuls and samango monkeys can also be heard throughout the forest. Guests to the forest are, however, advised not to go walking alone as there might be pit-falls on several of the game trails.*

## **Parks and Natural Attraction**

### **Lilongwe Nature Reserve**

*In the centre of Lilongwe, between the Old and New towns, lies the 120-hectare Lilongwe Nature Reserve. When walking along the footpaths of the Reserve, visitors should take note that both leopard and hyena roam the area.*

### **Dzalanyama Forest Reserve**

*About 40km south-west of Lilongwe is the Dzalanyama Forest Reserve with opportunities for exploring the variety of flora, natural pools and streams, bird watching and mountain biking.*

### **Kasungu National Park**

*Bordering Zambia, is the Kasungu National Park, a 2 100 sq km area of natural woodland and bush interspersed with stretches of open grass teeming with a variety of wildlife, including elephant, antelope, buffalo, and zebra amongst others. A significant number of hippos can be seen at the lake at Lifupa.*

*The central region has two vast game areas: Kasungu National Park in the west and Nkhotakota Reserve in the east, near the Lake, but there are also three game areas further south in the Shire Lowlands: Lengwe National Park and the wildlife reserves of Majete and Mwabvi.*

### **Zomba Plateau**

*Zomba Plateau boasts vast tracts of cedar, pine and cypress. The plateau top is criss-crossed by streams with tumbling waterfalls and still lakes. Drivable tracks make the views from the top, described in colonial times as "the best in the British Empire", accessible to the visitor to the area. Wildlife includes leopards, although sightings are rare. More in evidence are giant butterflies and, on the lower slopes, baboons. Birdlife includes the long-crested eagle and the augur buzzard.*

**Shopping**

*Lilongwe's Market in Mlangalanaga Road is worth a visit. The market is stocked with items ranging from live stock and fresh produce to arts and crafts.*

*Mua Mission is renowned for the wood carvings produced and sold there. Carvings sold at the mission are of high quality and prices are especially reasonable.*

*At Dedza Pottery visitors can view craftsmen in the workshops and factory producing items including mugs, dinner services, table lamps and tiles. The pottery also has a tea shop, which is a popular stop over between Lilongwe and Blantyre.*

**Historic, Cultural and educational excursions**

*The KuNgoni Centre of Culture and Art is also found at the Mua Mission. Here Malawi's history and culture is displayed through the Chamare Museum, the Carving Centre and the Research Centre. The KuNgoni Centre also holds displays of Gule Wamkulu masks, texts and images.*

*In the granite hills surrounding Dedza visitors will find the Chongoni Rock Art Area. Several rock paintings are found in natural shelters and some can be traced back to the late Stone Age.*

*At Cape Maclear visitors can have a glimpse of what remains of the original Livingstonia mission. A few missionary graves are also still on sight.*

**Recommended reading (in no particular order):**

- *Malawi – Lake of the Stars; Frank Johnson*
- *Africa's Top Wildlife Countries; Nolting, M.*
- *Safari Companion, Behaviour Guide of African Mammals; Estes, R.*
- *Newman's Birds of Southern Africa and Birds of Malawi; Ken Newman*
- *A guide to The Fishes of Lake Malawi; Lewis, Reinthal and Tendall*
- *Venture into the Interior; Laurens van der Post*
- *Livingstone's Lake; Ransford, O.*
- *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope; William Kamkwamba (Goodreads Author), Bryan Mealer.*
- *The Last of the Sweet Bananas: New and Selected Poems; Jack Mapanje*
- *The Jive Talker: An Artist's Genesis; Samson Kambalu*

***African Sojourns wishes you a wonderful and exciting holiday!***