



Malawi Travel Information

Information for the Visitor to Malawi

This information is provided as a guideline to the country you will be visiting. Further information is available to you on our website or the official Malawian Tourism Authority website (www.malawitourism.com).

Travel documents

All visitors must be in possession of a passport with a minimum of 3 blank pages and valid for at least six months beyond their date of intended departure from Malawi.

Further visa information is available on the following website (www.malawitourism.com). Please note we have provided this website as a guideline for further information, Terra Nova is not responsible for the content thereof.

Currency

The Malawi unit of currency is the kwacha (abbreviated to MK internationally; K locally) which is divided into 100 tambala. Practically speaking, only the kwacha is used. Travellers Cheques or foreign (hard) currency notes are widely accepted. You are strongly advised to avoid black market currency traders. There is no limit to the amount of foreign currency brought into Malawi but it must be declared and accounted for on departure. Only MK200 may be exported.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are only accepted at some of the major hotels. There is usually a minimum purchase price of US\$50 per transaction and a 6% commission is added.

Banks

Banks in the main towns are open weekdays from 08h00 to 13h00. Mobile banks operate along the Lakeshore and in more remote areas (check days/times locally).

Departure Tax

There is a US\$30 International departure tax per person. This is usually included in the ticket you have purchased but may not be - please check the ticket when you received it. Vouchers to pay for this tax are purchased at the airport but please note that payment must be in US dollars cash. There are also small domestic departure taxes (approximately US\$2.00 per person) from the main airports such as Lilongwe and Blantyre, when flying internally and again these are paid direct in US\$ cash.

Public Holidays

The dates of certain public holidays change from year to year – refer below. If a public holiday falls on a Saturday or a Sunday, then the Monday is also declared a public holiday

01 January – New Year Day

15 January – John Chilembwe Day

03 March – Martyr's Day

Varied date for Good Friday

Varied date for Easter Sunday

01 May – Labour Day

14 June – Freedom Day

06 July – Republic Day

The 02nd Monday in October – Mother's Day
25 December – Christmas Day
26 December – Boxing Day

Shopping

European-style shops are almost exclusively found in Blantyre and Lilongwe. Shops and offices open and close earlier in the day than is the custom in Europe or North America. Markets and roadside vendors are popular with travellers and popular souvenirs are the excellent wood carvings and straw goods. The standard of craftwork varies but at its best is quite outstanding. In the markets, bargaining is expected.

Duty Free

International travellers over the age of 18 may import, duty free: 200 cigarettes or 225gm of tobacco; 1 litre of spirits; 1 litre of beer; 1 litre of wine; plus a "reasonable" quantity of consumable goods to meet the traveller's immediate need while in Malawi.

Health

Besides the info in our general pre-tour information, please take note of the following:

Water

In Central Africa please treat ALL water (unless you are in Camps and Lodges where you are told that the water is fine) as undrinkable. Although most water may be safe to drink everywhere (it is free from bacteria), it may have a high mineral content generally magnesium, which acts like "Milk of Magnesia", and can therefore cause stomach upsets.

Bilharzia

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 as it can only exist in areas where there is minimal wave action. It is thus not likely to be present at Chintheche (where we have had the water tested often and never found bilharzia present) or at Kayak Africa where the camp is located 5 km's off the mainland. In the unlikely event of bilharzia being contracted, it is easily diagnosed by a simple blood test and easily and effectively treated with biltracide.

Malaria

Malawi is a malarial area and generally it is more prevalent in the lower hotter areas and during or within 3 months of the rains (November - June). Accommodation in all these areas will include mosquito netting. Please consult your doctor on the corrective preventative measures to take and see the more detailed note in our pre-departure information.

Laundry

Laundry can be done at all camps and hotels either complimentary or at a nominal charge.

Dress Code

Although no formal dress is required, the rural areas of Malawi are still conservative in outlook and ladies are advised to dress modestly. Outside of lodges and/or resorts, short skirts/shorts (i.e. above the knee) and swim suits would be inappropriate and if you thus wish to visit the local villages, then we recommend that you travel with a simple wrap around skirt (locally called a chitenje and available at any market in Malawi at a very reasonable price) to put on over your other attire.

Drinks policy

Drinks are usually excluded from the nightly tariff at all establishments in Malawi.

Language

Chichewa is the official language but English is widely spoken.

Mobile phones

At present the mobile network is fast expanding but does not cover all of Malawi. If you have international roaming then you should be able to talk and receive calls at Chintheche, Kayak Africa, Mvuu, Ku Chawe, Vwaza and Chelinda.

Time

Malawi shares the same time as all southern Africa which is Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) + 2 hours

Climate

There are a couple of anomalies that can occur i.e. the rains should stop in April and return in November but the north occasionally experiences summer rains and Zomba and Nyika can experience mist and drizzle throughout the year. Winds can brew up on the lake at any time. Our climate's two main influencing factors are altitude and time of year and there are 2 places we regularly visit, Zomba and Nyika National Park, which are at a higher altitude and will always therefore be chilly in the evenings, no matter what time of year. Lake Malawi and Mvuu are all at an altitude of about 400 metres above sea level and will be much warmer. April to May - Warm days and cool evenings, clear skies after the rains and 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 with warm evenings.

November to December - Either hot and wet or hot and dry.

January to March - Hot and wet but still possible to travel around particularly in the south.

Temperatures vary from below freezing (at night on the high plateau in winter – July) to 38°C (in the Lower Shire Valley in summer – December). To generalise is difficult but through much of the year, and in regions visited by travellers, temperatures during the day are usually in the mid-20sC. In the short hot season, November-December, maximum temperatures may rise to the lower 30sC. Lake Malawi's surface temperatures vary from about 24°C to 28°C.

Rainfall varies greatly. Some years in the early 1990s were exceptionally dry. Really high figures are rare.

Parts of the Lakeshore can receive 1270 to 1525 mm a year but Lilongwe's and Blantyre's figures are less than half that. Much of the rain falls in short but heavy bursts.

Recommended reading

We recommend the following books specific to the Malawian region. A further list of recommended books is contained in our general pre tour information.

1. A guide to the Fishes of Lake Malawi - Lewis, Reinthal and Tendall
2. Malawi - Lake of the Stars - Frank Johnson
3. Field Guide to the Mammals of Africa including Madagascar - Haltenorth, T., Diller, H.
4. Newman's Birds of Malawi - Ken Newman
5. Venture into the Interior - Laurens van der Post
6. Livingstone - T. Jeal
7. Livingstone's Lake - O.Ransford
8. The Spectrum Guide to Malawi - White and Douglas

Everyone should bring their own pair of BINOCULARS in order to get the most out of the safari.

Enjoy Malawi!

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