

AFRICA · WILDLIFE · BEACHES · DIVING · HIKING · OFF THE BEATEN PATH

 *Malawi*

Lake Malawi runs along much of the country's eastern edge, a freshwater inland sea whose clear water holds hundreds of colourful cichlid species found nowhere else. Add the rolling Nyika Plateau, the granite bulk of Mount Mulanje and revived safari parks such as Liwonde, and the 'Warm Heart of Africa' nickname feels earned rather than marketed.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Malawi and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 20 October 2026.

|                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  CAPITAL<br><b>Lilongwe</b>                     |  CURRENCY<br><b>Malawian kwacha (MWK)</b><br>£1 ≈ MWK 2,329 |  LANGUAGE<br><b>Chichewa, English</b><br>Chitumbuka, Chiyao                                           |  BEST TIME<br><b>May–Oct</b>                |
|  DAILY BUDGET<br><b>£30–£200</b><br>££ Moderate |  PLUGS<br><b>Type G</b><br>230V · UK plugs fit              |  FLIGHT FROM LONDON<br><b>16h via Addis Ababa,<br/>Nairobi or Johannesburg</b><br>~£800–£1,350 return |  TIME ZONE<br><b>UTC+2</b><br>standard time |

Malawi is long and narrow, wrapped around a lake roughly 580 km long that dominates both the map and most itineraries. The south holds the safari parks of Liwonde and Majete, the tea estates and peaks of Mulanje and Zomba's forested plateau; the centre has Lilongwe and the lakeshore at Senga Bay and Cape Maclear; the north rises to Nyika and the mission station at Livingstonia. A typical two-week trip runs from Lilongwe to the lake, south to Liwonde and Mulanje and out via Blantyre, or flips north for Nkhata Bay and Likoma Island.

This is one of Africa's poorest countries and travel is slow: minibuses wait until full and many roads are potholed. In return you get uncrowded parks, low prices outside the safari lodges and an easy lake life of kayaking, snorkelling and village walks. Conservation has been a quiet success, with African Parks reintroducing lions, cheetahs, rhinos and hundreds of elephants to its reserves. Malawi suits overlanders, divers and repeat Africa travellers who want something quieter than the big safari circuits. Many visitors are surprised by how cold the highlands get at night in June and July.

Top 5 highlights

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div><div>1</div><div>WILDLIFE</div><div><b>Lake Malawi National Park</b></div><div>Often called the world's first freshwater national park and UNESCO-listed for its astonishing range of cichlid fish. Snorkel or kayak from Cape Maclear to granite islands where fish eagles nest and the water is clear enough to watch shoals from the surface.</div></div> | <div><div>2</div><div>WILDLIFE</div><div><b>Liwonde National Park</b></div><div>Boat safaris on the Shire River pass hippos, crocodiles and elephants, while game drives seek black rhinos and the lions and cheetahs reintroduced since African Parks took over management in 2015.</div></div> |
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## ADVENTURE

**Mount Mulanje**

A granite massif rising abruptly from tea estates to Sapitwa Peak at about 3,000 metres. Multi-day hikes use simple mountain huts, with porters and guides arranged at Likhubula.

4

## NATURE

**Nyika National Park**

A high, rolling grassland plateau in the north where zebra and roan antelope graze among wildflowers and orchids after the rains. Superb for walking, mountain biking and cool, clear-air game drives.

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## BEACH

**Likoma Island**

A remote Malawian island in Mozambican waters, reached by boat or light aircraft, with sandy coves, baobabs and the vast Anglican St Peter's Cathedral, built by missionaries in the early 1900s.

**Biggest cities**

## LARGEST CITY

**Lilongwe**

≈ 990,000 people

A sprawling, low-rise capital split between the Old Town's markets and the leafy government quarter. Most travellers stay a night, visit the wildlife centre, then head for the lake.

## 2ND LARGEST CITY

**Blantyre**

≈ 800,000 people

The commercial hub, founded as a Scottish mission in 1876 and still graced by the brick church of St Michael and All Angels. A practical base for Mulanje, Zomba and Majete.

## 3RD LARGEST CITY

**Mzuzu**

≈ 220,000 people

The northern region's main town, with banks, supermarkets and transport links; a useful stop for supplies on the way to Nkhata Bay, Nyika or Livingstonia.

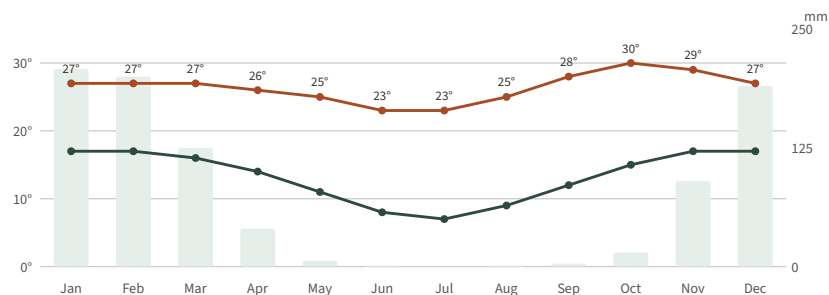
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

**When to go to Malawi**

Best time: **May–Oct.**

**Average climate in Lilongwe**

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)

**Festivals & events**

Aug

**Umthetho Cultural Festival**

The Ngoni people's annual gathering at the foot of Hora Mountain in Mzimba district each August, with warrior dances, praise poetry and royal ceremony.

## Lake of Stars

A three-day arts festival on the lakeshore, recently held at Nkhotakota in September or October, mixing Malawian and international musicians with poetry, film and dawn swims.

## How much does Malawi cost?

|                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div>SHOESTRING</div> <div>£30</div> <div>per person / day</div> <div>≈ MWK 69,866</div> <div>hostels, street food, buses</div> | <div>MID-RANGE</div> <div>£75</div> <div>per person / day</div> <div>≈ MWK 174,666</div> <div>3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis</div> | <div>COMFORTABLE</div> <div>£200</div> <div>per person / day</div> <div>≈ MWK 465,776</div> <div>4-star+, guided trips, private transfers</div> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

## Food to try

### Nsima with ndiwo

Stiff maize porridge rolled into balls by hand and dipped into ndiwo relish of beans, greens, meat or fish; the daily staple.

### Chambo

A Lake Malawi tilapia, usually grilled or fried whole and served with nsima or chips; best eaten fresh on the lakeshore.

### Mandasi

Lightly sweet fried dough buns sold at roadsides and markets in the morning, often with sweet milky tea.

## Getting around

Minibuses link most towns cheaply but leave only when packed, while a few coach companies run more comfortable services between Lilongwe, Blantyre and Mzuzu. The veteran MV Ilala ferry, when running, links lakeshore ports with Likoma. Light aircraft serve upmarket lodges, and many visitors hire a car with a driver. Fill up in towns, as filling stations are sparse in rural areas.

## Practical information

### PLUGS & VOLTAGE



G

230V — UK plugs fit

### DIALLING CODE

+265

### TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

### TIPPING

Not expected in local eateries, but around 10% is appreciated in tourist restaurants. Lodges usually have a shared staff tip box, and guides expect tips.

### ETIQUETTE

Take time over greetings, and give or receive with both hands, or with your left hand supporting your right forearm. Dress modestly in villages and cover knees away from the beach.

### EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **998**

Fire: **999**

Police: **990** or **997**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

### TIME ZONE

UTC+2 (standard time)

### DRIVING

On the left

MAIN AIRPORTS

Kamuzu International Airport (LLW), Lilongwe; Chileka International Airport (BLZ), Blantyre

Visas & entry for Malawi

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must apply for a visa to enter Malawi.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic 6–8 weeks before you go. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Dengue Hepatitis B Measles Polio Rabies Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in Malawi: antimalarial tablets recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Malawi

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

|                 |                       |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Fri 25 Dec 2026 | Christmas Day         |
| Sat 26 Dec 2026 | Boxing Day            |
| Mon 28 Dec 2026 | Boxing Day (observed) |
| Fri 1 Jan 2027  | New Year's Day        |
| Fri 15 Jan 2027 | John Chilembwe Day    |
| Wed 3 Mar 2027  | Martyrs Day           |
| Fri 26 Mar 2027 | Good Friday           |
| Mon 29 Mar 2027 | Easter Monday         |
| Sat 1 May 2027  | Labour Day            |

|                 |                       |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Mon 3 May 2027  | Labour Day (observed) |
| Fri 14 May 2027 | Kamuzu Day            |
| Tue 6 Jul 2027  | Independence Day      |
| Fri 15 Oct 2027 | Mother's Day          |

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

## Useful phrases in Chichewa

| ENGLISH           | CHICHEWA     | SAY IT            |
|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Hello             | Moni         | MOH-nee           |
| Thank you         | Zikomo       | zee-KOH-moh       |
| Please            | Chonde       | CHON-deh          |
| Excuse me         | Pepani       | peh-PAH-nee       |
| How much is this? | Ndi zingati? | ndee zeen-GAH-tee |

## Know before you go

- Bilharzia is present in parts of Lake Malawi, especially near reedy shores and villages; ask a doctor about a screening test a few weeks after you swim.
- Bring clean, recent US dollar notes for lodges and park fees, and draw kwacha from bank ATMs in cities; card acceptance in rural areas is limited.
- The whole country is malarial, including the lakeshore. See a travel clinic well before departure, and use repellent and a net at dusk.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice ([gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](https://gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice)) and TravelHealthPro ([travelhealthpro.org.uk](https://travelhealthpro.org.uk)). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.