

Malawi has an incredible variety of stunning landscapes

Malawi is a small landlocked country in Africa, south of the Equator between latitudes 9 degrees 45' and 17 degrees 16' South and between longitudes 33 degrees 35' east. It is 900 kilometres long, varying in width from 80 kilometres to 160 kilometres and covering an area of 118, 484 square kilometres. The country is bordered to the North and North-East by the Republic of Tanzania and to the East, South, and South-West by the Republic of Mozambique. The Republic of Zambia forms the Western border.



Photo Credit: jacksonsafricansafaris.com

The unique rolling hills of orchid-clad Nyika; the cool forested plateau of Zomba; the 10000 ft (3000m) climbers' paradise of Mulanje Massif; the broad and fertile Shire Valley. From rugged highlands to lowland plains – the scene is ever-changing. Malawi's nine Wildlife Reserves offer truly unspoiled wilderness. Experience the thrill of safaris as they used to be, staying in just a handful of exclusive lodges. The only crowds are the animals: lions and leopards; elephants and hippos; antelope and rhino. And Malawi has the best birdlife in the region. Hundreds of miles of tropical golden sand beaches line Africa's third-largest lake. Lake Malawi is a true inland sea

– and tideless. Relax in the sun on an uncrowded beach, hand-feed tropical fish at the world's first freshwater National Park, or enjoy the watersports (expert tuition available). Known as the Warm Heart of Africa, Malawi has a thoroughly deserved reputation for the friendliness of its people. Wherever you go you will receive a welcome which is unsurpassed anywhere else in the world. This is a land of smiles, of genuine friendship. Let the Warm Heart embrace you.

Malawi has excellent travel opportunities, not only in- but also outside the beautiful and diverse country. There are options for all budgets. A good starting point is reading a proper travel guide; Bradt or Lonely Planet provides interesting, abundant, and practical information on Malawi and surrounding countries. A reliable car, preferably with high clearance, can also be helpful, and if you prefer public transport, there are buses and minibusses. Depending on your sense of adventure or need for comfort, camping gear is useful; practically all camping items are for sale in Lilongwe, unless you are only happy with the very best. Lilongwe also has travel agencies, of which Kiboko (+2651751226), Land and Lake (+2651757120), Wilderness (+2651771393), and Ulendo (+2651754947) are the most commonly used. For flights abroad, some internet research might save you money (expedia.com). It should be noted, however, that at times there are fuel shortages in the country which can seriously hamper travel around the city let alone exploring the region.

The main attraction is the Lake, easily reachable from Lilongwe, in not more than 2 hours; Nkhata, Senga Bay, Cape Maclear, and Monkey Bay are popular destinations. Swimming, kayaking, fishing, diving, scuba diving are popular activities. Mountains and hills are for example in Mulanje, Zomba, and the Viphya Plateau. Activities: hiking, mountain biking, climbing, horse riding. Game parks you find in Liwonde, Kasungu, and Vwasa Marsh.

RELIEF AND CLIMATE

The country is dominated by Lake Malawi which runs southwards parallel to the main strip of land. This magnificent body of water is 568 kilometres long and 16 kilometres wide, accounting for 20 percent of Malawi's total surface area. Malawi has a varied

topography of mountains and rivers, which have a direct effect on the climate with minimum temperatures averaging from 14.4 – 19.4 degrees Celsius to 25 – 32 degrees Celsius along the lakeshore and Shire River valley areas. October and November are hot and often humid as the weather builds up to the rainy season.

BUSINESS HOURS

Civil Service Monday-Friday 0730h to 1200h and 1300h to 1700h. Private Sector Monday-Friday 0730h to 1200h and 1300h to 1700h Banks Monday-Friday 0800h to 1500h and Saturdays 0900h to 1100h.

DRESS

There are no restrictions on dressing in Malawi although it is usually formal in the city hotel where a lounge suit for men and a smarter dress for women may be required for certain occasions. The school has a modest dress code. Given the warm climate, light clothing should be packed, although in July/August the evenings can get quite chilly and so it is advisable to also pack some slightly warmer clothing.

PHOTOGRAPHY

This is allowed in all areas except military installations, uniformed security personnel, and all places of a security nature.

CURRENCY

The local currency in Malawi is the Kwacha and Tambala. 100 Tambala equals One Kwacha (MK1.00). There is no limit to the number of cash visitors may bring into the country and the same applies to the amount that can be taken out of the country as long as it's legally obtained. The latter was previously limited to USD 5,000 per outward journey.

It should be pointed out that with a negatively floating Kwacha, prices in the shops can be highly variable and open to frequent inflation.

POPULATION

Malawi has a population of close to 16.7 million and the population of main towns after the 2008 national census is: Blantyre 661,256; Lilongwe 674,448; Mzuzu 133,968,

Zomba 88,314. At the regional level, the South makes up 48.3% of the population, the Centre: 39.5%, and the North: 12.2%. English and Chichewa are the official languages while all the other major languages such as Tumbuka, Yao, Lomwe, Sena, and Tonga are used on the radio, in the media, and in schools at the local level.

IMMIGRATION

All visitors to Malawi must have passports and valid visas and — for those wishing to stay longer or wish to obtain employment, get an education or simply run bonafide businesses — it is a strict requirement that they possess requisite permits. Visas are not required for all visitors from the Southern African Development Community. Immigration formalities are kept to the minimum for visitors staying for periods not longer than three months.

As a new member of staff, the school will be applying for a Temporary Employment Permit (TEP) which in most cases will be ready for your arrival. The TEP is a requirement to stay in the country and also to be able to remit foreign exchange back home.

LIVING COSTS

Daily expenses in Malawi can be surprisingly expensive. Whilst there are some shopping basket items that are refreshingly good value for money, equally, there are many that could be seen as on a par with European prices.

There are several large supermarkets in the city which offer a wide variety of local and imported produce. There is also a market where locally grown produce may be purchased (and of course perhaps a little bargaining!)

There is a range of restaurants in Lilongwe offering western, Indian, Chinese, and Korean dishes. Prices of course vary. Typically a dish will be in the range of K3500 – K8000. A pizza will be around K3500 – K6000.

SEASONS

Malawi has two main seasons, the dry and the wet. The wet season extends from November to April. Rainfall amounts are variable; within the range of 725 – 2500 mm.

From May to August, it is cool and dry. July is a mid-winter month. In September it is hot and dry with October and November as the hottest months with rains expected almost throughout the country.

SHOPPING HOURS

Monday-Friday: 0800h to 1200h/1230h and 1300h/1330h to 1630h/1800h. Some shops, particularly the larger supermarkets, remain open at lunch time and through to 1800h/2000h. Saturday: 0800h to 1700h/ 1800h

BANKING SERVICES

There is a range of banks available in Lilongwe. BMIS tends to recommend Standard Bank simply because it holds accounts with them and therefore salary transfers are easier and quicker. Banks provide cheque books, although many retail outlets require pre-authorization in order to accept cheques. Very few shops accept payment by debit or credit card.

Expatriate staff are entitled to remit up to 2/3 of their salary to a foreign currency. However, this can often be problematic, particularly during the first few months in Malawi. Expatriate workers will require all their TEP (Temporary Employment Permit) documentation to have been completed before the banks will remit money overseas and this process may take several weeks or months to be finalised.

There are significant problems within Malawi with foreign currency and remittances. Some staff have been lucky and have not had problems, whilst others have found the process quite frustrating. New staff should anticipate potential hiccups

TV, RADIO, AND PRESS

Malawi has a national radio station providing two channels with the main studios located in Blantyre as well as five other private stations transmitting from Lilongwe, Blantyre, and Mangochi. The two channels on the national radio stations are on FM, MW, and SW and broadcast in English and the six major local languages — Chichewa, Tumbuka, Lomwe, Sena, Yao, and Tonga. These channels are also available online. A national television

station opened in mid-1999 but international satellite television provided by Multichoice Malawi is also available throughout the country.

There is also a proliferation of print and electronic media with more than 16 newspapers in circulation at the last count although only four can claim mass-circulation status. There are two dailies, 'The Nation' and 'Daily Times', and their sister weekend papers 'Weekend Nation' and 'Malawi News'. All are tabloids covering both local and international news. A government paper 'The Weekly News' is published Tuesdays and Fridays. Most international news magazines and regional newspapers are current but overseas publications are sometimes a week late. These are available from the two main book stalls Times and Central Bookshops, which also stock a variety of essential and leisure reading materials as well as toys.

HOUSING

Expatriate teaching staff appointed from overseas are provided with suitable furnished accommodation. Teacher's accommodation usually consists of a two or three-bedroom apartment or villa. Lilongwe is quite spread out and while every effort is made to source accommodation close to the school, this cannot be guaranteed. All accommodation is furnished with basic amenities. All new staff will be given a starter kit of essentials (cups, saucepans, etc.) for their home until their luggage arrives or until they purchase their own items. New teachers will also be given an advance on their salary, payable over the first three months, to enable them to purchase essential household goods.

It must be pointed out that Malawi is a developing country and as such faces numerous issues which include frequent power cuts and water shortages. Whilst these may be seen as an opportunity to have a braai (BBQ) and to conserve water, these inconveniences can also lead to frustration. It is not uncommon for a party to be relocated at the last minute because a certain area has no power!

Houses are rarely fitted with air-conditioning units, although some come with ceiling fans. These will be essential in the hot months of October and November. Floor and wall fans can be purchased locally, but like everything, they are not necessarily cheap.

SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

There are several sports clubs in Lilongwe. Very close to the school is the Golf club which also offers a pool, tennis, squash courts, and snooker. Adjacent to the Golf Club is the Cricket Club which has an active social program.

Socially, many teachers get together at weekends either at people's homes or at one of the bars or restaurants. Some of the clubs (above) occasionally arrange events, as does the school's PTA, but those people looking for high entertainment found in most capital cities will be disappointed. Generally, the lifestyle is what *you* make it.

There is a cable TV service (DSTV) that offers a wide range of international programs including sports and movie channels. Subscription packages vary in price, and a good selection of news, sports, and entertainment channels will cost around K6270 minimum (US\$ 11) and K 43,890 maximum (US\$ 77) per month.