

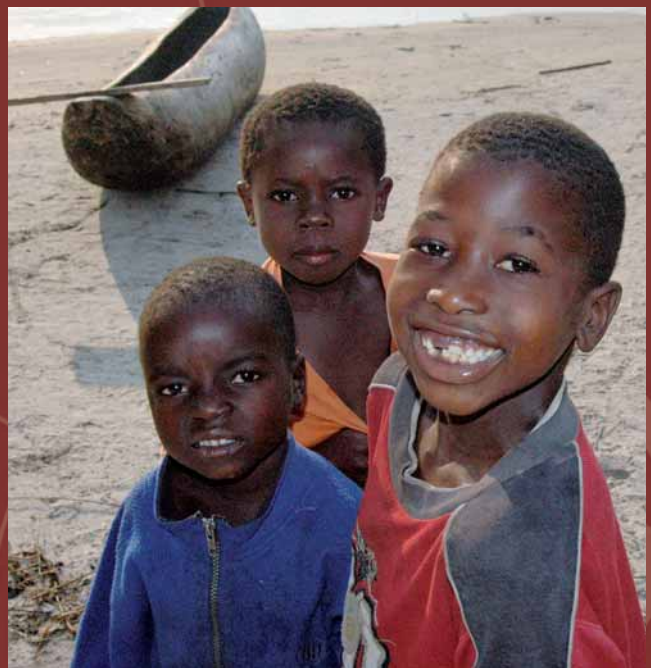
MALAWI

Malawi lies at the southern end of Africa's Great Rift Valley. It's a densely populated country with green productive land, lots of small traditional farms and famously friendly people. Watching local children play around the lake, you'll quickly understand why Malawi is promoted as the 'Warm Heart of Africa'.

The physical and spiritual backbone of the country is Lake Malawi, stretching for over 300 miles and covering more than 20% of the country in water. These clear, mineral-rich waters teem with countless, brightly coloured cichlid fish, many of which are endemic. Away from the lake, two high plateaux, Zomba and Mulanje, tower above rolling farmlands; both offer gentle hiking in a rich wilderness of moorlands and forests.



Relaxing by the pool at Club Makokola



Malawi's a friendly country and travelling responsibly helps reduce poverty



THE LAKESHORE

We have concentrated on the best places to stay along the lakeshore, either tucked into secluded coves, on rocky islands or along the lake's golden beaches – they make thoroughly relaxing beach retreats.

Chintheche Inn is a quiet and simple lodge on the northern lakeshore. It has a large central area, a bar and a new curio shop which sells local crafts. Close by, the restaurant spills out onto the lawn which rolls down to a fairly remote beach. Overlooking this is a large swimming pool, and a smaller children's pool. Each of Chintheche's ten comfortable, en-suite rooms has a veranda leading directly out on to the beach, from where it's possible to go snorkelling, sailing, fishing, scuba diving or on boat trips to nearby islands. The lodge also offers guided walks, fascinating village visits, mountain biking trails and cultural trips.

Five kilometres south of Chintheche is **Makuzi Beach**, a small owner-run lodge beside the water's edge. Makuzi has ten comfortable en-suite stone chalets overlooking the beach, with the main bar and dining area built on the rocks above the shoreline. As well as the usual lake activities, it is also possible to visit the nearby Bandawe Mission and orphanage.

A two-hour drive from Lilongwe, the **Sunbird Livingstonia Beach** hotel has 32 colonial-style rooms set in tropical gardens, alongside a beautiful beach. The rooms are spacious with en-suite facilities and fans, although the décor is a bit dated. Meals are taken either in the formal dining room or outside on the terrace under the trees. Despite the quiet atmosphere, there is a lot to do here – there's a large swimming pool, a tennis court, boat and snorkelling trips.

Close to the town of Mangochi, **Club Makokola**, or 'Club Mak' as it's known, is a thatched resort built beside a 600m-long golden beach on the lake's southern shores. It has 56 comfortable rooms, including some suites and family rooms, spread around extensive and beautiful tropical gardens. The furnishings are all



The lawns at Chintheche overlook the lake

locally made and the carvings come from Mua Mission. This is a lively place, offering activities that include sailing, boating and scuba diving. Club Mak has two swimming pools, as well as facilities for tennis and squash, and a nine-hole golf course scattered with baobabs.

Situated on the southern shore of Lake Malawi, within the Lake Malawi National Park, is a new lodge, owned and run by the professional team from Zambia's **Robin Pope Safaris** (see page 77). **Pumulani**, literally translated as "rest", is a smooth and luxurious beach lodge, set on gentle slopes of a hill leading down to a largely private beach. (Being on a hillside, note that Pumulani has lots of stairs.)

Pumulani's central area has a dining room, a separate bar and two outside decks. One is usually used for dining, whilst the lower is dominated by a large infinity swimming pool. There is a beach bar down on the lake shore, for light snacks as well as drinks, and the service is very good throughout.

Each of the ten hillside villas has a large bedroom, a comfortable sitting area and an en suite bathroom. Sliding glass doors lead out onto a big raised deck – and the roofs of the villas are grassed over to blend into the hillside.

Activities at Pumulani include snorkelling, kayaking, waterskiing, wake-boarding, sailing, fishing and scuba diving. Also on offer are village walks and birdwatching, accompanied by a guide. The lodge also has its own very impressive dhow, built in Malawi, for sunset cruises.



The honeymoon island at Kaya Mawa is reached by a rope bridge

LIKOMA ISLAND & ENVIRONS

Far offshore from Chintheche, but only 7km from Mozambique, lies a small island covering an area of 17km², called Likoma Island. Its inhabitants are mostly fishermen, but there are a couple of tiny villages, one bush road, a few vehicles and some bicycles. There is one town, Kapyela, and (amazingly) here you'll find St Peter's Cathedral – the third largest cathedral in Central Africa! Built in 1903, this is twenty-two feet longer than Winchester Cathedral. Inside, you'll not only find a lovely working cathedral, but also a great deal of carved soapstone and stained-glass windows kept in perfect condition.

Likoma Island's sandy beaches and secluded coves have some of the best snorkelling and diving in Malawi. On the southern tip of the island, between two beaches, is the small but stunning **Kaya Mawa Lodge** (a name which means "maybe tomorrow" in Chichewa). Each of its ten individual stone-and-thatch cottages was built by hand. Many perch on the rocks with panoramic views of the lake, others are nearer the beach, and all have their own private patio. Inside each is a four-poster bed, sunken bath, shower and a fabulous "loo with a view"! The honeymoon house is very special; on its own private island which is reached by rope bridge.

Kaya Mawa's dining and bar area (complete



St. Peter's Cathedral on Likoma Island

with a plunge pool) is built on a rocky outcrop with sweeping views of the lake. Kaya Mawa is a perfect hideaway for relaxing and enjoying the beach, and is a popular venue for romantic retreats – though the rough stone steps here won't suit less agile travellers.

Kaya Mawa is a place to be active. It has a recently constructed dive centre, with excellent snorkelling and diving equipment, a speed boat for waterskiing, plus kayaks, a laser dinghy and paddle-skis. On land you can head out on a mountain bike or try a little quad-biking, although most people will also enjoy just exploring the island on foot.

KAYAK AFRICA

Our favourite way to visit the lake is with Kayak Africa. Within Lake Malawi National Park, you'll reach their idyllic island camps, Mumbo and Domwe, either by kayak (two or three hours' paddle to Mumbo), or a slow 45 minutes by motorboat from the base camp at Cape Maclear.

Mumbo Island is the smaller and more scenic of the two islands. It has five very comfortable en-suite tents on wooden platforms, each with its own private deck and hammock, offering lovely views over the clear waters of the lake. In addition, there's a twin-tented family unit tucked into the forest, off the main beach. At Mumbo, you can just relax or choose to be active, by paddling yourself around the island, following one of the short marked hiking trails, or going bird-watching or fishing. The food here is fairly simple, wholesome fare – and the island has a well-stocked bar. (There is a small dive centre here, but when we last visited we were not happy to recommend it.)

On the lake's western shore, **Domwe Island** has three large tents and two camping sites. This island caters mainly for residents of southern Africa, who arrive with their own camping kit, food and supplies. The same activities are available here as those possible on Mumbo, although Domwe's marked trails are longer.

DANFORTH YACHTING

Owned and run by Howard and Michelle, Danforth Yachting run a small lodge, a water-sports centre and a rather lovely liveaboard boat.

On the shore, **Danforth Lodge** stands in a beautiful spot: on the peninsula of Cape Maclear, which is lined by pristine beaches. Inside, four beautifully-designed rooms face directly on to the lawn, and the beach beyond. Each has private en suite facilities, fans and mosquito nets, and comes with high-quality furnishing and a nautical theme. There is a central dining area and bar although (weather permitting) guests can usually dine out under the stars. The PADI water-sports centre here has very good diving equipment, plus hobie-cats, water-skiing and kayaks – and the dives in the area are excellent.

However, the main attraction here is the large, ocean-going catamaran, **Mufasa**, which is based at the lodge and can be booked for anything from a short sundowner cruise to a journey to the far end of the lake. This stunning 38-foot yacht has 'state of the art' controls and can be used under sail or as a motor-cruiser.



Learning to sail at Danforth



Traditional dancing on Likoma Island



Local fishing boats on the shore of Lake Malawi



Pearl-spotted owl in acacia

MANDA WILDERNESS, MOZAMBIQUE

Likoma is the gateway to an exciting new conservancy in Mozambique – the Manda Wilderness Community Trust. This was started in 1997 by a group of friends wanting to protect wildlife and benefit the local people. Here you will stay at Nkwichi Lodge, whose responsible approach to tourism won it the prestigious *Tourism for Tomorrow Community Award* in 2005. At present this can only be reached by boat from Likoma, via the village of Cobue, as there are no roads within miles of it. Hence we've chosen to include it in these Malawi pages, even though it is in Mozambique.

Nkwichi Lodge has seven very spacious, wood-and-thatch chalets. These have been designed individually and are tucked away amongst the trees, overlooking the lake; all are largely open at the front. Each has a four-poster bed, made from local tree trunks, and an en-suite open-air bathroom, with hot and cold running water, built amongst the rocks. The lodge does have a lounge and raised dining area, but it's very relaxed and informal, so most meals are eaten out on the beach or a wooden deck under a fig tree.

Activities can include snorkelling, kayaking, walking, bird-watching, picnics and visits to nearby villages – although relaxation is also taken very seriously here! This beach has

squeaky-white sand: the finest on the lakeshore.

The Trust arranges many community projects, which are often fascinating to visit. These include construction schemes for new schools and a maize mill, and a project whereby the local people are taught to improve their farming skills.

LIWONDE NATIONAL PARK

Malawi doesn't have the huge reserves full of big game that you'll find elsewhere in Africa. However, if you feel like a couple of days of gentle game viewing close to the lake, then Liwonde is ideal. It's a very lush park, totally tropical in atmosphere and reminiscent of the setting for Bogart and Hepburn's **African Queen**.

At its heart is the palm-lined Shire River, whose banks are home to numerous hippos and crocodiles, whilst the adjacent plains and forests harbour elephant, waterbuck, bushbuck, impala and beautiful sable antelope. The rich birdlife includes species from East and Southern Africa – Boehm's bee-eater, the palmtree vulture, Pel's fishing owl and Livingstone's flycatcher. So while Liwonde isn't the biggest or most spectacular safari park in Africa, it has a winning ambience and first-class birdwatching.



Mvuu Lodge's boat on the Shire River

Mvuu Wilderness Lodge is perfect for exploring this park on 4WD safaris day and night, guided walking safaris and wonderful river trips by motor boat. Mvuu Lodge has five luxury tents with en-suite bathrooms and private decks overlooking the lagoon. An additional three superior tents were completed in 2008 and attract a small supplement. The central dining, bar and lounge area is raised above the lagoon offering a great spot for game viewing whilst you enjoy your meal. There's also a welcome swimming pool for cooling off in the heat of the day.

Nearby the larger, family-friendly **Mvuu Camp** caters to more budget-conscious travellers. It has seven en-suite twin chalets and five en-suite family units, each with two bedrooms. As with the lodge, its thatched lounge and dining area has lovely views up the Shire River and its safari activities are similar to those offered at the lodge.

ZOMBA PLATEAU

Overlooking Liwonde and the Shire River Valley, Zomba Plateau is Malawi's oldest forest reserve. Here, waterfalls, trout dams and walking trails are interlaced with pine and indigenous montane forests.

Perched on the edge of the plateau, **Ku Chawe Inn** is a super mountain retreat, with good food and notably friendly service. Commanding panoramic views of the valley below, it makes a perfect base for gentle hiking in search of the birds, wild orchids and the occasional antelope. Lepidopterists will already know that Zomba is renowned for its butterflies.



Fishing provides the main source of food and income for many lakeshore communities

Combinations with South Luangwa

Malawi is easy to combine with Zambia's South Luangwa National Park (see pages 72-76), and relaxing beside Lake Malawi makes a great end to a serious safari. Flying from the Luangwa's Mfuwe airport to Lilongwe takes around an hour. Call us to help you plan a trip combining Zambia with Malawi.



The beach beside Nkwichi Lodge is probably the best beach on the lake

MUA MISSION

About 160 kilometres east of Lilongwe, in the foothills of the Dedza Highlands, is **Mua Mission**. This was first established by the Roman Catholic Church about 100 years ago, and a village has since grown up around it. The KuNgoni Art and Craft Centre was started here in the 1970s and is now famous throughout the region for the quality of its woodcarvings.

Mua also has a remarkable plantation of mahogany trees, which was started by the missionaries to supply the woodcarvers. A beautiful landscaped garden has been added, and there is also a fascinating cultural museum here. Most visitors just drop in to Mua for a few hours when travelling between Lilongwe and the lake. However, Mua Mission does have ten very simple, en-suite rooms here in five semidetached rondavels – and the atmosphere around the mission community is very relaxed.

Malawi: the facts

Currency:	Malawi's currency is the Kwacha. At time of writing £1 = MKw240, although camps often charge in US\$. Most lodges accept travellers' cheques; some take credit cards.
Visas:	Travellers with British passports do not currently need a visa (although a visa is needed for Nkwichi Lodge in Mozambique).
Health:	Several vaccines are sensible for Malawi: typhoid, polio, tetanus and possibly yellow fever. Malaria is common: you should take anti-malarials. Always check the latest recommendations with your doctor or travel clinic.
Language:	English is the official language and spoken by most people.
Food:	The standard of food is generally good, as is the local beer. Imported South African beers and wine are excellent.
Climate:	For details of Malawi's climate, and the best times to visit, see the section on 'When to go' on pages 14 – 15.
Children:	Children are warmly welcomed throughout Malawi and enjoy the lake immensely.

Trip Ideas in Malawi

(for costs see pages 158–160)

To help you with ideas and costs, we've split our Malawi trips into two separate elements:

- **Safari ideas** – whole, stand-alone trips to Malawi.
- **Ideas for lake add-ons** – start or end your trip beside the Lake

To get an idea of the costs, simply take one of the *Safari ideas* and, if you wish, add to it one of the *Ideas for lake add-ons*.

As usual, all our trips are tailor-made. So treat the following as just ideas. Call to talk your ideas through with one of our experts, who can help you design the perfect trip for you.

Safari Ideas

These few suggestions are not fixed; they're just an idea of what's possible. We'll be happy to cost out an individual trip for you.

See pages 158-160 for their corresponding prices, and note that these prices for the Trip ideas include scheduled flights between London and Lilongwe (via Nairobi or Johannesburg), UK airport departure tax, all internal flights and transfers. Current airport departure tax in Malawi is US\$35 per person and must be paid locally in US\$.

Bushpig Safari

Fly & transfer: **6 nights/7 days**

- 2n Liwonde National Park** – Mvuu Lodge (fba)
- 2n Zomba Plateau** – Ku Chawe Inn (hb)

Warthog Safari

Fly & transfer: **8 nights/9 days**

- 3n Liwonde National Park** – Mvuu Lodge (fba)
- 3n Zomba Plateau** – Ku Chawe Inn (hb)

Cape Clawless Otter Safari

Fly & transfer: **8 nights/9 days**

- 2n Liwonde National Park** – Mvuu Lodge (fba)
- 2n Lake Malawi** – Yacht *Mufasa* (fb)
- 2n The Lakeshore** – Chintheche Inn (fb)

Roan Safari

Fly & transfer: **11 nights/12 days**

- 3n Liwonde National Park** – Mvuu Lodge (fba)
- 2n Lake Malawi** – Yacht *Mufasa* (fb)
- 2n Likoma Island** – Kaya Mawa (fb)
- 2n Manda Wilderness** – Nkwichi Lodge (fb)

Ideas for Lake Add-ons

These suggestions are very flexible; they're designed to be combined with one of our Safari ideas. They include transport to and from Lilongwe, but they exclude any international flights. Call us and we'll cost a trip that's designed for you.

Black Top Cichlid Add-on

4n The Lakeshore – Chintheche Inn (hb)

Costs £795 pp sharing.

Red Top Cichlid Add-on

4n The Lakeshore – Club Makokola (hb)

Costs £733 pp sharing.

Blue Neon Cichlid Add-on

4n Lake Malawi – Mumbo Island (fba)

Costs £967 pp sharing.

Peacock Cichlid Add-on

4n Likoma Island – Kaya Mawa (fb)

Costs £1,342 pp sharing from 4 Jan–30 Apr, and £1,414 pp sharing from 1 May–20 Dec

Golden Cichlid Add-on

2n Likoma Island – Kaya Mawa (fb)

2n Manda Wilderness – Nkwichi Lodge (fb)

Costs £1,663 pp sharing from 4 Jan–30 Apr, and £1,698 pp sharing from 1 May–20 Dec

Powder Blue Cichlid Add-on

2n Lake Malawi – Danforth Lodge (fb)

1n Lake Malawi – Yacht *Mufasa* (fb)

1n Lake Malawi – Danforth Lodge (fb)

Costs £1,173 pp sharing.

Spangled Cichlid Add-on

4n The Lakeshore – Pumulani (fb)

Costs £1,119 pp sharing for 22 May–30 Jun; £1,244 for 1 Jul–31 Oct; £1,013 for the rest of the year.



One of the larger carvings at Mua Mission

Accommodation Codes

pp	per person
ao	accommodation only
bb	bed & breakfast
hb	half board
fb	full board
fba	full board and activities