

Malawi

Flick through the glossy tourist brochures and the clichés come thick and fast. Malawi is ‘the warm heart of Africa’, or ‘Africa for beginners’; and its lake ‘the lake of stars’. It all seems too good to be true, but, with stunning and varied scenery and supremely friendly locals, along with the relative ease of travel here, Malawi really does live up to the hype.

Malawi’s big draw is the lake: a magnificent shard of crystal water stretching some 500km along Malawi’s eastern border, separating it from the wild and mountainous coast of Mozambique and Tanzania. Isolated villages pepper the northern lakeshore and the beautiful Liwonde National Park rests at its southern tip. Around 500 species of fish inhabit the lake and the freshwater diving and snorkelling here are excellent.

Malawi’s not just for water babies and sun worshippers though; there’s plenty here to keep you active and Malawi’s landscape is surprisingly diverse. Head for the misty heights of Mt Mulanje or to the Nyika Plateau, where you find sheer escarpments, dramatic peaks, endless rolling grassland and some of the most enjoyable hiking routes in the whole of Africa.

Many travellers only pass through the country for a couple of days, intent on racing through to Africa’s ‘bigger’ attractions. This is a shame, as Malawi has much to offer. Take time to explore the highland wilderness, dive and swim in the lake’s warm waters, or simply soak up the vibrant local flavour and you’re sure to find yourself seduced.

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 118,484 sq km
- **ATMs** In major cities
- **Borders** Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia; all main border crossings are open from 6am to 6pm
- **Budget** US\$15 to US\$25 per day
- **Capital** Lilongwe
- **Language(s)** English, Chichewa
- **Money** Malawi Kwacha; US\$1 = MK140
- **Population** 12 million
- **Seasons** Cool and dry (May–Aug), hot and dry (September to mid-November), hot and wet (mid-November to April)
- **Telephone** Country code ☎ 265; international access code ☎ 101
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 2
- **Visa** Free (for most nationalities) for 30 days; issued at point of entry



HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lake Malawi** (p927) Discover untouched islands by kayak, commune with the underwater world or kick back on a near deserted beach.
- **Nyika National Park** (p917) Explore sweeping, magnificent wilderness filled with antelope and zebra on foot, by bike or on horseback.
- **Mount Mulanje** (p924) Hike the majestic peaks and take in the dramatic views.
- **Liwonde National Park** (p926) Cruise past hippos and crocs on the Shire River or take a walking safari and get up close and personal with the elephants.
- **Ilala ferry** (p932) Enjoy Malawi’s lakeshore via the ancient *Ilala* ferry and sleep out on deck under the stars.

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit Malawi is during the dry season from May to mid-November. From May to July the landscape is attractive and vegetation green and lush, and temperatures cooler. The months of October and November, at the end of the dry season, are the best time for wildlife viewing; however, the temperatures can be uncomfortably hot.

ITINERARIES

- **Three Days** Explore Lilongwe (p912) before heading down to Senga Bay (p920) for a couple of days of sun worshipping.
- **One Week** Follow the three-day itinerary the head down to Blantyre (p921) though the hills and waterfalls of the Zomba Plateau (p925), then meander through Malawi’s stunning tea plantations to get into some hiking on the misty peaks of Mt Mulanje (p924).
- **Two Weeks** Follow the one-week itinerary, then head north from Lilongwe to Mzuzu (p918), from where you can reach the wild open spaces of Vwaza Marsh (p917) and Nyika Plateau (p917) and the colonial hilltop town of Livingstonia (p916). Then head for Nkhata Bay (p918), before catching the *Ilala* ferry (p932) over to Likoma and Chizumulu Islands (p920).
- **One Month** With a month or longer you could encompass all of these highlights and more: check out the southern beach resorts of Cape Maclear (p927) or go hippo-spotting on a canoe in Liwonde National Park (p926).

HOW MUCH?

- **100 ml bottle of Nali (Malawi’s own chilli sauce)** US\$0.80
- **Bottle of wine** US\$10–20
- **Carving** US\$12
- **30 ml sachet of Malawi Gin** US\$0.30
- **1 live chicken** US\$2.50

LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L petrol** US\$1
- **1L bottled water** US\$2
- **Bottle of Kuche Kuche (Malawian beer)** US\$0.90
- **Souvenir T-shirt** US \$10
- **Plate of chips** US\$1

HISTORY

Since the first millennium, the Bantu people had been migrating from Central Africa into the area now occupied by Malawi, but migration to the area stepped up with the arrival of the Tumbuka and Phoka, who settled around the highlands of Nyika and Viphya during the 17th century, and the Maravi, who established a large and powerful kingdom in the south.

The early 19th century brought with it two significant migrations. The Yao invaded southern Malawi from western Mozambique, displacing the Maravi, while groups of Zulu migrated northward to settle in central and northern Malawi. This century also saw the escalation of the East African slave trade. Several trading centres were established in Malawi, including Karonga and Nkhotakota – towns that still bear a strong Swahili-Arab influence today.

Enter the British

The most famous explorer to reach this area was David Livingstone. He reached Lake Malawi in September 1859, naming it Lake Nyasa. His death in 1873 inspired a legion of missionaries to come to Africa, bringing the more ‘civilised’ principles of commerce and Christianity.

The early missionaries blazed the way for various adventurers and pioneer traders and it wasn’t long before European settlers began to arrive in their droves. In 1889 Britain



allowed Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company to administer the Shire Highlands, and in 1891 the British Central Africa (BCA) Protectorate was extended to include land along the western side of the lake. In 1907 the BCA Protectorate became the colony of Nyasaland.

Colonial rule brought with it an end to slave-traders and intertribal conflicts; but it also brought a whole new set of problems. As more and more European settlers arrived, more and more land was taken away from the locals and Africans were forced to pay taxes to the administration.

Transition & Independence

Not surprisingly, this created opposition to colonial rule and in the 1950s the Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) party, led by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, began a serious push for independence. This came, after considerable struggle, in 1964, and Nyasaland became the independent country of Malawi. Two years later Malawi became a republic and Banda was made president, eventually declaring himself 'President for life' in 1971. He ruled for 30 years before his downfall and died three years later. Many achievements were made during his presidency but these were overshadowed by his stringent rule: banning the foreign press, imposing dress codes and waging vendettas against any group regarded as a threat.

In June 1993, however, Banda agreed to a referendum that resulted in the introduction of a multiparty political system; at Malawi's first full multiparty election in May 1994, the victor was the United Democratic Front (UDF), led by Bakili Muluzi. On becoming President, Muluzi moved quickly: political prisons were closed and freedom of speech and print was permitted. The Muluzi government also made several economic reforms with the help of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), including the withdrawal of state subsidies and the liberalisation of foreign exchange laws. By 1996 these economic reforms were hitting the average Malawian citizen hard. Food prices and unemployment soared; there were reports of increased malnutrition, and crime increased in urban areas. Nevertheless, Muluzi was re-elected in May 1999 despite complaints of mismanagement and corruption at the highest government levels.

Malawi Today

In July 2002 Muluzi aired the idea of a Third Term Bill, which would have extended his presidency for one more term. When this failed, he chose Bingu wa Mutharika as his successor, who in 2004 duly won the election. Many thought he would follow in Muluzi's footsteps, but he soon declared his independence by quitting the UDF and setting up his own party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). His presidency seemed like a breath of fresh air and he set about stemming corruption, stepping up the fight against HIV/AIDS, attempting to attract greater foreign investment, and, more controversially, restoring Banda's reputation as a great African hero.

A massive famine in 2005 put the pressure on however, and in early 2006 the Mutharika government was rocked by scandal and political infighting which threatened to undermine its effectiveness.

CULTURE

Most Malawians live up to their reputation as some of the friendliest people in Africa. They tend to be very generous and will go out of their way to help others; unlike in some other countries, there's no sense that they're just doing so because they want something from you.

Walking around in revealing clothing is seen as inappropriate for both men and women and public drunkenness is frowned upon, as are open displays of affection. Great respect is accorded to the older generation, who should always be treated in a courteous manner.

For the average Malawian, economic conditions are not good. Malawi remains one of the world's poorest countries and has one of the highest HIV/AIDS infection rates in Southern Africa. The country is urbanising rapidly; natural resources struggle to support the burgeoning population and schools, hospitals and other social institutions are overflowing.

PEOPLE

Estimates put Malawi's total population at around 12 million. Because the country is small this creates one of the highest population densities in Africa. About 85% of the people live in rural areas and are engaged in subsistence farming or fishing, or working on commercial farms and plantations. Around half the population is under 15 years of age.

The main ethnic groups are: Chewa, dominant in the central and southern parts of the country; Yao in the south; and Tumbuka in the north. Other groups are: Nguni, in parts of the central and northern provinces; Chipoka, also in the central area; and Tonga, mostly along the lakeshore. The number of Malawians of European descent is less than 1%. There is also a small Indian population in Malawi, who were brought to the country by the British in the early 1900s to help construct a railway line between Malawi and Mozambique.

Christianity is the majority religion in Malawi, making up about 75% of the numbers, although for many Malawians Western beliefs are intertwined with traditional African practices.

Muslims make up almost 20% of the population. The people of the Yao tribe along the southern lakeshore are the most closely associated with Islam.

ARTS & CRAFTS

Dance is an important social element across Malawi and most dances are rooted in traditional beliefs and customs. The most famous traditional dance is known as the Gule Wamkulu, which reflects the traditional belief in spirits.

Poetry is very popular in Malawi: leading poets include Steve Chimombo – whose most highly acclaimed work is a complex poetic drama, *The Rainmaker* – and Jack Mapanje, whose first poetry collection (*Of Chameleons and Gods*, published in 1981) led to his imprisonment by the Banda regime in 1987 and eventual release in 1991.

Most critics agree that Malawi's leading novelist is Legson Kayira, whose semiautobiographical *I Will Try* and *The Looming Shadow* earned him acclaim in the 1970s.

Home-grown contemporary music is becoming increasingly popular in Malawi, due largely to influential and popular musicians such as Lucius Banda, who plays soft 'Malawian-style' reggae with his band Zembani, and the late Evison Matafale. Other reggae names to look out for are Billy Kaunda and Nyasa Gurus. Also popular is Ethel Kamwendo, one of Malawi's leading female singers.

Malawi is especially known for skilful woodcarvers and you'll see beautifully made wood and stone carvings, including walking sticks, chairs and coffee tables, in craft shops and markets all over the country.

ENVIRONMENT

Malawi is wedged between Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique, measuring roughly 900km long and between 80km and 150km wide, with an area of 118,484 sq km.

Lake Malawi covers almost a fifth of Malawi's total area. Beyond the lake, escarpments rise to high rolling plateaus covering much of the country. Malawi's main highland areas are Nyika and Viphya in the north and Mt Mulanje in the south.

Malawi's main river is the Shire (pronounced *Shir-ee*); it flows out of the southern end of Lake Malawi, through Lake Malombe and then southward as the plateau gives way to low ground, to flow into the Zambezi River in Mozambique. In this area, the lowest point is a mere 37m above sea level.

Malawi is not often thought of as a great place to see wildlife and if you're looking for a stereotypical safari experience, you'll be disappointed. However, for those less concerned with simply ticking off the Big Five (lion, leopard, buffalo, elephant and rhino), the country has plenty to offer. There are five national parks in Malawi: Liwonde, Lengwe, Kasungu, Nyika and Lake Malawi (around Cape Maclear), and four wildlife reserves: Vwaza Marsh, Nkhotakota, Mwabvi and Majete. The main park is Liwonde, which has plenty of elephants, hippos, antelope species and birdlife. Nyika National Park is renowned for roan antelopes and reedbucks; you'll also see zebras, warthogs and jackals. Nearby Vwaza Marsh is known for its hippos and, in the dry season, is the best place in the country to get up close and personal with elephants.

FOOD & DRINK

If you're self-catering, supermarkets are found all over Malawi and stock locally produced and imported goods. Markets and bus stations usually harbour a collection of food stalls, where you can get a cheap snack for around US\$0.30. There are cheap restaurants everywhere serving traditional Malawian food as well as chicken or fish (the most popular being *chambo*, a delicate white-fleshed fish found in great numbers in the lake) with rice or chips from around US\$1.50.

Most midrange hotels and restaurants serve European-style food such as steak, chicken or fish, which is served with vegetables and chips or rice – usually around the US\$5 mark.

At top-end hotels and restaurants in cities and along the lakeshore you can find straightforward international standards, plus more elaborate French, British or Italian cuisine. If you're hankering for something different, in Blantyre and Lilongwe are restaurants serving Ethiopian, Indian, Korean, Chinese and Portuguese food. Main courses range from around US\$5 to US\$10.

Traditional beer of the region is made from maize; in Malawi this is commercially brewed as Chibuku. Malawi's local lager is called Kuche Kuche but most travellers (and many Malawians) prefer the beer produced by Carlsberg at its Blantyre brewery (the only one in Africa).

LILONGWE

pop 590,000

Lilongwe is hardly awash with excitement; it's a sleepy little city that while perfectly pleasant, isn't particularly interesting or memorable. The quiet buzz of the Old Town, with its craft stalls, market, a nice little cafés and drinking holes, is at its heart, and this is where you're likely to spend most of your time. The more modern city centre has little to offer – it's a soulless collection of banks, office buildings and embassies.

ORIENTATION

Lilongwe is unusually spread out, and rather than one central business district it has two centres: City Centre and Old Town. City Centre is rather loose and sterile with a handful of offices, banks and hotels. Three kilometres south, Old Town has a good range of places to stay, the bus station, the market and several restaurants, all in a condensed area easily covered on foot. The town is divided into Areas: the Old Town is comprised of Areas 1 to 4.

INFORMATION

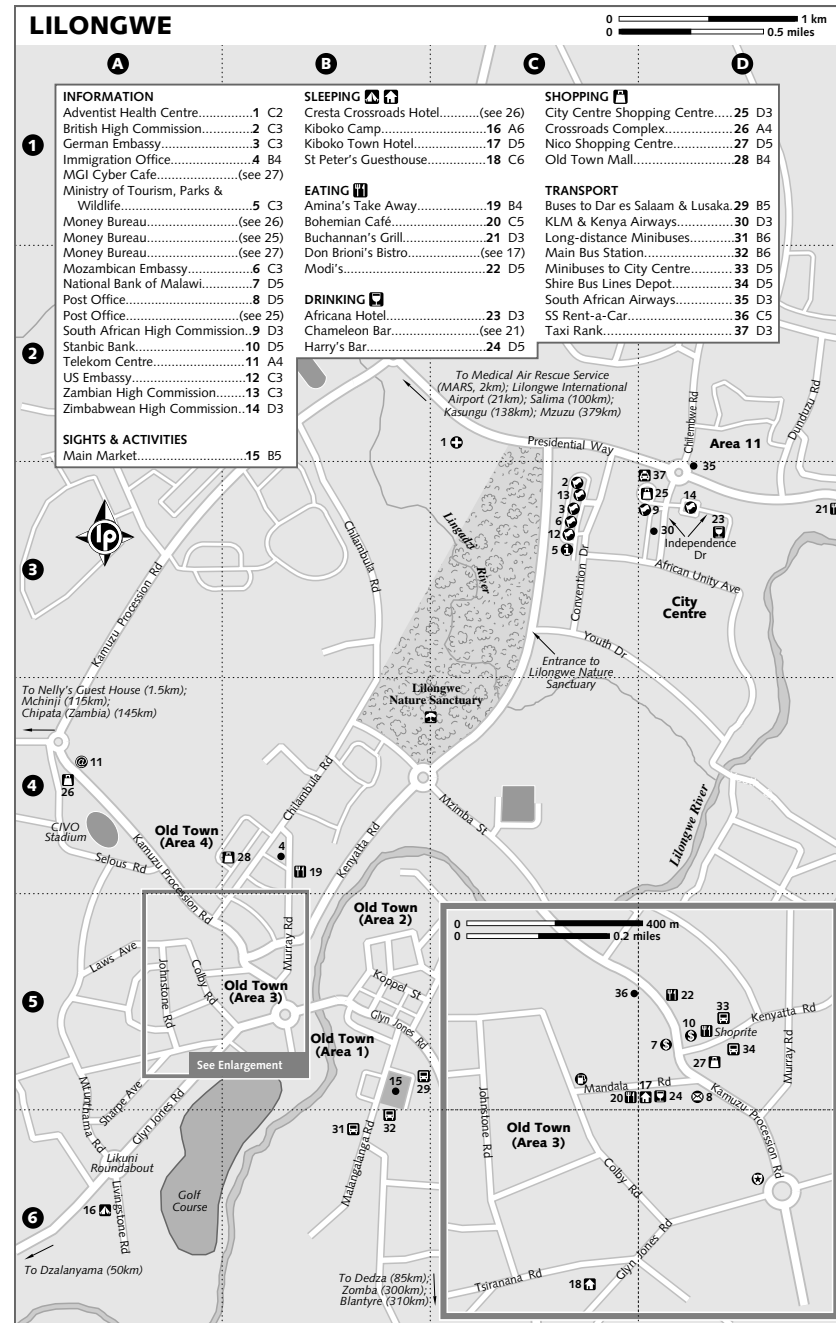
Internet Access

MGI Cyber Cafe (Nico Shopping Centre, Kamuzu Procession Rd, Old Town; per hr US\$2.80) Offers quick access.

Telekom Centre (Kamuzu Procession Rd; per hr US\$5) Speedy internet as well as international telephone services. It's opposite the Crossroads Complex.

Medical Services

Adventist Health Centre (☎ 01-775456; Presidential Way, City Centre) Also good for consultations, plus eye and dental problems.



Medical Air Rescue Service Clinic (☎ 01-794036, 236644; www.mars.co.zw; Ufulu Rd, Area 43) The best place for major matters and also deals with emergency evacuations. It's northwest of City Centre.

Money

Money Bureau City Centre (☎ 01-772239; Centre House Arcade, City Centre Shopping Centre, City Centre); Crossroads Complex (☎ 01-750789); Old Town (☎ 01-750659; Nico Shopping Centre, Kamuzu Procession Rd, Old Town) Has good rates, quick service and doesn't charge commission.

National Bank of Malawi (Kamuzu Procession Rd; ☎ 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) You can change money here, get a cash advance on your Visa card, and there's a 24 hour ATM that accepts Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus and Maestro.

Stanbic Bank (Kamuzu Procession Rd) Offers the same facilities as the National Bank.

Post

Post office (Kamuzu Procession Rd, Old Town; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri) Another post office, with the same opening hours, is located next to the City Centre Shopping Centre.

Tourist Information

Immigration office (☎ 01-754297; Murray Rd, Old Town)

Ministry of Tourism, Parks & Wildlife (☎ 01-771295; Tourism House; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8-10am Sat) The tourist office is located here, but information and advice is minimal. It's off Convention Dr.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Muggings and the occasional stabbing have become a serious problem around the Nature Sanctuary (below) over the past few years, so if you plan to visit get a taxi to inside the gate. At night, Malangalanga Rd can be dangerous, and walking to Area 3 is not recommended. The bridge between Area 2 and Area 3 is a favourite haunt for muggers. If you arrive on a bus after dark, take a minibus or taxi to your accommodation.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The **main market** (Malangalanga Rd, Old Town) is a pocket of frenetic activity, with traders, market stalls and food vendors packed into a swarming, small area.

For a total change of pace head for the **Nature Sanctuary** (Kenyatta Rd; admission US\$0.50; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to noon Sat), a peaceful wilderness area by the Lingadzi River. There is a signposted

network of walking trails, and the information centre lists the birds and animals that may be seen.

TOURS

Barefoot Safaris (☎ 01-707346; www.barefoot-safaris.com) Offers budget and midrange tours, mostly geared towards wildlife-watching in Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania. Tours cost from US\$85 per person per day and include all meals and accommodation.

Kiboko Safaris (☎ 01-751226; www.kiboko-safaris.com) Specialises in budget tours; fully inclusive and four-day trips to South Luangwa cost US\$325.

SLEEPING

Kiboko Camp (☎ 01-754978; www.kiboko-safaris.com; Livingstone Rd; camp sites per person US\$3, dm US\$5, d US\$15; ☎) The most popular place in town for those on a budget. There's plenty of space for campers, as well as dorms, and double and twin A-frame chalets. The reception doubles up as a small bar (it closes at 10.30pm) and breakfast, lunch and evening meals can be ordered.

St Peter's Guesthouse (☎ 01-752812, 08-317769; Glyn Jones Rd; r without bathroom US\$8.50, 3-bed dm US\$4) This place offers excellent, clean and safe rooms with mosquito nets, all of which open out onto a peaceful courtyard garden. It's very quiet and part of the parish so guests should be respectful.

Nelly's Guest House (☎ 01-59514; Area 9/156, Old Town; s/d US\$32/42; ☎) This is cosy and popular, with conservatively decorated rooms, a pretty garden, and an internet café.

Kiboko Town Hotel (☎ 01-752201; imperial@omw.net; Mandala Rd, Old Town; s/d from US\$40/45; ☎) This is the best-value place in town. It's located bang in the centre of the Old Town action; the rooms are spacious, comfortable and stylish – all white gauze and linen topped off with bright African prints – and there's a good little café downstairs. Best of all is the beautiful residents bar with its low Moroccan-style seating, twinkling fairy lights, open-air fireplace and mellow atmosphere.

Cresta Crossroads Hotel (☎ 01-750333; www.cresta-hospitality.com; Crossroads Complex, Mchinji Roundabout; s/d from US\$120/140) Lilongwe's newest top-end hotel has all the facilities you'd expect and the rooms are just that little bit more swanky than those of its rivals. It also has a wonderfully cheesy drinking hole called the Cat-chy Saloon.

EATING

Modi's (☎ 01-757694; Kamuzu Procession Rd, Old Town; starters US\$2, mains US\$5-6; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Has delicious and filling Indian food; the seafood and vegetarian options are particularly good.

Amina's Take Away (Murray Rd, Old Town; dishes US\$2-5; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Serves the usual burgers, sandwiches and curries and is popular with local office workers. Has a quirky roadside terrace complete with make-shift gazebo.

Bohemian Cafe (☎ 01-757120; Mandala Rd, Old Town; dishes US\$3; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Serves excellent sandwiches, snacks and cakes in a plant-filled courtyard overlooking, but sheltered from, the buzz of the street.

Don Brioni's Bistro (☎ 01-756998; Mandala Rd, Old Town; mains US\$4-10; ☎ dinner) Usually buzzing with a lively infusion of locals and tourists, this place under the Kiboko Town Hotel is suitably Italian in décor and flavour and the eccentric English owner is always happy to chat. Excellent steak, fish, chicken accompany pizzas and pastas on the menu.

Buchannan's Grill (☎ 01-772846/59; Four Seasons Centre, Presidential Way; mains US\$6-14; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) One of Lilongwe's newest offerings, this place is set in the grounds of a garden centre. It's a lovely spot; if you can, eat out on the terrace, which overlooks a beautiful rockery and pond. As the name suggests, this place specialises in grilled meat and the menu is a carnivore's dream.

DRINKING

Africana Hotel (off Independence Dr, City Centre) This lively place has a large outdoor patio that is popular with nearby office workers and government types. It's easy to make friends at the Africana and you are sure to strike up a conversation with one of the locals over a few beers.

Chameleon Bar (Four Seasons Centre, Presidential Way) This swanky cocktail bar hosts regular live events, including the 'pillow talk' unplugged session on the last Thursday of every month which welcomes poets, musicians and comedians.

Harry's Bar (Mandala Rd, Old Town) Above Bookmart, this circular bar has a relaxed atmosphere with a happy, mixed crowd of expats and locals. It's a popular meeting place, although Harry's taste in music can be atrociously cheesy.

SHOPPING

There are several shopping centres in Lilongwe. Old Town Mall houses a small corridor of shops including African Habitat, selling a variety of African arts and crafts. Crossroads Complex is Lilongwe's newest shopping area and houses banks, a hotel and minigolf and City Centre Shopping Centre (off Independence Dr) is a collection of buildings containing shops, travel agents, restaurants, a bank and a post office.

Nico Shopping Centre (Kamuzu Procession Rd) has a bookshop, travel agency and pharmacy.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Airlines with offices in Lilongwe include: **Air Malawi** (☎ 01-700811; Lilongwe International Airport)

KLM & Kenya Airways (☎ 01-774227; City Centre)

South African Airways (☎ 01-772242; City Centre)

Bus

Coachline buses run between Lilongwe and Blantyre (US\$20, four hours, two daily). Book tickets at the **Shire Bus Lines Depot** (☎ 01-756226; Kenyatta Rd, Old Town), from where the buses depart. The bright orange Sacramento Bus runs to Mzuzu daily (US\$18, four hours) from the main bus station near the market.

Express and ordinary buses operate out of the main bus station. Express buses run to: Blantyre via Zalewa (US\$6, five hours, one daily), Zomba (US\$4, six hours, one daily), Mzuzu (US\$12, seven to eight hours, two daily) and Kasungu (US\$3, four hours, two daily). All other buses are ordinary (ie slow) and travel between Lilongwe and Mchinji (US\$1.50, two to three hours, three daily), Salima (US\$1.50, two hours, two daily) and Nkhhotakota (US\$2.50, 4½ hours, two daily). Long-distance minibuses for destinations such as Salima, Mchinji and Dedza (all around US\$1.50) depart from the minibus park across the road from the main bus station on Malangalanga Rd.

GETTING AROUND

The most useful local minibus service for visitors is between Old Town and City Centre. From Old Town, local minibuses leave from either the bus park near the market, or outside Shoprite on Kenyatta Rd. From City Centre back to Old Town, the bus stop is at the northern end of Independence Dr. The

best places to find taxis are the main hotels. There's also a rank on Presidential Way, just north of City Centre Shopping Centre, and outside Shoprite in Old Town.

NORTHERN MALAWI

This section covers most parts of Northern Province, from the northern tip of the country down to the Mzuzu and Nkhata Bay areas. Places are described roughly north to south.

KARONGA

In the surrounding dry and dusty country, Karonga is a relaxed little town with wide streets and wandering cattle. It's the first and last town on the road between Malawi and Tanzania and has some good facilities, including the only bank north of Mzuzu.

Sleeping

Mufwa Lakeshore Lodge & Camping (☎ 01-362390; camp sites US\$2, s/d US\$14/19, without bathroom US\$10/14, all ind breakfast) This large, quiet property can be difficult to find; it's set back from the road with the turn-off between Club Marina and the National Bank of Malawi. There's a large grassy camping ground with plenty of trees but the rooms are quite small and dark.

Zgambota Resthouse (s/d US\$2.50/3) Opposite the Mobil petrol station at the roundabout, this place has clean and basic rooms with nets.

Club Marina (☎ 01-362302; s/d standard chalets US\$20/30, superior chalets US\$40/55, all ind breakfast) Near Mufwa, Club Marina is an excellent, upmarket option. Classy chalets (superior ones have hot water) are set in a beautiful, leafy area and the large outdoor bar is perfect for a cold drink. Rates include breakfast.

Getting There & Away

Buses and minibuses run between Karonga and Mzuzu (US\$4, 3½ hours). If you're heading north, minibuses and *matolas* (vehicles that provide unofficial public transport) travel to the Songwe border crossing (US\$1.30). It's 200m across the bridge to the Tanzanian border.

CHITIMBA

Chitimba is little more than a stretch of beach on Lake Malawi, a couple of places to stay and some shops straggled along the highway where you turn off the main north-south road to reach Livingstonia.

Chitimba Campsite (camp sites per person US\$3, dm US\$5, stilt chalets without bathroom US\$10, d US\$15) is right on the beach, about 1km north of the Livingstonia turn-off, and very popular with overland trucks, which makes the place rather rowdy. The shabby rooms and chalets aren't good value, but good food is available all day and there are two bars so there's plenty of space for party animals.

Sangilo Sanctuary Lodge (☎ 09 395203, 08 392611; sanctuary@sangilo.net; chalets US\$25), about 8km north of Chitimba, is the newest offering on the strip. It has a stunning setting, with cliff-top cottages, camping, an empty stretch of beach, and an open-air deck restaurant. If you call in advance you can arrange a pick up from the Livingstonia turn-off or the *Ilala*.

LIVINGSTONIA

Livingstonia provides a fascinating glimpse into Malawi's colonial past, and the mixture of old colonial architecture, wide, dusty tree-lined streets and panoramic views is quite beguiling. Relative isolation, maintained by arduous access, has kept it quiet and unspoilt, making it an ideal place to recover from hard travel in Tanzania or the rigours of beach life on the lake.

Sights & Activities

The fascinating **museum** (admission US\$2; ☎ 7.30am-5pm) in the Stone House details early European exploration and missionary work in Malawi. In many regards, the exhibits are a tribute to the efforts and achievements of Dr Robert Laws, who established the Livingstonia Mission.

Nearby is the **church**, dating from 1894, with a beautiful stained-glass window featuring David Livingstone with his sextant, medicine chest and two companions, and Lake Malawi in the background.

Manchewe Falls, about 4km from the town, is a spectacular 50m-high waterfall with a cave behind it where local people hid from slave-traders some 100 years ago. Allow an hour going down and 1½ hours back up. Alternatively, if you're walking to/from Chitimba, you can visit on the way.

Sleeping

Mushroom Farm (mickmitchell2001@yahoo.com; camping per person US\$2, s/d US\$5/10) This place has gained quite a reputation on the backpackers' circuit. It's a sustainable bush retreat in a forest set-

ting, with stunning views over the lake, hot solar showers, compost toilets and a range of adventure activities on offer, including water-fall abseils and rap jumping.

Stone House (☎ 01-368223; camp sites per person US\$3, dm ind breakfast US\$8) This was built by missionaries in the early 20th century and still has original Victorian furniture, along with a friendly caretaker, clean bathrooms and occasional hot water. Meals are available for around US\$6.

Getting There & Away

From the main north-south road between Karonga and Mzuzu, the road to Livingstonia turns off at Chitimba, forcing its way up the escarpment in a series of acute hairpin bends. Drivers should attempt this only in a 4WD, and only if there's been no rain. There's no bus, and you'll wait a very long time if you're hitching.

The alternative is to walk up: it's about 15km, and steep, so it takes around four hours from Chitimba if you follow the road.

NYIKA NATIONAL PARK

Established in 1965, Nyika National Park is the oldest and the largest in the country, covering some 3000 sq km. The main feature of the park is the Nyika Plateau, with a landscape and climate unique in Malawi, and unusual in Africa. It's a vast range of high rolling hills, sweeping wide valleys, dense pine forest and flower-studded grasslands, and the views (on clear days) are endless.

Rather than just a place to watch wildlife, what makes Nyika alluring is the chance to explore a unique and preserved patch of African wilderness in a variety of ways: on horseback, by bike, or simply on foot. Common animals here include zebras, bushbucks, reedbucks and roan antelopes, and you may also spot warthogs, klipspringers, jackals and possibly hyenas and leopards.

Entry fees of US\$5 a day are payable. All accommodation, tourist activities and charter flights are operated by the **Nyika Safari Company** (☎ 01-330180; www.nyika.com), a small professional outfit based at Chelinda Camp, at the heart of the plateau.

Sleeping

Camping ground (camp sites per person US\$5) About 2km from the main camp, this place is set in a secluded site with vistas of the plateau's

rolling hills. The site has permanent security, clean toilets, hot showers, endless firewood and shelters for cooking and eating.

Chelinda Camp (4-bed cottages US\$120, full board per person \$150) Tucked inside a pocket of forest, it has atmospheric rooms and chalets dressed with pine and juniper furniture and stone fireplaces.

Chelinda Lodge (full-board cabins per person US\$310) About 1km from Chelinda Camp, nestled against the side of the hill in a clearing of trees, this place looks like something out of a Bavarian fairy tale. Rooms are in luxurious log cabins housing tasteful furniture, Victorian baths, roaring fireplaces and individual balconies.

Getting There & Away

The quickest way to reach Chelinda Camp is on a flight by Nyika Air Services. Flights for up to five people can be chartered from Lilongwe (US\$999), while rates from Mzuzu are US\$150 per person. There are no public buses into the park; the nearest you can get is the service from Mzuzu to Rhumpi (US\$1). From there, you can get a *matola* or minibus to Chelinda Camp (US\$6.00). If coming by car, the main Thazima gate is in the southwest of the park, 54km from Rumphi; to Chelinda Camp it's another 55km. Fuel is available at Chelinda, but in limited supply so it's best to fill up before you enter the park.

VWAZA MARSH WILDLIFE RESERVE

Vwaza is an ideal destination for any budget: it's compact and accessible, the accommodation is close to the main gate, and public transport here is straightforward. Entry fees of US\$5 are payable. The main camp is conveniently located a safe but rewarding distance from the hippo-heavy Lake Kazuni, which also lures impalas, buffaloes, waterbucks, elands, roans, sables, zebras, hartebeests and pukus. The big attraction however, is the 160-plus elephants within the park. There are regular parades in front of the camps between July and September. The best time of year to visit is in the dry season; just after the rainy season, the grass is high and you might go away without seeing anything.

Sleeping

Kazuni Camp (camp sites per person US\$5, s/d chalets without bathroom US\$10/20) Has simple, rustic chalets, separated from each other by a decent stretch

of bush; and they're close to the water so that elephants and hippos are frequent night-time visitors. You must bring your own food, and there are cooking stations with barbecues.

Kazuni Safari Camp (full board per person US\$190) Accommodates guests in smart and stylish chalets with thatched roofs and verandas in a prime position overlooking the lake.

Getting There & Away

The Nyika Safari Company operates flights for a minimum of two people between Vwaza Marsh and Mzuzu (US\$150 per person) or Chelinda Camp in Nyika National Park (US\$112 per person). If you're travelling by public transport, first get to Rumphu (reached from Mzuzu by minibus for US\$1.50). From there fairly frequent *matolas* and minibuses run to the main gate (US\$3). By car, head west from Rumphu. Turn left after 10km (Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve is signposted), and continue for about 20km. Where the road swings left over a bridge, go straight on to reach the park gate and camp after 18km.

MZUZU

Mzuzu is the largest town north of Lilongwe and the transport hub for all north-related activities. The town is centred around a grand tree-lined avenue. It has banks, shops, a post office, supermarkets, pharmacies, petrol stations and other facilities, which are especially useful if you've come into Malawi from the north.

Information

The National Bank of Malawi, Stanbic Bank and First Merchant Bank, all on Orton Chewa Ave, exchange travellers cheques and money, and offer credit card withdrawals. National and Stanbic banks have ATMs that accept foreign cards. If you're heading to the lake, cash up here as there is no foreign exchange facility in Nkhata Bay.

Internet access is available at the **Mzuzu Business Centre** (St Denis Street; per hr US\$10) or at the **Dot.com Internet** (per hr US\$9) opposite the Peoples Supermarket.

Sleeping & Eating

Mzoozoozoo (☎ 08-864493; camp sites US\$1, dm/d US\$3/7) This is Mzuzu's only hostel and the very friendly owners make it a good one at that. Dorms are in a big timber bungalow and

a constant stream of happy activity buzzes around the funky outdoor bar.

Flame Tree Guesthouse (☎ 01-333053; r incl breakfast with/without bathroom US\$15/12) A relaxed option, with clean, cool and homely rooms, and a lovely veranda restaurant overlooking the flower-filled courtyard.

Mzuzu Hotel (☎ 01-332622; mzh@sdpn.org.mw; s/d US\$50/64) Mzuzu's plush hotel has large rooms with all the requisite trimmings, but has a rather staid atmosphere and the rooms look old fashioned. There's a good restaurant and a quiet bar for residents. It's off Kabunduli Viphya Dr.

Ossie's (meals MK250) A lovely café, shielded by trees from the bustle of the road, and set in a little palm-filled garden squeezed in between the road and a cornfield. Food includes decent burgers and curries.

Maharaja Restaurant (☎ 09-351550; St Denis St; starters US\$2, mains US\$4; ☺ lunch & dinner) Satisfy your chilli cravings here with a wide variety of tasty curries and tandoori dishes.

Getting There & Away

Air Malawi flies between Lilongwe and Mzuzu (see p932 for details). The Sacramento bus runs between Mzuzu and Lilongwe (US\$18, four hours, Monday, Wednesday, Saturday) and express buses run to/from Lilongwe (US\$12, seven to eight hours, two daily) via Kasungu (US\$2.50, three hours). Ordinary buses go to Rumphu (US\$1, 1½ hours, four daily), Nkhata Bay (US\$1, two hours, two daily) and Karonga (US\$3.80, seven hours, four daily) via Chitimba (US\$2, four hours). Minibuses also go to these destinations and are slightly more expensive, but also more frequent.

A bus originating in Lilongwe travels between Mzuzu and Dar es Salaam (US\$35, 17 hours, Tuesday and Saturday). Departing Mzuzu around midnight, it crosses the border at first light, goes through Mbeya in the morning and gets to Dar es Salaam late in the afternoon.

NKHATA BAY

Nkhata Bay is a lush tropical indent on the northern lakeshore that lures a constant stream of travellers with its Caribbeanesque milieu. This may be a touch fanciful, but the bay is quite picturesque at sunrise and sunset, and most recreation certainly involves a good deal of lounging by the water.

Information

There's nowhere to change money so make sure you cash up in Mzuzu, Nkhotakota or Lilongwe. Alternatively, several of the lodges accept credit cards, US currency and travellers cheques for payment. Internet access is available at Aqua Africa (below).

Activities

Monkey Business (☎ 01-252365) on Chikale Beach operates fully inclusive kayak excursions from anything between two and seven days from US\$35 per person per day. If you want to learn scuba diving, **Aqua Africa** (☎ 01-352284; www.aqua-africa.co.uk) has a variety of options, including five-day PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) courses for US\$260 and casual day dives for US\$20.

Sleeping & Eating

Kupenja Lodge (☎ 09-471742; camping US\$1.50; s/d US\$3.50/5.00) Is a quiet, homely place with cosy stone chalets, a relaxed lounging area and delicious food. It has a nice stretch of sandy beach, which is blissfully hassle-free and provides a great antidote to the party atmosphere of some of the Chikale Beach lodges. The owner runs the charity Africa Unplugged (volunteers get a discount at the lodge) and ploughs a lot of profits back into the local community.

Big Blue (☎ 01-352316; bigblue@sdpn.org.mw; camp sites per person US\$1.50, dm/s/d without bathroom US\$3/4/6) This large, ramshackle place has clearly seen better days. However, the staff are very friendly, it's a good deal cheaper than the options in Chikale and it frequently has special offers and discounts.

Mayoka Village (☎ 01-352421; info@mayoka-village.com; camping US\$3, s/d chalets US\$15/20, without bathroom US\$5/8) A very popular place and deservedly so: it's a sprawling, buzzing collection of picturesque chalets with no beachfront to speak of, but plenty of 'chill out' spots near the water. What really attracts people, though, is the infectious, lively atmosphere. The energetic bar – an open, breezy spot overlooking the water – plays host to regular barbeque nights, Malawian buffets and Malawian music nights, and the friendly owners make a real effort to chat to the punters, get the party started and ensure that everyone feels right at home.

Aqua Africa (☎ 01-352284; www.aqua-africa.co.uk; tw US\$20; ☑) Has a few secluded and comfortable rooms with balconies overlooking the private

beach. It's also home to Nkhata Bay's only internet café, with superfast connection for US\$6 an hour.

Nkhata Bay Local Restaurant (mains US\$2-3; ☺ noon-9pm) Perched on the side of the hill on the road up to Chikale Beach, this place is a small and charming wood, reed and thatch café, complete with jaw-dropping views over the bay. Dishes from the small menu must be ordered about an hour in advance, but are well worth the wait. The owners are keen drummers and can always be persuaded to show off, or to teach you, their skills.

Getting There & Away

All buses and minibuses go from the bus stand on the main road. Ordinary buses run to Mzuzu (US\$1, two hours, two daily) and minibuses and *matolas* run to Nkhotakota (US\$4, six hours), Chintheche (US\$1, one hour) and Mzuzu (US\$1.30, 1½ hours). To reach Lilongwe, go to Mzuzu and transfer. Many travellers also come or go on the *Ilala* ferry (see p932 and p932).

THE CHINTHECHE STRIP

Chintheche is an unremarkable village about 40km south of Nkhata Bay. Nearby is a long and beautiful stretch of lakeshore known as the 'Chintheche Strip'. It's lined with hotels, lodges and camping grounds, each catering for different types of travellers.

Activities

Aquanuts Dive School (☎ 01-357376; www.aquanuts.info) has an on-site training pool and offers PADI courses for US\$265, casual dives from US\$30 and PADI Scuba refresher courses for US\$45. It's well run and pays excellent attention to safety and the environment. If you've come to Malawi to find inner peace, **Makuzi Beach Lodge** (www.makuzibeach.com) has a variety of yoga and meditation retreats on offer. The lodge has its own qualified Sivananda yoga instructor and offers five-day courses for US\$550, including all meals and accommodation.

Sleeping

Kande Beach Camp (☎ 01-357376; www.kandebeach.com; camp sites US\$3, dm US\$5, chalets sleeping 3-4 US\$30) About 7km from the Makuzi turn-off (55km south of Nkhata Bay), it's a legendary stop for overland trucks, where beachlife, good times and late-night partying is the name of the game. All accommodation is excellent and the

smorgasbord of facilities includes a large bar, games room, book exchange and the Soft Sand Cafe (dishes US\$4 to US\$6), which serves great pizzas.

Kawiya Cottages (sosmalawi@globemw.net; camp sites per person US\$5, chalets US\$10) About 3km north of Chinthethe village, it has two simple cabins in a shady site on a private bit of beach. Each is fully self-contained, including an equipped kitchen.

Chinthethe Beach Lodge (r US\$5) This is nearer to town, down the track running west from the Peoples Supermarket. It has clean two-bed rooms and although you need to bring your own food the friendly caretaker will cook it for you.

Makuzi Beach (☎ 01-357296; www.makuzibeach.com; camp sites per person US\$10, s/d chalets US\$82/\$144) This can be found by heading south down the main road, where you'll reach the turn-off to Bandawe (also called Old Bandawe); it's another 3.5km down the track. The accommodation and facilities here are a step up in quality, and the restaurant (US\$5 to US\$7 lunch; US\$17 to US\$20 dinner) serves the best food on the strip. If you're feeling active you can hire a windglider, power boat, mountain bike or even a yacht.

LIKOMA & CHIZUMULU ISLANDS

Likoma and Chizumulu Islands are on the Mozambican side of Lake Malawi, but are part of Malawi. With their beautiful beaches, these islands are the perfect hideaway, with very friendly locals and few other tourists. If you want to visit both islands, transport links make it best to go to Chizumulu first.

Sights

On Likoma, the impressive Anglican **Cathedral of St Peter** should not be missed. You can climb the tower for spectacular views. Nearby, the neat **market place** contains a few shops and stalls, and down on the lakeshore is a beach where local boats come and go, and the people wash and sell fish.

Sleeping

Mango Drift (camp sites per person US\$1, dm US\$3, s/d chalets without bathroom US\$4/8) A short walk from Kaya Mawa, this is a series of simple stone and thatched chalets and a bright, breezy bar, spread across a beautiful beach on the western side of the island; at the time of writing, Mango Drift was about to go through a major

refurbishment, though it will remain squarely aimed at the budget traveller.

Wakwenda Retreat (camp sites US\$2, dm US\$2.50, r from US\$4) Smack bang on a postcard-perfect beach on Chizumulu, this place is utter chill-out material. The sizable bar is constructed around a massive, hollow baobab tree and the shaded lounge area is often the focus of lazy activity. The restaurant (breakfasts US\$1.50, dishes US\$2.50) serves good beachy fare, including sandwiches, omelettes and burgers.

Kaya Mawa (www.kayamawa.com; full-board chalets per person from US\$180) This luxury lodge on Likoma Island is one of Africa's finest paradise retreats, and its beauty lies in the ingenuity of its design. Each chalet has been meticulously constructed around the natural landscape, using rock faces as walls or screens for open-air showers and stone baths. The bar, perched on the top of a huge rock buttress, offers seamless views of mango-hued sunsets and the meals are possibly the finest in Malawi.

Getting There & Away

Several companies can arrange flights to Likoma Island, including **Wilderness Safaris** (☎ 01-771393/153; www.wilderness-safaris.com), and the **Ulendo Air Services** (☎ 01-754717/950; air-services@ulendo.malawi.net) The cost of chartering a five-seater plane from Lilongwe is US\$755, but you can purchase an empty seat (if available) in either direction for a discounted price; contact the companies directly for details.

The *Ilala* ferry (see p932) serves Likoma and Chizumulu twice a week. Heading south, the *Ilala* then sails to Còbuè (*kob-way*) and Metangula on the Mozambican mainland.

SENGA BAY

Senga Bay is at the eastern end of a broad peninsula that juts into the lake from Salima. The water is remarkably clear here, and the beaches, while a little more crowded than those at Cape Maclear or Nkhata Bay, are also good.

Sights & Activities

As a break from lazing on the beach, you can go windsurfing or snorkelling, take a boat ride or learn to dive. You could also take a trip out to nearby **Lizard Island** to see its population of giant monitor lizards and its cormorant colony. Alternatively, you can go hiking in the nearby **Senga Hills** (although it's best to hire a local guide to show you the way).

Sleeping & Eating

There's a good choice of places to stay and a couple of eateries in Senga Bay.

Wheelhouse Marina (☎ 01-263139; wheelhouse@mw.celtelplus.com; camp sites per person US\$2, caravan \$12, 2-/10-bed house US\$30/50) A rambling, ramshackle paradise made up of the ruins of an old marina, a grassy camp site, two self-catering cottages nestled into the hillside and a groovy old caravan for two. There's also a quirky round bar raised above the water on stilts that serves great steaks and fish.

Steps Campsite (camp sites per person US\$3) Beautifully situated on a wide, clean, sandy beach right by the water, with plenty of shady areas to put up your tent, a beach volleyball pitch and excellent security. The bathrooms are spotlessly clean, there's a good bar, and food can be brought to you from the restaurant at the Livingstonia Beach Hotel next door.

Cool Runnings (s/d without bathroom US\$20) An extremely homely and friendly place. It's obvious that a lot of thought has been put into its design and there are plenty of extra touches that make a stay here memorable – there's comedy reading material in the shared bathrooms, for instance. Best of all, though, is the tantalizing food: you discuss the options with the owner a couple of hours in advance, and come dinnertime, a specially tailored feast will arrive at your table.

Red Zebra Cafe (breakfast & snacks US\$1-3, dishes US\$3.50-4; ☎ 6am-10.30pm) Little café in a large garden by the side of the main road, 500m from the Livingstonia Beach Hotel, with a simple menu of burgers, pizzas, *chambo* and curries.

Getting There & Away

First get to Salima (buses run there from Lilongwe; see p915). From here, local pickups run to Senga Bay (US\$1), dropping you in the main street. If you want a lift all the way to Steps Campsite, negotiate an extra fee with the driver. If you're travelling to/from Cape Maclear consider chartering a boat; it's not too expensive (around US\$100) if you get a group together, it's good fun and it saves one hell of a trip on the bus.

SOUTHERN MALAWI

All places in this section are south of Lilongwe. Except for Mulanje, towns are listed heading north from Blantyre.

BLANTYRE

pop 640,000

Blantyre – the commercial and industrial capital of Malawi – is a more happening city than Lilongwe, although that's not saying much. It stretches for about 20km, merging into Limbe, its 'sister city'. Most travellers stop only for a few days to send or receive mail, buy maps and books or pick up a visa for Mozambique. This is probably long enough to check out some interesting sights, the most global selection of cuisine in Malawi, several enjoyable bars, and a fair selection of places to stay.

Orientation

Despite the sprawling suburbs and townships surrounding Blantyre, the city centre is very compact, with most places of importance to travellers within easy walking distance. Central Blantyre's main street is Victoria Ave; along here are several large shops, the tourist office, the map sales office, banks, foreign exchange bureaus and travel agents. To the east is Haile Selassie Rd, which contains many smaller shops. At the northern end of Victoria Ave is the landmark Mount Soche Hotel.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

There are plenty of internet bureaus throughout Blantyre.

E Internet Café (nr Victoria Ave & Independence Dr; per 30 min US\$2.20)

Celtel Cyber Cafe (Victoria Ave; per 30min US\$2)

Icon Internet Café (per 30min US\$2) Off Livingstone Ave.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Mwaiwathu Private Hospital (☎ 01-622999; Chileka Rd; ☎ 24hr) For private medical consultations or blood tests, this hospital, east of the city centre, is good. A consultation is US\$10; all drugs and treatment are extra. An overnight stay in a private ward is US\$80; before any treatment, you must put down a US\$220 deposit.

Seventh Day Adventist Clinic (☎ 01-620006; Robins Rd) For medical or dental problems, this clinic charges US\$6 for a doctor's consultation and US\$10 for a malaria test.

MONEY

All of the following banks are on Victoria Ave. There are branches of the National Bank of Malawi and Stanbic Bank, both of which can change cash and travellers cheques and have 24-hour ATMs that accept Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus and Maestro.

Victoria Forex (☎ 01-621026) Usually has more competitive rates and charges no commission. You can get a speedy cash advance on your credit card here for a fee of US\$3.

POST

Main post office (Glyn Jones Rd, Blantyre; ☎ 7.30am-5pm) Has poste restante.

TOURIST INFORMATION

French Cultural Centre (☎ 01-671250; ccf@malawi.net; cnr Moi Rd & Kasungu Cres; ☎ 8am-noon & 2pm-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Not just for French lessons. The centre has a regular programme of concerts, plays and readings. Performances have been known to include such international luminaries as Angélique Kidjo. **Immigration office** (Bldg Society House, Victoria Ave) If you need to extend your visa, Blantyre has an immigration office.

Tourist office (☎ 01-620300; Victoria Ave; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri) The central tourist office has a few leaflets, and the people here make quite an effort to provide information and assistance.

Sights & Activities

Probably the most impressive building in Blantyre is the **CCAP Church** (off Chileka Rd, officially called the Church of St Michael and All Angels. This magnificent church was built in 1891 by Scottish missionaries who had no construction training, using only local hand-made bricks and wood.

Paper Making Education Trust (Pamet; ☎ 01-623895; www.pamet.org.mw; 10 Chilembwe Rd) is an inspiring project that was set up to teach people how to recycle paper. For US\$0.80 you can take a tour of the workshop to see how it's all done and buy a lovely assortment of cards and other paper products made from a range of different material including elephant dung!

The **National Museum** (Kasungu Cres; admission US\$0.70, ☎ 7.30am-5pm) is midway between Blantyre and Limbe. There's a small collection of traditional weapons and artefacts, and exhibits relating to traditional dance, European exploration and slavery.

A visit to the **Carlsberg Brewery** (☎ 01-670022; Gomani Rd), east of the centre, may also appeal. Free tours are conducted at 2.30pm every Wednesday; you must book. The tour ends with a free tasting session.

Tours

Based at the Mount Soche Hotel in Blantyre, **Jambo-Africa** (☎ 01-823709; www.jambo-africa.com) of-

fers tours to Lengwe National park for US\$385 per person and Mount Mulanje hiking packages from US\$230 for three days.

Sleeping

Doogles (☎ 01-621128; www.doogleslodge.com; Mulomba Pl; camp sites US\$3, dm US\$5.50, chalets without bathroom US\$16, d US\$21; ☎) Close to the main bus station. The rooms and dorms here are decent enough and there's a good bar, but some of the chalets are looking a little rough and it's not the friendliest of places. There's a limited menu of snacks and burgers at the bar (snacks US\$1 to US\$2.50, dishes US\$4), and an internet café.

Kabula Lodge (☎ 01-621216; Kabula Hill; dm/s/d incl breakfast US\$10/35/45) Northwest of the city centre off Michiru Rd, this is highly recommended. Dorms have only two or three beds and a cool veranda wraps around the back of the building, offering great views of the city. The friendly Malawian lady who runs this place can prepare meals with advance notice, or you can self-cater.

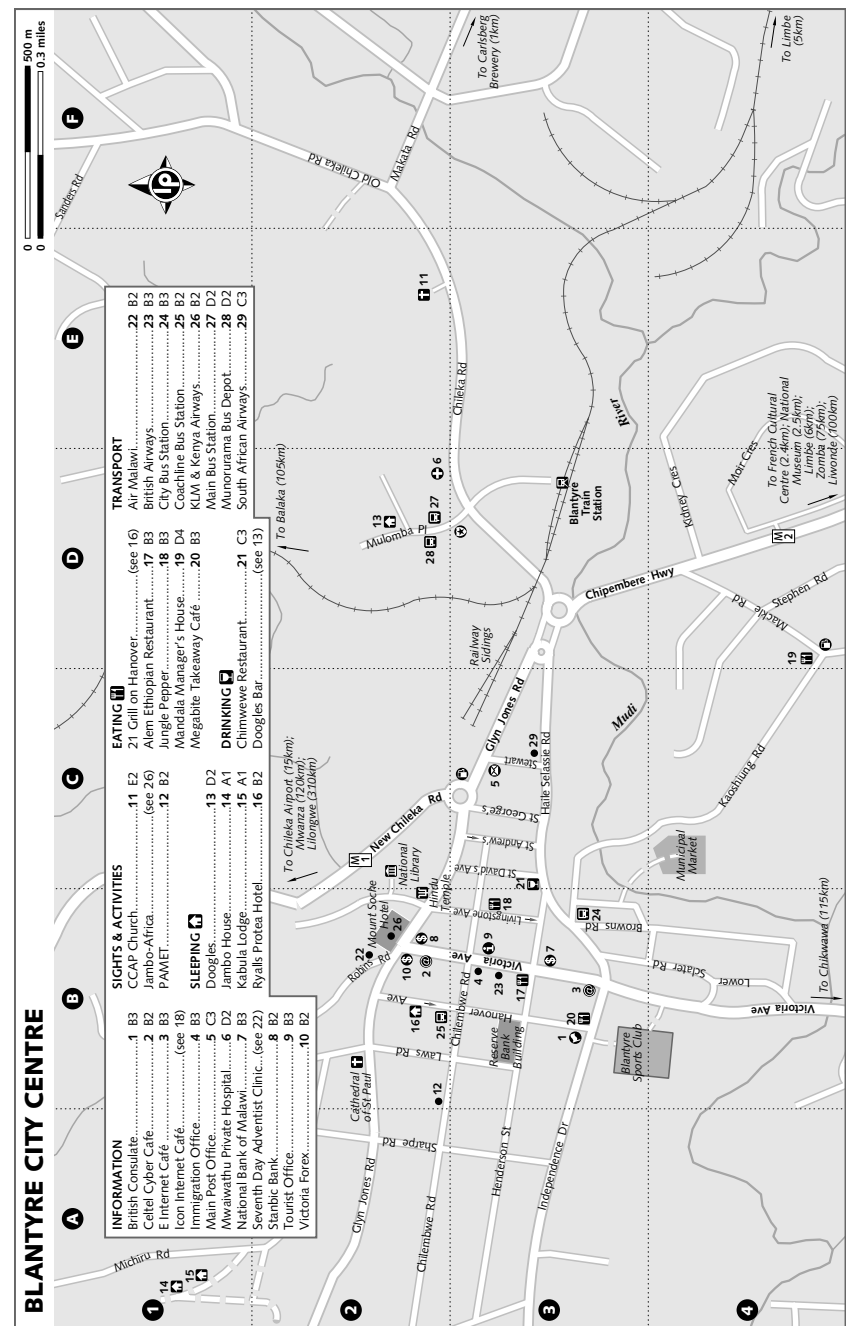
Jambo House (☎ 01-623709; jambofrica@africa-online.net; Kabula Hill; s/d US\$40/50, without bathroom US\$30/40, all incl breakfast) A homely little place with just four bedrooms, a swimming pool and gardens with excellent views of the surrounding hills. There's also a TV lounge and a self-service 'honesty' bar. There's no restaurant as such but meals can be provided if you ask in advance. It's off Michiru Rd.

Ryalls Protea Hotel (☎ 01-620955; ryalls@proteamalawi.com; 2 Hannover Ave; s/d US\$210/243; ☎) A very classy old-fashioned place, with a grand entrance hall and sophisticated rooms decorated with old black-and-white photos and African artefacts. It's also home to the superb 21 Grill on Hanover.

Eating

Alem Ethiopian Restaurant (☎ 01-622529; Victoria Ave; dishes US\$1-7.50; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) For some different African flavours, this place serves injera (sour millet pancake) and wat (sauce), but you can also get 'normal' meals like chicken and chips or curry.

21 Grill on Hanover (☎ 01-620955; 2 Hanover Ave; starters US\$3, mains US\$9-17; ☎ lunch & dinner) At the Ryalls Protea Hotel, this is a highly rated eatery, with a swanky interior complete with soft lighting, mahogany bookcases, comfortable cushioned chairs and the soft tinkle of piano music in the background. It serves seriously good steaks and seafood.



Jungle Pepper (☎ 01-635135; pizzas US\$4-5; 🕒 10.30am-9pm Thu-Tue) Teems with office workers over the lunch hour, due to a tasty and diverse selection of fresh pizzas and hotdogs. It's off Livingstone Ave.

Mandala Manager's House (mains US\$5; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat) This charming little café is set in the grounds of the Mandala Manager's House and has excellent cakes, salads and good coffee. Mains include homemade lasagne and fish cakes.

Megabite Takeaway Café (Independence Dr; dishes US\$1.50-5; 🕒 11am-9pm Mon-Sat) A little courtyard café popular with the lunchtime office crowd. It serves fish and chips and Malawi curries.

Drinking

Doogles bar (☎ 01-621128; Mulomba Pl; 🕒 to late) Like a constant happy hour, where streams of travellers chill out and socialise with devoted expats and well-to-do Malawians.

Chimweve Restaurant (cnr Henderson St & Haile Selassie Rd) Despite its name, this is more like a bar. Loud music and gaming machines mean it's low on charm but the congenial crowd and cheap drinks compensate.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Blantyre's Chileka airport is about 15km north of the city centre. Airline offices in Blantyre include:

Air Malawi (☎ 01-620811; Robins Rd)

British Airways (☎ 01-624333; Victoria Ave)

KLM & Kenya Airways (☎ 01-620106; Mount Soche Hotel)

South African Airways (☎ 01-620627; Haile Selassie Rd)

BUS & MINIBUS

Coachline buses, operated by Shire Bus Lines, run between Blantyre and Lilongwe (US\$20, four hours, two daily), stopping at the Total petrol station near Ryalls Protea Hotel on Hanover Ave.

Blantyre's main bus station is east of the centre on Mulomba Pl. Express buses run between Blantyre and Lilongwe via Zalewa (the junction with the Mwanza road; US\$5, five hours, one daily); this route is also serviced by ordinary buses (US\$3.80, seven hours, four daily). There's an express service to Zomba (US\$2, one hour, one daily), which also continues to Lilongwe (US\$6, seven hours). Ordinary buses travel between Blantyre and Zomba (US\$1, 1½ hours, frequently), Mulanje

(US\$1.25, 1½ hours, seven daily), Mwanza (US\$1.30, one hour, two daily) and Monkey Bay (US\$3.80, eight hours, one daily) via Liwonde (US\$2, three hours) and Mangochi (US\$3, six hours).

Other buses (ie not Shire Bus Lines) and long-distance minibuses go from the bus station in Limbe; most leave on a fill-up-and-go basis. Routes include: Zomba (US\$1); Mulanje (US\$1.50); and Mangochi (US\$3).

Getting Around

Blantyre is a compact city, so it's unlikely you'll need to use public transport to get around, apart from the minibuses that shuttle along Chipembere Hwy between Blantyre city centre bus station and Limbe bus station. You can find private hire taxis at the Mount Soche Hotel or at the bus stations. A taxi across the city centre is around US\$3; between the centre and the main bus station costs from US\$3 to US\$4; and a taxi from Blantyre to Limbe costs around US\$5.

MOUNT MULANJE

Mt Mulanje rises steeply from the undulating plain of the highlands, surrounded by near-vertical cliffs of bare rock, many over 1000m high. It is often misty here and Mulanje's high peaks sometimes jut above the cloud, giving rise to the local name 'Island in the Sky'. Some people come to the base of the mountain just for a day visit, but the stunning scenery, easy access, clear paths and well-maintained huts make Mulanje a fine hiking area and many travellers spend at least a few days here.

For hikers, it's worth remembering that Mulanje is a big mountain with notoriously unpredictable weather. Even during the dry season, it's not uncommon to get rain, cold winds and thick mists, which make it easy to get lost. Between May and August, periods of low cloud and drizzle can last several days, and temperatures drop below freezing.

Information

Hiking on Mt Mulanje is controlled by the **Likhubula Forestry Office** (PO Box 50, Mulanje; 🕒 7.30am-noon & 1-5pm), at the small village of Likhubula, about 15km from Mulanje Town; it can also arrange guides and porters if required. Another good source of information is the **Mulanje Infocentre** (☎ 01-466466; infomulanje@malawi.net), based at Chitakale Trading Centre, on the corner of the Phalombe

road. An excellent tour company based in the area is **Tiyende Pamodzi Adventures** (☎ 01-467737; www.cholemalawi.com/pamodzi). It gets rave reviews from travellers and offers packages from US\$145 for two days.

Activities

There are about six main hiking routes up and down Mulanje. The three main ascent routes go from Likhubula: the Chambe Plateau Path (also called the Skyline Path), the Chapaluka Path and the Lichenya Path. Other routes, more often used for the descent, are: Thuchila Hut to Lukulezi Mission; Sombani Hut to Fort Lister Gap; and Minunu Hut to Lujeri tea estate. A guide is not mandatory, but hikers need to register with the Likhubula Forestry Office before starting out.

Sleeping

At the foot of Mt Mulanje is Mulanje Town, which has several places to stay. At the village of Likhubula, about 15km from Mulanje Town, are a couple more options.

Council Resthouse (Mulanje Town; r with/without bathroom US\$1/0.50) Close to the bus station; is bargain basement in price and quality.

CCAP Guesthouse (Likhubula; camp sites US\$1, chalets per person US\$6.50) At the CCAP Mission, it has cosy rooms, self-catering chalets and camping.

Limbani Lodge (☎ 01-466390; Mulanje Town; s/d US\$5/7.50, VIP r US\$13) Heading closer to Likhubula on the main road, near the School for the Blind; has the best beds in town. Standard rooms are comfy and the 'VIP' rooms contain TV and fully equipped kitchens.

Likhubula Forest Lodge (☎ 01-467737; likhubula@cholemalawi.com; Likhubula; camp sites per person US\$5, s/d/tr US\$20/25/30, without bathroom US\$15/20/25) This stylish lodge has a kitchen, comfortable lounge, several bedrooms and is spotless all over. A cook will prepare your food and wash up.

On the mountain there are several **Forestry huts** (camp sites/huts per person US\$0.80/1.30). Each is equipped with benches, tables and open fires with plenty of wood. You provide your own food, cooking gear, candles, sleeping bag and stove, and a caretaker chops wood, lights fires and brings water, for which a small tip should be paid.

Getting There & Away

For information on buses between Blantyre and Mulanje Town, see opposite. The dirt road to Likhubula turns off the main sealed

Blantyre-Mulanje road at Chitikali, 2km west of the centre of Mulanje Town; follow the signpost to Phalombe. If you're coming from Blantyre on the bus, ask to be dropped at Chitikali. From here, irregular *matolas* run to Likhubula (US\$0.50). Alternatively, you can walk (10km, two to three hours).

ZOMBA

Zomba was the capital of Malawi until the mid-1970s and it's still a large, busy place. The town has good facilities, though, and there are Stanbic, National and First Merchant banks in the town. For supplies, there's a Shoprite and a Metro Cash and Carry.

The mist-shrouded **Zomba Plateau**, hovering protectively above the town, has fantastic views of the surrounding plains, hills and lakes and is a favourite with hikers. Queen's View and the Emperor's View are particularly impressive. There's no bus up here, so you'll have to hitch or take a taxi (around US\$8). You can walk, but there have been reports of occasional attacks on lone hikers.

Sleeping & Eating

Chitinji Campsite (admission US\$0.80, camp sites per person US\$2.50, basic r per person US\$5) Near Malumbe Peak in the west. An excellent place to stay, although likely to be shrouded in mist.

Ndindeya Motel (☎ 08-855700, 08-385540; s/d incl breakfast US\$4/8) A good budget option. The rooms are large and the shared bathrooms are clean. The downside is that it's next door to a bar, which is very noisy even during the day.

Annie's Lodge (☎ 01-527002; Livingstone Rd; r from US\$35) North of the town centre, it's a rambling old place made up of colonial-style buildings with wide verandas. The rooms are great value and incredibly spacious, and there's a very nice rondavel bar.

Ku Chawe Inn (☎ 01-514237; r superior/deluxe US\$80/110) Up on the Zomba Plateau is this inn. It is like a small palace, built right on the edge of the escarpment, with excellent views and spacious rooms with fireplaces to keep you warm on those chilly mountain nights. There's a good restaurant (buffet breakfast US\$6.50, dishes US\$9) and the terraced gardens are particularly pleasant.

Gulnoor Restaurant & Take Away (dishes US\$2-4; 🕒 breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Specialises in Pakistani curries and also does Malawian food. Dishes include *chambo* marinated in chillies and yoghurt, baltis, *haandis*, sheikh kebabs.

Getting There & Away

Zomba is on a main route between Lilongwe and Blantyre. Express buses run to/from Zomba and Lilongwe (US\$3.50, six hours, one daily), Blantyre (US\$1.80, one hour, one daily) and Liwonde (US\$1, 45 minutes, three daily). Minibuses go every hour or so to Limbe (US\$1).

LIWONDE

You may visit Liwonde town if you're heading for Liwonde National Park or for Mozambique by train. The Shire River divides the town; on the more pleasant eastern side are the train station, the market, a supermarket and several shops.

Waterline River Safaris (☎ 01-542552/832; colin_sue@malawi.net) operates wildlife-viewing boat trips for around US\$15 per person per hour (the price decreases with more passengers). This is also a viable way to access Mvuu camp in Liwonde National Park, with one-way/return transfers costing from US\$32/42.

The large international-standard **Hippo View Lodge** (☎ 01-542822/255; www.hippoviewlodge.com; s/d from US\$35/50) has extensive flower-filled gardens that lead down to the river, a gazebo for sundowners and a kids' playground complete with bouncy castle and trampoline. Turn right down the dirt road just before the National Bank and it's about 1km down the road.

At **Sun Village Lodge** (☎ 01-542330; s/d bathroom US\$21/40) large rooms with fans, high ceilings and spotlessly clean shower rooms open onto a pleasant garden square. It's opposite the National Bank.

The **Town Council Resthouse** (s/d with bathroom US\$3), just down the road from the Liwonde Park Motel, is next to the Peoples Supermarket. It's very clean and simple

LIWONDE NATIONAL PARK

Liwonde National Park is the closest thing Malawi has to a traditional wildlife park. Dominating the west, the Shire River overflows with hippos and crocodiles and is a favourite stomping ground for the abundant elephants. Waterbucks are also common near the water, while beautiful sable and roan antelopes, zebras and elands populate the surreal flood plains in the east. Night drives can reveal spotted genets, bushbabies, scrub hares, side-striped jackals and even spotted hyenas. Black rhinos are protected within a separate

enclosure and there's a rich and colourful array of birdlife.

Sleeping

Places to stay in Liwonde remain open all year; you can reach them by boat even if rain closes some of the park tracks.

Chinguni Hills Lodge (☎ 08-838159; www.chinguni.com; camp sites US\$5, dm/r per person from US\$10/15) In the south of the park, it has very accommodating rooms, the friendly host is a walking wealth of information on the park's flora and fauna, and delicious home-cooked meals are taken *en famille*. Walking and canoeing safaris are US\$12.50 per person and night drives are US\$15. It also has a camp site, a few minutes' walk away, with dorms, tented rooms and fantastic views over the park.

Mvuu Camp (camp sites per person US\$5, accommodation only/full-board chalets per person US\$35/140) Managed by Wilderness Safaris (☎ 771393, info@wilderness.malawi.net) in Lilongwe, this camp is deep in the northern part of the park on the banks of the river. Stone chalets have tented roofs, lavish interiors and verandas overlooking the river, and the small but accommodating camp site has spotless ablution blocks and self-catering facilities, including utensils.

Njobvu Cultural Village (full-board hut per person US\$50) This is actually 6km from the western boundary of Liwonde National Park and offers visitors a rare opportunity to stay in a traditional Malawian village. The experience includes dancing and crafts displays and allows you to participate in the daily activities of village life. All proceeds go directly to the community; you can book at Mvuu Camp or through Wilderness Safaris.

Getting There & Away

The main park gate is 6km east of Liwonde town. There's no public transport beyond here. From the gate to Mvuu Camp is 28km along the park track (closed in the wet season), and a 4WD or high-clearance vehicle is recommended for this route.

Another way in for vehicles is via the dirt road (open all year) from Ulongwe, a village between Liwonde town and Mangochi. This leads for 14km through local villages to the western boundary. A few kilometres inside the park is a car park and boat jetty, where a watchman hoists a flag to arrange a boat from Mvuu Camp to come and collect you.

For those without wheels, the best option is to get any bus or minibus between Liwonde town and Mangochi and get off at Ulongwe, where local boys wait by the bus stop and will take you by bicycle to the park gate (US\$2) or all the way to the boat jetty (US\$3).

Another option is the boat transfer service along the Shire River offered by Waterline River Safaris (opposite).

MONKEY BAY

Monkey Bay is a port at the southern end of Lake Malawi, which most travellers pass through on the way to Cape Maclear. Monkey Bay also has a market and a Peoples Supermarket but no ATM or money exchange.

Sleeping

Venice Beach Backpackers (camp sites per person US\$1.30, dm US\$2, d without bathroom US\$2.50) This place is about 1.5km from the main road and offers dorms and rooms in a two story thatch building set on a beautiful stretch of beach. There's a bar with a small menu of local food; fish and *nshima* (maize porridge) is about US\$2.

Njobvu Backpackers (☎ 01-587214; www.monkeybay.bravehost.com/backpackers.htm; camp sites/dm/r US\$1.50/1.50/3) Just off the main street is a small and friendly joint with an internet café, tidy rooms and dorms and splendid home-baked cakes. It's also home to the Back to School Foundation; volunteers get free accommodation in return for helping this scheme, which raises money to send children and young adults to secondary school.

Getting There & Away

From Lilongwe, ordinary buses go to Monkey Bay, either via Mua and the southern lakeshore (US\$3.80, seven hours, two daily) or the long way round, via Balaka, Liwonde and Mangochi (US\$4.50, 10 hours, two daily). But you're probably better off going by minibus to Salima (US\$1.50), from where you can find a minibus or *matola* going direct to Monkey Bay.

It's much easier to reach Monkey Bay from Blantyre on the ordinary bus that travels via Liwonde and Mangochi (US\$3.80, eight hours, one daily). A quicker option is to go by minibus (US\$5, four hours), but you'll need to leave in the morning and you're likely to change at Limbe, Mangochi and sometimes Zomba.

You can also get to/from Monkey Bay on the *Ilala* ferry (see p932).

CAPE MACLEAR

Cape Maclear sits on a scenic jut of land at the southern end of Lake Malawi, with the alluring Domwe and Thumbi Islands anchored offshore. It was once a travellers' byword for sun, sand, rest and recreation, but the crowds seem to have moved on elsewhere and the beach is no longer as clean as it once was. It is still a relaxing place to experience the beauty of the lake, however. There's nowhere to change money in Cape Maclear, so make sure you bring enough with you.

Sights & Activities

Much of the area around Cape Maclear, including several offshore islands, is part of **Lake Malawi National Park**, one of the few freshwater aquatic parks in Africa. There's a good range of hikes and walks in the hills; you can go alone or arrange a guide, either from the village or at the national park headquarters. Near the entrance gate to the Golden Sands Holiday Resort, a path leads towards the hills overlooking the bay. A few hundred metres up here is a small group of **missionary graves**, marking the last resting place of the missionaries who attempted to establish the first Livingstonia Mission here in 1875 (see p916). There's also a **museum**, which is well worth a visit to learn about the formation of the lake and the evolution of the fish.

Guides registered with the Chembe Village Tourist Association can organise day trips to nearby islands for about US\$10 to US\$40 per boat, plus around US\$15 per person. If you prefer to go snorkelling on your own, many places rent gear (rates start at about US\$2 – but check the quality of your mask). For diving, go to **Scuba Shack** (☎ 09-934220; www.scubashackmalawi.com), based within Stevens Resthouse, **Kayak Africa** (☎ 09-942661; www.kayakafrika.net) or **Danforth Yachting** (☎ 09-960077; www.danforthyachting.com). If you prefer to stay on top of the water, Kayak Africa has top-of-the-range kayaks (single and double) suitable for experts or beginners.

Danforth Yachting also offers sailing. A full-day island-hopping cruise costs US\$75 per person (minimum four people), including lunch.

Tours

Kayak Africa (☎ 09-942661; www.kayakafrika.net) offers guided one-, two- or three-night island-hopping kayak tours from US\$130 per person

per night. The charge includes tented accommodation, meals, snorkel gear and park fees. It also operates PADI open-water courses for US\$250.

Sleeping

Fat Monkeys (☎ 09-948501; camp sites per person US\$1, r with shared bathroom US\$5) Almost 1km east of the village centre and away from the crowds, this is a huge camping ground aimed primarily at overland trucks and car-campers. It also has small and comfortable rooms, good security, showers, and the ubiquitous bar and restaurant by the water.

Gaia Lodge (☎ 09-300559, 09-374631; gaiahouse@mw.celtelplus.com; camp sites/dm/s/d US\$2/2.50/3/6) The rooms are on the small side, but there's a great, shady waterfront garden, excellent food and a supremely chilled-out atmosphere.

Chembe Eagles Nest (☎ 09-960628, 09-966507; www.chembenest.com; camp sites \$6, per person half board for cottages & safari tents \$60) At the eastern end of Cape Maclear beach, this is about as far from the tourist trap as you can get. It's an idyllic spot on a beautiful and very clean, broad stretch of beach, strewn with palm trees and shaded tables. There are airy thatch and brick rooms with wooden four posters and verandas.

Gecko Lounge (☎ 09-833856; kite@africa-online.net; dm/d US\$10/40) You can't miss this place from the beach, with its bright orange buildings and excessively manicured lawns. It's a good bet for families and groups, with spacious cottages with self-catering facilities that sleep up to four people. The dorm, while more expensive than most, is also a good deal nicer, and the food is top-notch, with menus that change daily.

Eating & Drinking

Thomas's Grocery Restaurant & Bar (dishes US\$2) This is a great local eatery if you want to leave the confines of your lodge. Meals are filling, tasty and predictable (although it does serve Indian chapatis and spaghetti) and the outdoor bench seating is the perfect spot to watch the village operate around you.

Setting Sun Bar is a lively, loud, mural-adorned bar on the waterfront, accessible from the beach or the main street. It's a good place to chat with the locals, although it can get a little raucous.

Getting There & Away

By public transport, first get to Monkey Bay, from where a *matola* ride to Cape Maclear

should cost US\$1, although some travellers have been charged much more so be assertive when negotiating. Although not far away, it can take all day to get there; you could wait anything from 30 minutes to five hours for a *matola* departure. If you're driving from Mangochi, the dirt road to Cape Maclear (signposted) turns west off the main road, about 5km before Monkey Bay. Be warned, however; it's a bumpy ride and unless you're in a 4WD or high-clearance vehicle, it'll be slow going.

MALAWI DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

In almost every town there is a council or government rest house. Prices vary from as little as US\$1 up to around US\$5 a double, but conditions are not great. Backpacker hostels are present in the main cities, and are numerous in popular lakeshore destinations. Prices range from US\$3 for a dorm up to about US\$8 per person for a double or triple. Camp sites are usually about US\$1 to US\$3.

Midrange hotels are about US\$25 to US\$75 per double, including taxes, usually with private bathroom and breakfast. The quality of service at a smaller place can be just as good as or even better than at the pricey establishments, though.

Top-end hotels or lodges generally range from US\$100 to US\$250 for a double room, including taxes and breakfast, with facilities such as private bathroom, TV, air-con and telephone.

ACTIVITIES

Lake Malawi is one of the best freshwater diving areas in the world – and one of the cheapest places to learn how to dive. Places where you can hire scuba gear and learn to dive include Nkhata Bay, Cape Maclear, Likoma Island and Senga Bay. Many of the more upmarket places along the lake have facilities for water-skiing or windsurfing. You can also go sailing, and kayaking is available at Cape Maclear and Nkhata Bay.

The main areas for hiking are Nyika and Mulanje. Other areas include Zomba, and various smaller peaks around Blantyre. Mulanje is Malawi's main rock-climbing area, with some spectacular routes (including the longest in Africa).

PRACTICALITIES

- Malawi's main newspapers are the *Daily Times*, *Malawi News* and the *Nation*. The *Chronicle* is a smaller publication with a strong independent voice (read relentless criticism of the government).
- Malawi's national radio station, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, broadcasts music, news and chat shows in English, Chichewa and some other local languages. International news is brief but wide-ranging. There are also commercial music stations in the large cities.
- Malawi's national TV station was launched in 1999 and broadcasts mostly imported programs, news, regional music videos and religious programs. International satellite channels are available in most midrange and top-end hotels.

The main area for horse riding is the Nyika Plateau, which lends itself perfectly to travel on horseback. If you prefer nonanimated transport, Nyika's hilly landscape and good network of dirt tracks are also great for mountain biking.

BOOKS

Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa* includes a good section on Malawi and is recommended for trekkers and hikers.

Day Outings from Lilongwe and *Day Outings from Blantyre*, both published by the Wildlife Society of Malawi, are highly recommended. They are well written and researched, and include suggestions on places to visit, things to see and local walks in the region.

Venture to the Interior, by Laurens van der Post, describes the author's 'exploration' of Mt Mulanje and the Nyika Plateau in the 1940s, although in reality this was hardly trailblazing stuff.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Unfortunately, reports of travellers being robbed in Lilongwe and Blantyre have increased. However, incidents are still rare compared with other countries, and violence is not the norm. There have also been robber-

ies at popular lakeshore areas such as Cape Maclear and Nkhata Bay, but here violence is very rare.

Potential dangers while at Lake Malawi include encountering a hippo or crocodile, but for travellers the chances of being attacked are extremely remote. Popular tourist beaches are generally safe, although, just to be absolutely sure, you should seek local advice before diving in.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Malawi Embassies & Consulates

Malawian embassies and consulates abroad include:

Canada (☎ 613-236 8931; 7 Clemow Ave, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 2A9)

France (☎ 01 40 70 18 46; 20 Rue Euler, 75008 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030 843 15 40; Westfälische Strasse 86, 10709 Berlin)

Tanzania (☎ 255 22 113 239; 6th fl Nic Life House, Dar es Salaam)

UK (☎ 020-7491 4172; 33 Grosvenor St, London W1X 0DE)

USA (☎ 202-797 1007; 2408 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Although Malawi has no high commission in Australia, it is represented by the **Consular Office, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade** (☎ 02-6261 3305; John McEwen Cres, Barton, ACT 2600).

Embassies & Consulates in Malawi

The following countries have diplomatic representation in Malawi:

Canada (☎ 01-651450; Accord Centre, Limbe)

Germany (Map p913; ☎ 01-772555; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe)

Mozambique Lilongwe (Map p913; ☎ 01-774100; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe); Limbe (☎ 01-643189; 1st fl Celtel Bldg, Rayner Ave, Limbe) The embassy is in Lilongwe, the consulate in Limbe.

South Africa (Map p913; ☎ 01-773722; sahe@malawi.net; Kang'ombe Bldg, City Centre, Lilongwe)

UK Lilongwe (Map p913; ☎ 01-772400; off Kenyatta Rd, City Centre, Lilongwe); Blantyre (Map p923; Hanover Ave, Blantyre) The high commission is in Lilongwe, the consulate in Blantyre.

USA (Map p913; ☎ 01-773166; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe)

Zambia (Map p913; ☎ 01-772590; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe)

Zimbabwe (Map p913; ☎ 01-774997; off Independence Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe)

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays in Malawi:

New Year's Day 1 January

John Chilembwe Day 15 January – celebrates this national hero, a Baptist minister who led an uprising against the colonial government in 1915

Martyrs' Day 3 March

Easter (Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Monday) March/April

Labour Day 1 May

Freedom Day 14 June

Republic Day 6 July

Mother's Day second Monday in October

National Tree Planting Day second Monday in December

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

LEGAL MATTERS

Although cannabis is widely available in Malawi, it is an offence to sell, purchase or consume it. There are severe penalties for its possession.

MEDIA

The *Daily Times* and the *Nation* are the main national daily newspapers. Major international papers and magazines are available in bookshops in the cities. The Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (the national radio station) broadcasts news and programmes in English, Chichewa and a few other Malawian languages. The national TV station broadcasts local news.

MONEY

The unit of currency is the kwacha (MK), which is made up of 100 tambala. The best foreign currencies to carry with you are US dollars, British pounds and South African rands. You'll find a few ATMs at banks in Lilongwe, Blantyre, Karonga, Liwonde, Mzuzu, Salima and Zomba. Very few places outside main cities will accept credit cards. Most banks and bureaux de change won't charge you a commission for changing cash, but there's usually a 1% commission for changing travellers cheques.

POST

Post in and out of Malawi is a bit of a lottery. Some letters get from Lilongwe to London in three days, others take three weeks. Post offices in Blantyre and Lilongwe have poste restante services.

TELEPHONE

International calls (to destinations outside Africa) from public phone offices cost around US\$4 per minute. The international code for Malawi if you're dialling from abroad is ☎ 265. Malawi does not have area codes, but all land-line numbers begin with ☎ 01, so whatever number you dial within the country will have eight digits.

Mobile phone prefixes are ☎ 08 or ☎ 09 and the two major networks are Celtel and Telekom. SIM cards are readily available and cost around \$5. You can buy top-up cards at supermarkets, petrol stations and roadside booths.

TOURIST INFORMATION

There are tourist offices in Blantyre and Lilongwe, and an office at the Ministry of Wildlife and Tourism in Lilongwe. Outside Malawi, tourism promotion is handled by UK-based **Malawi Tourism** (☎ 0115-982 1903; www.malawitourism.com), which responds to inquiries from all over the world.

VISAS

Visas are not needed by citizens of Commonwealth countries, the USA and most European nations (except Switzerland). Visas are limited to 30 days, although extensions are easy to get.

Visa Extensions

You can get a visa extensions at immigration offices in Blantyre or Lilongwe (see p22 or 914 respectively) or at regional police stations. It's straightforward and free.

Visas for Onward Travel

If you need visas for neighbouring countries while in Malawi, these are the conditions: **Mozambique** Visas are available in Lilongwe and Limbe; both offices are open from 8am to noon Monday to Friday. One-month single-entry visas cost US\$15 and take four working days to issue, but you can pay extra to have it issued in one day.

South Africa Visas are free and take two days to issue. The high commission in Lilongwe is open from 8am to noon Monday to Friday.

Tanzania There is no Tanzanian representation in Malawi, but visas are administered at the border, or on arrival at the airport, and cost US\$50.

Zambia The cost of a single-entry visa depends on your nationality: Brits pay US\$60, all others pay US\$30. Applications can be made between 8am and 4.30pm (closed between 12.30pm and 2pm) on Monday and Tuesday, or

Wednesday morning and passport collection is on Friday only, between 8am and noon.

TRANSPORT IN MALAWI

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Malawi's main airport for international flights is at Lilongwe. Airlines flying to and from Malawi include **Air Malawi** (www.airmalawi.net), which has a pretty good regional network, with three flights a week to Harare, two flights a week to both Lusaka and Johannesburg (Jo'burg). The following regional airlines also serve Malawi, usually flying on the days Air Malawi doesn't (so you get a wider choice of flights), with fares mostly on a par: **South African Airways** (www.flysaa.com) flies twice per week to/from Jo'burg (with connections to Durban, Cape Town etc); **Kenya Airways** (www.kenya-airways.com) flies four times per week to/from Nairobi.

Ulendo Air Services (☎ 01-754717/950; air-services@ulendo.malawi.net) has flights from Lilongwe to Mfuwe in Zambia (US\$220) and to Livingstone in Zambia (US\$320).

Land

MOZAMBIQUE

The quickest way to reach Mozambique south of the Zambezi is to get a minibus to the Mozambique border crossing at Zôbuè (*zob-way*; US\$2.50 from Mwanza) and then a minibus to Tete (US\$1.50). Otherwise, from the Dedza border crossing, 85km southeast of Lingowe, *chapas* run to Tete via Ulongwé.

There are three border crossings from Malawi into northern Mozambique: regular buses run from Blantyre, via Mulanje, to Muloza (US\$2). From here, you walk 1km to the Mozambique border crossing at Milange, from where it's another few kilometres into Milange *vila* (town) itself. From Milange there's usually a *chapa* (pick-up or converted minibus) or truck about every other day in the dry season to Mocuba (US\$4), where you can find transport on to Quelimane or Nampula.

You could also take a minibus from Mangochi to Namwera (US\$2), then take a bicycle taxi for the remaining 10km to the Malawian border at Chiponde (US\$3). It's then 7km to the Mozambique border crossing at Mandimba. There's at least one vehicle daily, usually a truck, between here and Cuamba (US\$4) and daily vehicles to Lichinga.

DEPARTURE TAX

For travellers flying out, the airport departure tax for international flights is US\$20, payable in US dollars in cash. No other currency is accepted.

Another option is to go by minibus from Liwonde to the border at Nayuchi (US\$3). You can walk to the Mozambique border post at Entre Lagos and possibly to hitch to Cuamba. Yet another option is to take a passenger train, which departs Limbe on Wednesdays at 7am, travelling via Balaka and Liwonde to Nayuchi. From here (where there are moneychangers) you can walk to Entre Lagos, but transport from here into Mozambique is limited.

SOUTH AFRICA

If you need to get to South Africa, **City to City** and **Translux** (☎ for both 09-937499) run direct luxury coaches from Blantyre to Jo'burg every day between them, for US\$40 to US\$50. **Vaal Africa** (☎ 01-621265) also operates a service between Blantyre and Jo'burg on Tuesday and Sunday for US\$80. All companies depart at 9am, arriving in Jo'burg by mid-afternoon the next day. **Ingwe** (☎ 01-622313, 01-829879) runs services to Jo'burg on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for US\$86.

TANZANIA

If you want to go the whole way between Lilongwe and Dar es Salaam, two buses a week (Tuesday and Saturday) depart from opposite the market in Lilongwe. There's a ticket office where you can book; fares are US\$33. These buses also pick up and drop off in Mzuzu and Mbeya (Tanzania) and are handy for going between northern Malawi and southern Tanzania.

If you're going in stages, buses and minibuses run between Mzuzu and Karonga (US\$4, 3½ hours), from where minibuses and *matolas* travel to the Songwe border crossing (US\$1.30). It's 200m across the bridge to the Tanzanian border crossing.

ZAMBIA

There are three direct buses per week between Lilongwe and Lusaka (US\$25), also departing from Devil St. There is no specific office so ask at the Tanzanian bus ticket office for information. Regular minibuses run between

Lilongwe and Mchinji (US\$2). From here, it's 12km to the border. Local shared taxis shuttle between Mchinji and the border post for around US\$1.50 per person, or US\$8 for the whole car.

ZIMBABWE

Although Zimbabwe doesn't border Malawi, many travellers go directly between the two countries. The cheapest option is the daily **Munurama Bus** (☎ 01-6248735), between Blantyre and Harare (US\$15). The bus departs opposite the main bus station at 7.30am and arrives in Harare by late afternoon. The service is good and on Wednesday and Saturday it continues all the way to Jo'burg (US\$38).

Lake

MOZAMBIQUE

The Lake Malawi steamboat *Ilala* (see right) stops at both Cóbue and Metangula on the Mozambican mainland. If you're planning a visit you must get your passport stamped at the immigration post in Chipyela (the main village) on Likoma Island.

Another way to get to the Mozambican lakeshore is to take a dhow (local sailing boat) from Likoma Island to Cóbue (US\$0.80). For more information on the Mozambique side of Lake Malawi, see p948.

TANZANIA

The *Songea* ferry sails from Mbamba Bay (Tanzania) to Nkhata Bay on Malawi's northern lakeshore every Saturday. The journey takes around four hours and fares for 1st-/economy-class deck are US\$11/6.50. Cabins are available and children travel for US\$3.

GETTING AROUND

Air

Air Malawi (☎ 01-772123, 01-753181, 01-788415; www.airmalawi.com) Has daily flights between Lilongwe and Blantyre, and four flights a week between Lilongwe and Mzuzu, both for US\$77 one way. You can also fly from Lilongwe or Blantyre to Lake Malawi's Club Makokola for US\$75 (you don't have to be a guest), from where you can reach other points on the lake. Domestic flights can be paid for in kwacha and there's a departure tax of US\$2.

Nyika Safari Company (☎ 01-330180; www.nyika.com) Mainly services Nyika National Park, but often has promotional offers to other Malawian destinations.

Ulendo Air Services (☎ 01-754717; air-services@ulendo.malawi.net) Has charter and seat-only flights to major destinations around the country.

Boat

The **Ilala ferry** (☎ 01-587311; ilala@malawi.net) chugs passengers and cargo up and down Lake Malawi, once per week in each direction. Travelling between Monkey Bay in the south and Chilumba in the north, it makes 13 stops at lakeside villages and towns in between. (You can get to the Mozambique mainland via the *Ilala*; see left.)

The whole trip, from one end of the line to the other, takes about three days. The official schedules are as follows (only selected ports are shown):

Northbound port	Arrival	Departure
Monkey Bay	-	10am (Fri)
Chipoka	1pm	4pm (Fri)
Nkhotakota	midnight	2am (Sat)
Metangula	6am	8am (Sat)
Likoma Island	1.30pm	6pm (Sat)
Nkhata Bay	1am	5am (Sun)
Ruarwe	10.15am	11.15am (Sun)
Chilumba	5pm (Sun)	-

Southbound port	Arrival	Departure
Chilumba	-	1am (Mon)
Ruarwe	6.45am	8am (Mon)
Nkhata Bay	12.45pm	8pm (Mon)
Likoma Island	3.15am	6.15am (Tue)
Metangula	noon	2.00pm (Tue)
Nkhotakota	5.30pm	7.30pm (Tue)
Chipoka	3.30am	7.30am (Wed)
Monkey Bay	10.30 (Wed)	-

The *Ilala* offers travellers three classes: Cabin Class was once luxurious and the cabins are still in reasonable condition; the spacious First Class Deck, which includes seats, a shaded area and mattresses for hire (US\$2); and, finally, economy, which covers the entire lower deck.

ILALA SAMPLE ROUTES & FARES

All of the following sample fares are from Nkhata Bay.

Destination	Cabin (US\$)	1st class (US\$)	Economy (US\$)
Likoma Island	20	11	5
Metangula	33	20	6
Monkey Bay	50	35	10
Ruarwe	18	10	4

Bus & Minibus

There are three options for bus travel in Malawi. Top of the range is Coachline, operated by **Shire Bus Lines** (☎ 01-756226). This luxury non-stop service travels three times a day between Blantyre and Lilongwe. There's also a daily express service operated between Lilongwe and Mzuzu by Sacramento Bus. Other buses, also operated by Shire Bus Lines, fall under the category of express – fast buses between the main towns with limited stops and no standing passengers allowed – and ordinary, which cover long-distance routes but stop everywhere, so are very slow.

In rural areas, the frequency of buses and minibuses drops dramatically – sometimes to nothing. In cases like this, the 'bus' is often a truck or pick-up, with people just piled in the back. In Malawi this is called a *matola*.

You can buy a ticket in advance for Coachline services and are allocated a reserved seat.

Car & Motorcycle

The majority of main routes are mostly good-quality sealed roads, but in recent years sev-

eral stretches of road have not been repaired and potholes are opening up. Rural routes are not so good, and after heavy rain they are often impassable, sometimes for weeks. Rental companies in Malawi include:

Avis (☎ in Blantyre 01-692368; in Lilongwe 01-756103, 01-756105) Plus offices at Blantyre and Lilongwe airports and at some large hotels.

SS rent-a-car (☎ in Blantyre 01-622836; in Lilongwe 01-751478)

You need a full driver's licence (international diving licence is not necessary) and companies normally require a minimum age of 23 and one year's driving experience.

Train

Trains run every Wednesday between Blantyre and Balaka (US\$1.50), but passengers rarely use them since road transport on this route is both quicker and cheaper. The service of most use to travellers is the continuation of this line from Liwonde to the Malawi–Mozambique border crossing at Nayuchi (US\$2). For details, see p931.

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