## Central Malawi



This small corner of Malawi packs a lot into a small space. First off there are the beaches. Backpackers' Mecca, Cape Maclear, is the first to spring to mind – a sunny peninsula where travellers slip into a daze of snorkelling, sunbathing and laid-back village life. But it's not just backpackers who are seduced by the lake's warm waters – family-friendly resorts dot the coastline and luxury seekers will be rewarded by gorgeous resorts straight out of the pages of a magazine.

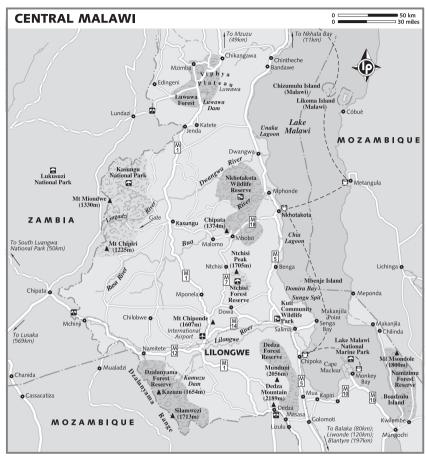
A world away in feel, but just a short drive up from the lake, is the Viphya Plateau, a haunting wilderness of mountains, grasslands and mist-shrouded pines that's so beautiful it'll make you forget all about the beach. That not enough for you? Then check out the parks. Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve and Kasungu National Park had been neglected for many years but now have fine lodges and improved access, and are making strides to increase wildlife stocks and decrease poaching.

To discover more about Malawian culture and history, head for the excellent museum, workshop and gallery at Mua, or visit Nkhotakota and feel a shiver down your spine as you hear tales of the town's involvement in the slave trade.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Make like a beach bum in the country's most laid-back lakeside resort: Cape Maclear (p253)
- Hike through cool pine forests and past whaleback boulders on the stunning Viphya Plateau (opposite)
- Go hippo-spotting without the crowds at Kasungu National Park (p243)
- Throw a pot or two by a beautiful beach at Nkhotakota Pottery (p246)
- Delve into Malawi's cultural history at the fascinating Chamare Museum, Mua (p252)
- Explore untouched wilderness on foot at the Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve (p247)





## **VIPHYA PLATEAU**

The Viphya Plateau forms the spine of central and northern Malawi, snaking a cool path through the flat scrubland, dusty towns and sunny beaches that reign on either side. It may be called a plateau, but there's nothing flat about this part of the country in looks or in atmosphere. Tightly knit forests give way to gentle valleys and rivers, and huge granite domes rise softly from the earth like sleeping beasts. Indigenous woodland bristles with birds and wildflowers, antelope can often be seen, and monkeys are regularly spotted darting through the trees.

The main route to Mzuzu from Lilongwe passes through the plateau and much of it

is lined by pine trees, encasing the road in an eerie silence on misty days (and there are plenty). When the mist lifts you'll be rewarded with a line of sweeping grey- and purple-tinged mountains lining the western horizon in the distance. If you want to stay for a few days, there are a few peaceful forest lodges and plenty of hiking, cycling and rock climbing to be done.

## Sights & Activities

Hiking is the main activity here and all of the accommodations will be able to give you advice on where the best places are to roam, though there's a lot to be said for simply sitting back and taking in the views. Otherwise, for activity junkies the best