

Malawi Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Malawi has long been a popular destination for backpackers who will find a good range of suitable accommodation across the country. These days midrange and top-end travellers are also well catered for. There are plenty of comfortable tourist lodges, as well as the odd luxury beach or safari lodge.

Budget

At the budget end of the price range, in almost every town there is a council or government resthouse. Prices vary from as little as US\$2 up to around US\$8 for a double, but conditions are generally spartan to say the least and downright disgusting at worst. In national

parks and along the lakeshore, many places offer camping as well as self-catering chalets or cabins. Camping costs from around US\$3 to US\$10, depending on whether you're presented with long-drop toilets and bucket showers, or well-equipped affairs with hot showers and power points.

You'll find backpacker hostels all over the country, in the major cities as well as at popular lakeshore destinations such as Cape Maclear and Nkhata Bay. Prices range from US\$5 to US\$10 for a dorm up to about US\$10 to US\$15 per person for a double or triple with shared facilities and around US\$30 for an en suite room. Camping is usually about US\$3 to US\$5.

Midrange

Midrange hotels and lodges start from about US\$30 up to US\$80 for a double, including taxes, usually with private bathroom and breakfast, sometimes with air-con. Additionally, some backpacker lodges have stylish en suite options for around US\$30 to US\$50 for a double. Often, the quality of service at small midrange tourists' lodges is just as good or even better (and more personal) than that at the expensive big hotels.

Top End

Standard top-end hotels in the big cities and at beach resorts range from US\$100 to US\$250 for a double room, with in-room facilities such as private bathroom, TV, air-con and telephone, and hotel facilities such as swimming pools, tennis courts and organised activities. The price normally includes taxes and breakfast. Then there are the exclusive beach hotels and safari lodges,

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PRACTICALITIES

- Malawi's main **newspapers** are the *Daily Times*, the *Malawi News* and *The Nation*. *The Chronicle* is a smaller publication but with a strong independent voice.
- Malawi's national **radio station**, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, combines music, news and chat shows in English, Chichewa and some other local languages. International news is brief but wide-ranging. Commercial stations include Capital FM, providing a steady stream of international and Malawian hits as well as local and international news.
- **TV Malawi** was launched in 1999 and consists mostly of imported programmes, news, regional music videos and religious programmes. International satellite channels are available in most midrange and top-end hotels.

which charge anything from US\$100 to US\$450 per person, per night, though this usually includes all meals and some activities.

ACTIVITIES

Malawi provides a wide range of activities for travellers. Lake Malawi is the main destination so diving and snorkelling are particularly popular.

Birdwatching

Malawi is a great destination for birding with almost 650 species recorded here. The best place to start is the national parks. Liwonde (p263) is an excellent spot, with particularly good birdlife along the river, and the forests in Nyika (p224) are also good. For water birds, Elephant Marsh (p288) in Malawi's far south is your surest bet. Land & Lake Safaris (www.landlake.net, p207) Lilongwe can organise birdwatching tours around the country, as can Budget Safari (www.budget-safari.com, p233) in Nkhata Bay.

Diving & Snorkelling

Lake Malawi's population of colourful fish (p255) attracts travellers to come scuba diving. The lake is reckoned by experts to be among the best freshwater diving areas in the world and one of the cheapest places to learn how to dive. The water is warm and (depending on season) visibility and weather conditions are usually good. Places where you can hire scuba gear and take a PADI Open Water course include Nkhata Bay (p232), Cape Maclear (pp254–5), Likoma Island (p238) and Senga Bay (p249).

If you don't want to dive you can still have fun with the fish. Gear for snorkelling can be hired from most dive centres, and most lake-side hotels rent snorkelling equipment.

Other Watersports

Many of the more upmarket places along the lake have facilities for water-skiing or windsurfing. You can also go sailing, or join luxurious 'sail safaris' where everything is done for you – Danforth Yachting (p255) and Pumulani (p258) on the southern lakeshore can both organise this for you. Kayaking is available at Cape Maclear (p255) and Nkhata Bay (p232) and at many of the lodges that dot the lakeshore.

Fishing

You can go fishing in Lake Malawi for *mpasa* (also called lake salmon), *ncheni* (lake tiger), *sungwa* (a type of perch), *kampang* or *vundu* (both catfish). There are trout in streams on Nyika, Zomba and Mulanje Plateaus, and tigerfish can be hooked in the Lower Shire River. Anglers can contact the Angling Society of Malawi (www.anglingmalawi.com) for further details.

Hiking

The main areas for hiking are Nyika (p225) and Mulanje. Other areas include Zomba (p269), and various smaller peaks around Blantyre. Mulanje is Malawi's main rock-climbing area, with some spectacular routes, although local climbers also visit smaller crags and outcrops. Rock climbing can also be arranged in Livingstonia and in the Viphya Plateau (p241).

The Mountain Club of Malawi (www.mcm.org.mw) provides a wealth of information about hiking on Mt Mulanje.

Horse Riding

Malawi's biggest horse riding destination is the Nyika Plateau – the huge open landscape lends itself perfectly to exploration on