

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 natives, along with the relative ease of travel here, Malawi really does live up to the hype.

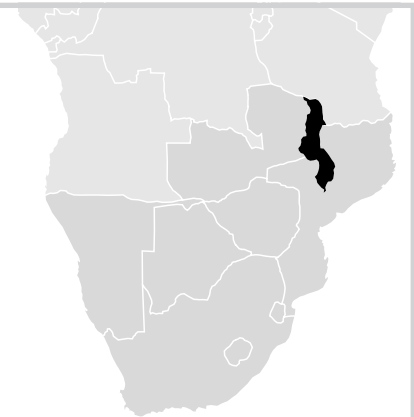
Malawi’s big draw is the lake – a magnificent shard of crystal water stretching some 500km along Malawi’s eastern border, separating it from the wild and mountainous coast of Mozambique and Tanzania. Isolated villages pepper the northern lakeshore, and the beautiful Liwonde National Park rests at its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

Malawi’s not just for waterbabies and sun worshippers though, there’s plenty here to keep you active, and Malawi’s landscape is surprisingly diverse. Head for the misty peaks 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 on their way elsewhere, intent on racing through to Africa’s ‘bigger’ attractions. This is a shame, as Malawi has much to offer. Take some 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
- **Capital:** Lilongwe
- **Country code:** ☎ 265
- **Famous for:** The lake, laid-back beach resorts and friendly locals
- **Languages:** English, Chichewa
- **Money:** Malawi kwacha
- **Phrase:** *Muli bwanji?* (How are you?)
- **Population:** 12 million



HOW MUCH?

- **100mL bottle of Nali (Malawi's own chilli sauce)** US\$0.80
- **30mL sachet of Malawi Gin** US\$0.30
- **Live chicken** US\$2.50
- **Bottle of wine** US\$10-20
- **Carving** US\$12

LONELY PLANET INDEX

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

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Lake Malawi** (p187) Explore the untouched islands by kayak, commune with the underwater world or kick back on a near-deserted beach.
- **Nyika National Park** (p181) A sweeping, magnificent wilderness filled with antelope and zebra, to be explored on foot, by bike or on horseback.
- **Mt Mulanje** (p219) Hike the majestic peaks and take in the dramatic views.
- **Liwonde National Park** (p206) Cruise past hippos and crocs on the Shire River, or take a walking safari and get up close and personal with the elephants.
- **Off the beaten track** (p225) Head to the little visited swamplands of the Elephant Marsh to enjoy some of the best bird-watching in Malawi.

ITINERARIES

- **Three days** Head down to **Senga Bay** (p198) from **Lilongwe** (p167) for a couple of days of sun worshipping, then visit the museum at the **Mua Mission** (p200) for an eye-opening glimpse into Malawi's cultural heritage.
- **One week** Head down to **Blantyre** (p212) through the hills and waterfalls of the **Zomba Plateau** (p210), then meander through Malawi's stunning tea plantations before getting in some hiking on the misty peaks of **Mt Mulanje** (p219).
- **Two weeks** Head north from **Lilongwe** (p167) to **Mzuzu** (p185), from where you

can reach the wild open spaces of **Vwaza Marsh** (p184) and **Nyika Plateau** (p181) and the colonial hilltop town of **Livingstonia** (p179). Then head for **Nkhata Bay** (p188) for some fun in the sun, before catching the **Ilala** ferry over to **Likoma** (p192) and **Chizumulu Islands** (p194). Charter a flight or wait for the **Ilala** to take you back to the mainland.

- **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** (p201); go hippo spotting on a canoe in **Liwonde National Park** (p206); or head to the little-visited but beautiful wilderness spots of the **Majete Wildlife Reserve** (p224) and **Lengwe National Park** (p224).

CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Malawi has a single wet season, from November to April, when daytime temperatures are warm and conditions humid. The best time to visit Malawi is during the dry season from April/May to October. 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. Average daytime maximums in the lower areas are about 21°C in July and 26°C in January. In highland areas, average daytime temperatures in July are between 10°C and 15°C, while in September they reach 20°C and above. See p742 for climate charts.

HISTORY

The pre-colonial history of Malawi is linked to the history of Southern Africa as a whole. For more detail see p37.

Early Migrations

Since the first millennium, the Bantu people had been migrating from Central Africa into the area now occupied by Malawi. Migration to the area stepped up with the arrival of the Tumbuka and Phoka groups, who settled around the highlands of Nyika and Vipha during the 17th century, and the Maravi people (from whom the modern-day Chewa are descended), who established a large and powerful kingdom in the south.

The early 19th century brought with it two more 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 (where they became known as the Ngoni).

The Rise of Slavery

Slavery, and a slave trade, had existed in Africa for many centuries, but in the early 19th century demand from outside Africa increased considerably. Swahili-Arabs, who dominated the trade on the east coast of Africa, pushed into the interior, often using the services of powerful local tribes such as the Yao to raid and capture their unfortunate neighbours. Several trading centres were established in Malawi, including Karonga and Nkhotakota – towns that still bear a strong Swahili-Arab influence today.

Early Europeans

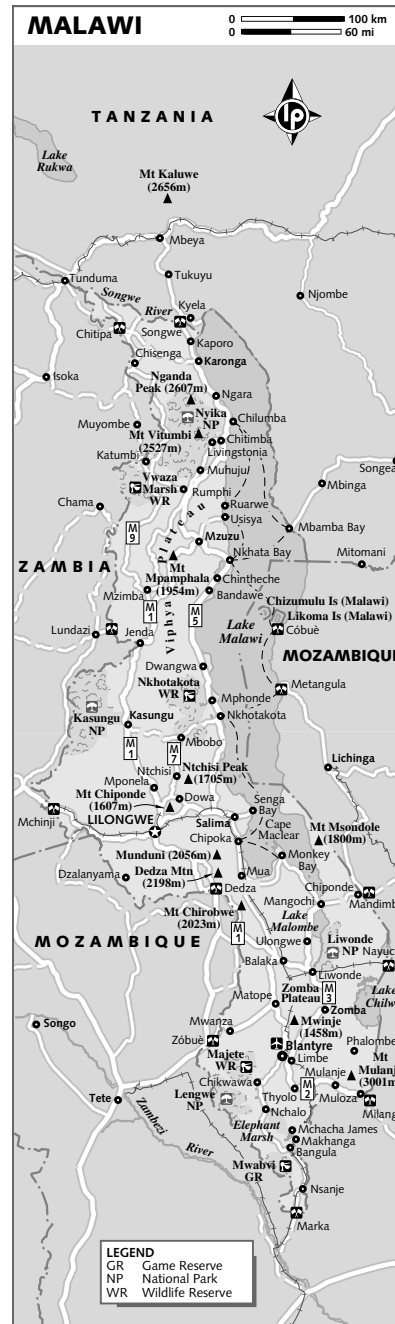
The first Europeans to arrive in Malawi were Portuguese explorers who reached the interior from Mozambique. One of these was Gaspar Bocarro who, in 1616, journeyed from Tete (on the Zambezi River) through the Shire Valley to Lake Chilwa (to the south of Lake Malawi), then through the south of what is now Tanzania and back into Mozambique.

The most famous explorer to reach this area was David Livingstone from Scotland, whose exploration heralded the arrival of Europeans in a way that was to change the nature of the region forever.

Livingstone & the First Missionaries

Livingstone's first foray into Malawi was unplanned. Returning to Africa in 1858, after a short spell drumming up missionary support back home, he found his planned route up the Zambezi was blocked at Cahora Bassa, so he followed a major Zambezi tributary called the Shire into southern Malawi. He reached Lake Malawi in September 1859, named it Lake Nyasa and provided fodder for thousands of tourist brochures to come by reportedly dubbing it the 'lake of stars'. He returned in 1861 with some fellow missionaries to establish a mission in the Shire Highlands, and later on the Lower Shire. In 1864, ravaged by malaria and other illnesses, and plagued by conflict with slave-traders and local people, the surviving missionaries withdrew to Zanzibar.

In 1866 Livingstone returned to Malawi again, on his quest to find the source of the



Nile. He died near the village of Chief Chitambo, southeast of Lake Bangweulu in Zambia, in 1873.

Livingstone's death inspired a legion of wannabes to come to Africa and help save the 'poor natives'. In 1875 a group from the Free Church of Scotland built a new mission at Cape Maclear, which they named Livingstonia; and 1876 the Established Church of Scotland built a mission in the Shire Highlands, which they called Blantyre. Cape Maclear proved to be malarial, so the mission moved to Bandawe, then finally in 1894 to the high ground of the eastern escarpment. This site was successful; the Livingstonia mission flourished and is still there today (see p179).

The Colonial Period

The early missionaries blazed the way for various adventurers and pioneer traders. In 1878 the Livingstonia Central African Mission Company (later renamed the African Lakes Corporation) was formed and built a trading centre in Blantyre. The company then established a commercial network along the Shire River and the shores of Lake Nyasa. As intended, this had a serious effect on the slave trade in the area, and after several clashes many slave-traders were forced to leave the area.

By the 1880s the competition among European powers in the area was fierce. 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, the demand for land grew, and the hapless local inhabitants found themselves labelled as 'squatters' or tenants of a new landlord. A 'hut tax' was introduced and traditional methods of agriculture were discouraged. Increasing numbers of Africans were forced to seek work on the white-settler plantations or to become migrant workers in Northern and Southern Rhodesia (present-day Zambia and Zimbabwe) and South Africa. By the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries some 6000 Africans were leaving the country every year. (The trend continued through the colonial period: by the 1950s this number had grown to 150,000.)

Early Protest

The first serious effort to oppose the Nyasaland colonial government was led by Reverend John Chilembwe, who protested in his preaching about white domination, and later about the forced conscription of African men into the British army at the outbreak of WWI.

In January 1915 Chilembwe and his followers attacked and killed the manager of a large estate. His plan had been to trigger a mass of uprisings, but these failed or didn't materialise, and the rebellion was swiftly crushed by the colonial authorities. Chilembwe was executed, his church was destroyed, and many supporters were imprisoned. Today Chilembwe is remembered as a national hero, with many streets named in his honour.

Transition & Independence

After WWI the British began allowing the African population a part in administering

BANNING THE PRESS *David Else*

It's worth noting that it wasn't only works of literature that incurred the wrath of President Banda. Several books on contemporary history were also banned, including, perhaps not surprisingly, *Malawi – the Politics of Despair*. Newspapers from other countries and from within Malawi were also frequently barred from circulation, especially if they were seen to be critical, but sometimes even if they weren't. Any form of pornography was also prohibited, but this included several medical textbooks, on the grounds that the diagrams were indecent. Even guidebooks didn't escape; an early Lonely Planet book called *Africa on the Cheap* was critical of the regime in the Malawi chapter, and was promptly banned as well. This meant travellers with a low-budget look were often searched for the scurrilous tome, and when I first visited Malawi in the early 1980s, getting across the Songwe border with the book intact was notoriously difficult.

the country, although it wasn't until the 1950s that Africans were actually allowed to enter the government. The economic front was similarly sluggish; Nyasaland proved to be a relatively unproductive colony with no mineral wealth and only limited plantations.

In 1953, in an attempt to boost development, Nyasaland was linked with Northern and Southern Rhodesia in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. But the federation was opposed by the pro-independence Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) party, led by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda. The colonial authorities declared a state of emergency and Banda was jailed.

By mid-1960 Britain was losing interest in its African colonies. Banda was released, and returned to head the now renamed Malawi Congress Party (MCP), which won elections held in 1962. The federation was dissolved, and Nyasaland became the independent country of Malawi in 1964. Two years later, Malawi became a republic and Banda was made president.

The Banda Years

President Banda began consolidating his position and demanded that several ministers declare their allegiance to him. Many resigned rather than do so and took to opposition. Banda forced them into exile and banned other political parties. He continued to increase his power by becoming 'President for Life' in 1971, banning the foreign press, and waging vendettas against any group regarded as a threat. He established Press Holdings, effectively his personal conglomerate, and the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation, to which all agricultural produce was sold at fixed rates, and thus

gained total economic control. In a blow to travellers all over the region, miniskirts, women in trousers, long hair for men, and other such signs of Western debauchery were outlawed.

Alongside this move towards dictatorship, Banda remained politically conservative, giving political support to apartheid South Africa, who, in turn, rewarded Malawi with aid and trade. This angered the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which was furious at Banda's refusal to ostracise the apartheid regime.

As well as the usual dictatorial behaviour of living it up at the expense of his citizens and clamping down on freedom of expression, Banda had a bizarre range of habits. He developed a fondness for wearing jaunty gangster-style hats and carrying an African flywhip; and at public appearances he was often accompanied by a group of women who would dance and chant words of praise, clad in customised outfits with his face printed all over them.

With the end of the East/West 'cold war' in the 1990s, things began to get dicey for Banda. South Africa and the West no longer needed to support him, and inside the country opposition was swelling. In 1992 the Catholic bishops of Malawi condemned the regime and called for change, and demonstrations, both peaceful and violent, added their weight to the bishops' move. As a final blow, donor countries restricted aid until Banda agreed to relinquish total control.

In June 1993 a referendum was held for the people to choose between a multiparty political system and Banda's autocratic rule. Over 80% of eligible voters took part; those voting for a new system won easily, and Banda accepted the result.

THE NAMING OF MALAWI

The derivation of the name Malawi is disputed. When David Livingstone first came across Lake Malawi, he called it Lake Nyasa (derived from the word *nyanja*, which simply means 'lake' in the language of the indigenous Chewa people) and recorded in his journal that Maravi people (of whom the Chewa people were part) inhabited the area.

At independence in 1964 a commission was given the task of finding a new name for a new country. Malawi was chosen – inspired by the word *malavi*, which means 'reflected light', 'haze', 'flames' or 'rays' in Chichewa. (The word is also spelt *maravi* – 'l' and 'r' seem interchangeable in Chichewa.) This new name was seen as a reference to the sun rising over the lake, bringing fresh light to the country. It may also be connected to the Maravi people.

The 'w' in Malawi was originally pronounced as a soft 'v'. Nowadays the name of the country is generally pronounced with the 'w' sound.

Multiparty Democracy

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, freedom of speech and print was permitted, and free primary school education was to be provided. The unofficial night curfew that had existed during Banda's time was lifted. For travellers, the most tangle change was the repeal of that notorious dress code.

The Muluzi Government also made several economic reforms with the help of the World Bank and the IMF; these included the withdrawal of state subsidies and the liberalisation of foreign exchange laws.

In April 1995 former president Banda was brought to trial accused of ordering the murder of three government ministers who died in a mysterious car accident in 1983. He was acquitted and the result was greeted with general approval, especially when Banda went on to apologise publicly. As the population warmed once more to Banda, it became clear that the UDF's honeymoon period was well and truly over.

By 1996 the economic reforms were hitting the average Malawian citizen very hard. Food prices and unemployment soared. There were reports of increased malnutrition, and crime, particularly robbery, increased in urban areas. Matters were made worse by a slow resumption of international aid, after it had been frozen in the final years of Banda's rule.

In November 1997 Dr Banda finally died. His age was unknown, but he was certainly over 90.

In July 2002 Muluzi attempted to change the constitution by proposing an Open Terms Bill to parliament, which would have given him life presidency. When it was defeated,

he aired the idea of proposing a Third Term Bill instead, which would have extended his presidency for one more term.

When this failed, Muluzi chose Bingu wa Mutharika as his successor, and in 2004 he duly won the election. Many thought he would simply 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.

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

THE CULTURE The National Psyche

Most Malawians live up to and are proud of 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. People will offer you food, invite you to their homes for dinner and take you on tours around their hometown, and they're always keen to chat and tell you (with a great deal of pride) about their country. Look a little lost and you'll soon have offers of help. And unlike in some other countries, there's no sense that they're just doing so just because they want something from you.

Malawians have a great sense of humour, and any misunderstanding will usually be greeted with peals of laughter. They're also laid back, and don't see the point in com-

THE CHEWA

The Chewa are the largest ethnic group in Malawi, although their ancestors hail from the Congo. During the first millennium, they migrated through Zambia and then on to central Malawi, conquering land as they went and eventually establishing a powerful kingdom in 1480 that covered southern Malawi as well as swathes of Mozambique and Zambia. During the 17th century, Malawi experienced an influx of diverse cultures and dynasties, but the Chewa kept their ethnicity distinct through language, tattoos and secret societies.

The Chewa believe that God (Chiuta or Chautu) created all living things during a thunderstorm, at a mountain range that straddles the Malawi and Mozambique border. They also believe that contact between spirits and the living is achieved through a dance called *gule wamkulu*, in which leading dancers dress in ragged costumes of cloth and animal skins, usually wearing a mask and occasionally standing on stilts. Today, however, Chewa culture is a mixture of traditional beliefs and European influences; although Christianity is the dominant religion, it's common practice to consult a witch doctor in times of trouble. If you are interested in this process, you can arrange a consultation with a witch doctor on Likoma Island (see p193).

To really experience Chewa culture, it's best to immerse yourself in a village. There are cultural villages offering overnight stays near Liwonde National Park (p206) and the Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve (p184).

plaining about or stressing over the small things in life.

Malawians can be pretty conservative, though. Women tend to dress modestly and respectable ladies are not seen in bars unaccompanied. Walking around in revealing clothing is seen as inappropriate for both men and women. Public drunkenness is frowned upon, as are open displays of affection between men and women. Great respect is accorded to the older generation, who should always be treated in a courteous manner.

Daily Life

For the average Malawian, economic conditions are not good. Malawi remains one of the world's poorest countries, with a per capita gross national product (GNP) of around US\$170. Other socioeconomic indicators paint a grim picture: infant mortality is around 9% and, although the population growth rate has dropped in recent years, the fall is due largely to AIDS. The HIV/AIDS infection rate in Malawi is estimated to run at over 14%. Driven by this scourge, life expectancy has fallen to around 40.

Malawi is urbanising rapidly, and the rate of population growth in the cities is far higher than that in rural areas. Natural resources struggle to support the burgeoning population, and schools, hospitals and other social institutions are overflowing.

Family life is very important here and most Malawians, even more affluent urbanites, will

live at home until they are married. The legal age for marriage in Malawi is 15, but there are many cases of girls getting married as young as 11 or 12. Because of this phenomenon, the average age of marriage in Malawi is amongst the lowest in the world, while the percentage of teenage mothers is one of the highest.

Like many other African countries, gender inequality is evident in all walks of life and is particularly reflected in the disproportionate amount of work that women do. For example, as well as doing most of the work around the home, women also undertake the bulk of farm work.

Population

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.

Multiculturalism

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.

FAMINE IN MALAWI

In 2005, after a shorter than average rainy season and the worst harvest for a decade, Malawi, as with much of Southern Africa, was affected by severe drought and famine. Around five million Malawians – almost half the population – were experiencing food shortages, prompting President Mutharika to declare a national disaster. Many expected there to be loss of life and famine on a huge scale. However, although there is still widespread hunger, it seems that for the time being that scenario has been averted. Early 2006 saw greater food aid, longer rains, a bumper harvest, and successful government initiatives, including a sponsored fertiliser program. Until more long-term steps are taken, however, it seems that there is little to prevent such a large-scale disaster from happening again.

MOVERS & SHAKERS: JACK MAPANJE

Poet and activist, Malawi's Jack Mapanje is one of the most influential living writers to come out of Africa. Born in 1944 in a small, poor Malawian village, he started writing poems inspired by the corruption and maltreatment that he saw all around him. Through his book *Of Chameleons & Gods*, he voiced his anger, albeit couched in metaphor, at the brutal Banda regime and was one of the few who dared to do so.

The volume was soon won international acclaim for which Mapanje received the Rotterdam International Poetry Prize. In 1985, once the government cottoned on to what his poems were really about, the book was withdrawn from all bookshops and libraries. A mere two years later, while drinking in a bar in Zomba, Mapanje was arrested and imprisoned without trial or charge for over three years. His arrest and subsequent incarceration provoked an international outcry and writers and linguists all over the world took up his cause, including Harold Pinter, Noam Chomsky and Wole Soyinka. While in prison he composed a number of poems which would later be published in the volume *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*, where he would describe cells filled with 'blood-bloated' mosquitos where 'desperate voices of fractured souls' struggled to make themselves heard.

Upon his release, he went into exile in England, where he continues to teach today, and to promote and support African writers. Most recently he edited *Gathering Seaweed*, a collection of poems, plays and memoirs from Africans who, like Mapanje himself, were imprisoned by their governments.

The number of Malawians of European descent is less than 1% – the country was only a British protectorate and few chose to settle here. Most Westerners in Malawi are here on a short-term basis and involved in business, aid or the diplomatic service.

There is also a small Indian population in Malawi, who are mostly involved in commerce. Indians first came to the country when they were brought in by the British in the early 1900s to help construct a railway line between Malawi and Mozambique. During the Banda regime, they were not allowed to participate in politics and certain sections of the economic sector, and many were forced to leave the country.

SPORT

The most popular sport in Malawi is football, which is played throughout the country at all levels, from young boys on makeshift pitches to the national team. Malawi's national team is nicknamed the Flames. They are not major players on the world stage and are currently ranked 26th in Africa and 107th in the world. Each year, regional teams in Malawi battle it out for the Super League championships and the most popular teams in the country are the Big Bullets and the MTL Wanderers. For details of local fixtures, check the newspapers, look out for billboards or check out the website of the **Football Association of Malawi** (www.fam.mw).

Sailing is popular among more affluent Malawians and expats, and every July the Lake Malawi 500km Sailing Marathon takes place. It's the world's longest freshwater race, during which catamarans race the entire length of the lake.

Other popular sports include volleyball, golf and basketball. In 2006 Malawi sent a team of squash players to the Commonwealth Games.

Athletics and cross-country running are also gaining more prominence, thanks in part to the international success of long-distance runner Catherine Chikwakwa.

RELIGION

Christianity is the majority religion in Malawi, making up about 75% of the population, 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.

See p45 for more information.

ARTS & CRAFTS Dance

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 (see p163).

Literature

Like most countries in Africa, Malawi has a very rich tradition of oral literature. Since independence, a new school of writers has emerged, although thanks to the despotic President Banda's insensitivity to criticism, many were under threat of imprisonment and lived abroad until the mid-1990s. Not surprisingly, oppression, corruption, deceit and the abuse of power are common themes in their writing.

If you want a taste of current literature by well-known or new writers, try any of the short novels or poetry collections under the Malawi Writers Series imprint, available in good bookshops in Blantyre and Lilongwe. Most cost less than US\$1.

Poetry is very popular. Steve Chimombo is a leading poet whose collections include *Napolo Poems*. His most highly acclaimed work is a complex poetic drama, *The Rainmaker*. To many Malawians he is better known for his popular short stories in newspapers and magazines, with their vivid combination of traditional themes and harsh urban settings.

Jack Mapanje's first poetry collection, *Of Chameleons and Gods*, was published in 1981

(see the boxed text, opposite). Much of its symbolism was obscure for outsiders, but not for President Banda – in 1987 Mapanje was arrested and imprisoned without charge; he was eventually released in 1991.

Another significant literary figure is David Rubadi, who has compiled an anthology called *Poetry from East Africa* (which includes a section on Malawi) and also writes poetry himself. His novels include *No Bride Price*, which discusses the familiar themes of corruption and oppression.

Most critics agree that Malawi's leading novelist is Legson Kayira, whose semiautobiographical *I Will Try* and *The Looming Shadow* earned him local acclaim in the 1970s. A later work is *The Detainee*. Another novelist is Sam Mpasu. His *Nobody's Friend* was a comment on the secrecy of Malawian politics – it earned him a 2½-year prison sentence. After his release he wrote *Prisoner 3/75* and later became minister for education in the new UDF government. His comments on Banda's rule sum up the situation for all Malawian writers, and the people of Malawi too: 'We had peace, but it was the peace of a cemetery. Our lips were sealed by fear.'

Music

Home-grown contemporary music is becoming increasingly popular in Malawi,

THE MARTYR & THE MUSIC

In 2000 a young musician named Evison Matafale made his mark on Malawi's popular reggae scene, amassing huge domestic and growing international support with his charismatic melodies and outspoken social and political expression. His future was bright and he was soon declared Malawi's unofficial king of the genre.

Not all were charmed by his assessment of the government, though, and on 24 November 2001 he was arrested for allegedly writing a seditious letter criticising President Bakili Muluzi. Three days later, while still in police custody, Matafale was declared dead at Lilongwe Central Hospital.

The official post mortem indicated that he died from acute pneumonia, and Matafale was certainly ill at the time of his incarceration. However, a second post mortem, conducted at the request of his brother – a UDF regional governor – suggested the cause of death was less clear and that Matafale had sustained internal bleeding in the days leading to his death. An avalanche of public outrage ensued, prompting a joint commission of inquiry to probe the circumstances of the musician's death.

The official finding maintained the hospital's autopsy conclusion, but also found that the police had exercised negligence by incarcerating Matafale when he was visibly ill. What is without question is that the life of a talented and revered musician was tragically cut short, creating a martyr for all avenues of free expression in Malawi.

Matafale released two albums in his short-lived career – *Kuyimba 1* and *Kuyimba 2*; both can be bought on virtually any street corner in Malawi's larger towns and cities.

due largely to influential and popular musicians such as Lucius Banda, who performs soft 'Malawian-style' reggae with his band Zembani, and the late Evison Matafale (see the boxed text, p165). Other reggae names to look out for are Billy Kaunda and Nyasa Gurus. Bubulezis plays Jamaican-style reggae, while the Sapitwa Band tends towards Congo-style rhumba. Also popular is Ethel Kamwendo, one of Malawi's leading female singers. For more on other musical styles in the region, see p52.

Sculpture

You'll see woodcarvings and stone carvings in craft shops and markets all over the country, but you won't find anything there by Kay Chirombo, Lemon Moses, Willie Nampeya, Berling Kaunda, Charley Bakari or Louis Dimpwa. These are some of Malawi's leading artists, producing sculpture, batiks and paintings, and many have exhibited outside Malawi. Possibly the best-known artist is Cuthy Mede – he is also actively involved in the development and promotion of Malawian art within the country and around the world.

ENVIRONMENT The Land

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 one-fifth of Malawi's total area. A strip of low ground runs along the western lakeshore, sometimes 10km wide, sometimes so narrow there's only room for a precipitous footpath between the lake and the steep wall of the valley. 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.

Wildlife

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', the country has plenty to offer. The main park is Liwonde, which is home to plenty of elephants, hippos, antelope species and bird life. Kasungu National Park is also home to elephants, as is Nkhhotakota Wildlife Reserve, where you'll also meet several antelope species, buffaloes and if you're lucky, leopards. Nyika National Park is renowned for roan antelopes and reedbucks; you'll also see zebras, warthogs and jackals, and at night you could well hear hyenas prowling around your tent. 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. In southern Malawi, Lengwe National Park supports a population of nyalas – at the northern limit of its distribution in Africa.

For bird-watchers, Malawi is a dream come true; over 600 species have been recorded, and a visit to any of the parks or wildlife reserves will reward serious ornithologists, tourists and everyone in between with a diverse and colourful array of species.

Lake Malawi has more fish species than any other inland body of water in the world, with a total of over 500, of which more than 350 are endemic. (For more information see the boxed text, p199.)

National Parks

There are five national parks in Malawi: Lengwe, Liwonde, Kasungu, Nyika and Lake Malawi (around Cape Maclear). There are also four wildlife reserves: Vwaza Marsh, Nkhhotakota, Mwabvi and Majete, which are less developed than the national parks, with fewer accommodation options and a more limited network of roads and tracks (if they exist at all). Malawi also has many forest reserves including Mt Mulanje and the Zomba Plateau. For more information on the facilities at each park and reserve see their individual listings.

All parks and reserves cost US\$5 per person per day (each 24-hour period), plus US\$2 per car per day. Citizens and residents pay less. Other costs are for optional services: a fishing licence costs US\$4 and the hire of a wildlife scout guide costs US\$5 to US\$10. All fees are payable in kwacha.

Environmental Issues

The main environmental challenges facing Malawi are deforestation and soil erosion,

which result from a rapidly growing population and increasing pressures on the land – the vast majority of Malawians live without electricity and therefore the use of wood as a source of fuel in Malawi is very high. In the mid-1970s Malawi's forest cover was 4.4 million hectares. It's now under two million, with over 50,000 hectares being cleared each year, mostly for fuel. Although some replanting is taking place, at this current unsustainable rate the woodlands and forests will eventually disappear.

Another environmental challenge faced by Malawi is overfishing. Population growth over the years means that the demand for fish has grown, to an extent that the stocks are now taken from the lake at an unsustainable level. In an effort to minimise overfishing, the government imposes an 'off-season' moratorium, which prohibits the capture of certain fish for several months starting in November. In 2003 the Malawi Fisheries Department launched a 10-year plan to restore depleted fish stocks to maximum sustainable yields.

Poaching of wildlife from national parks was a major environmental problem in the 1980s and early 1990s, and wildlife was severely depleted. Although the situation is better than it once was, poaching still threatens the wildlife of some of Malawi's national parks and reserves.

To learn more, or to help, get in touch with Ripple Africa (see p191) or the **Wildlife Action Group of Malawi** (www.wag-malawi.org). They both run admirable conservation projects, and both organisations accept volunteers.

FOOD & DRINK

The staple diet for most Malawians is *nsima*, a porridge made out of maize meal and water, which is eaten with vegetables and/or hot *relish*, and occasionally meat or fish. Fish is particularly good here, and *chambo*, the popular, bream-like variety, can be found on every menu, from cheap cafés to top-end restaurants. If you're self-catering, Peoples Supermarkets are found all over Malawi and Shoprite has made an entrance in larger cities. Both stock locally produced and imported goods, many of them from South Africa or Europe and sold at similar prices.

Markets and bus stations usually harbour a collection of food stalls, where you can get tea with milk for US\$0.30 and a bread cake or deep-fried cassava for US\$0.20, or a simple

meal of beans or meat and *nsima* for about US\$0.50.

Local restaurants in small towns provide simple meals for around US\$1.50. In cities and larger towns, cheap restaurants serve traditional Malawian food as well as chicken or fish (the most popular being *chambo*) with rice or chips for around US\$2.50.

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.

If you're hankering for something different, in Blantyre and Lilongwe you can find 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, and sold all over the country in large red-and-blue cartons. For most travellers, the thick texture and bittersweet taste are not appealing. Malawi's local lager is called Kuche Kuche.

Most travellers (and many Malawians) prefer the beer produced by Carlsberg at its Blantyre brewery (the only one in Africa). There are three main types of beer: 'greens' (lager), 'browns' (like a British ale) and 'golds' (a stronger brew). If you're a beer fan, you can visit the brewery (see p214).

LILONGWE

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, 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. At the week-ends movement in Lilongwe is reduced to a trickle, particularly on Sunday, when sleeping and church attendance seem to be the main activities.

Most travellers will spend a day or two here at some point, which isn't all bad news. There are good facilities in Lilongwe, and it's a decent enough spot to refuel and get things done before heading off to discover Malawi's real attractions.

HISTORY

Originally a small village on the banks of the Lilongwe River, Lilongwe became a British colonial administrative centre around the turn of the 20th century, after its chief requested protection from warlike neighbours. Due to its central location on the main north-south route and the road to Northern Rhodesia (later Zambia), Lilongwe soon became Malawi's second-largest urban centre. Plans announced in 1968 to relocate the country's administration from Blantyre were fully realised in 1975, when Lilongwe was officially declared the capital.

ORIENTATION

Lilongwe is unusually spread out and rather than one CBD, has two centres: City Centre and Old Town. City Centre is rather loose and sterile. 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.

Maps

Survey maps of Malawi and some of its cities are available from the Department of Surveys Map Sales Office (Map p169), about 500m south of the roundabout where Glyn Jones Rd meets Kamuzu Procession Rd. See also p229.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Bookmart (Map p171; Mandala Rd) An excellent second-hand bookshop with a wide range of recent bestsellers, classics, and travel books. It also has a small coffee bar so you can have a latte while you browse.

Central Africana (Map p171; Old Town Mall) Has a diverse selection of travel, history and nature books. It also does a nice line in leather-bound, secondhand Africana books and old colonial-style maps.

LILONGWE IN...

Two Days

Start your day with breakfast in one of the many local cafés in the **Old Town** (see p174) to take in a slice of Malawi daily life. Then barter for carvings at the **craft stalls** (p175) outside the post office on Mandala Rd after which you can spend your afternoon at the nearby **market** (p171) by the main bus station, to soak up the lively atmosphere and snap up some bootleg CDs. After all the excitement, head into the City Centre for a leisurely dinner at **Buchanan's Grill** (p174) at the Four Seasons Centre followed by a cocktail or two at the **Chameleon Bar** (p175).

On your second day, head for the **tobacco auction floors** (p171) to see the heart of Malawi's economic life in action. Then spend the afternoon at the **Nature Sanctuary** (p171) before exploring **Old Town's bars and restaurants** (p174 and p175) for the evening.

Central Bookshop (Map p171; Nico Shopping Centre, Kamuzu Procession Rd) Sells a surprisingly good stock of African literature and local guidebooks.

TBS bookshop (Map p171; Nico Shopping Centre, Kamuzu Procession Rd) In Old Town; sells international and local newspapers and magazines, and some paperback novels.

Emergency

The emergency number for police and ambulance is ☎ 199 (Lilongwe and Blantyre only), but there are never enough vehicles, so if you need assistance you'll probably have to go to the police station by taxi and bring an officer back to the scene of the crime. Once you've contacted the police, put aside several hours while they laboriously take a statement, which will then cost you around US\$30. If you are seriously injured, don't waste time phoning an ambulance – get a taxi straight to hospital.

Internet Access

Internet access is readily available in Lilongwe and there are several cheap options both in Old Town and the City Centre.

Comptech Cyber Café (Map p171; Mandala Rd; per hr US\$3) Fast internet connection, printing and photocopying as well as Skype telephone service.

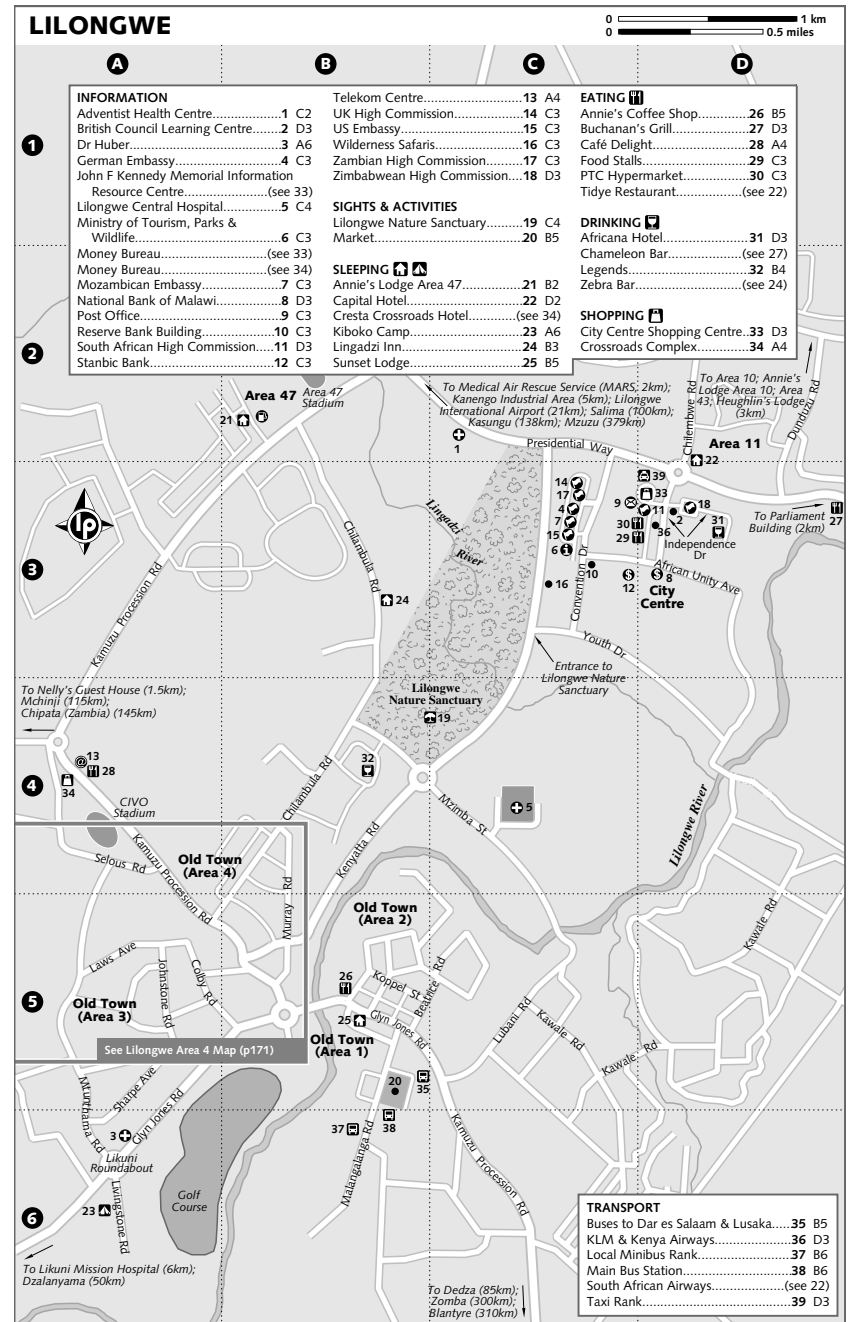
Globe Computer Systems (Map p169; ADL House; per hr US\$3)

MGI Cyber Café (Map p171; Nico Shopping Centre, Kamuzu Procession Rd; per hr US\$2.80) Offers quick access.

Telekom Centre (Map p169; Kamuzu Procession Rd; per hr US\$5) Opposite Crossroads Complex. Speedy internet as well as international telephone services.

Libraries

The **British Council Learning Centre** (Map p169; ☎ 01-773244; info@britishcouncil.org.mw; ☎ 12pm-5.30pm Mon, 8.30am-5.30pm Tue-Thu, 8.30am-12pm Sat), off Independence Dr, and the **John F Kennedy**



Memorial Information Resource Center (Map p169; ☎ 01-772222; Old Mutual Bldg, City Centre Shopping Centre; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Wed, 8.30am-12.30pm Thu) allow nonmembers to read books and magazines in the library, but not to take them away. Both places also show films on some afternoons and evenings. Check their noticeboards for details.

Medical Services

There are MPL pharmacies at the Nico Shopping Centre in Old Town and in City Centre Shopping Centre.

Adventist Health Centre (Map p169; ☎ 01-775456; Presidential Way) Good for consultations, plus eye and dental problems.

Dr Huber (Map p169; ☎ 01-750404, 09-919548; Glyn Jones Rd) Has been highly recommended to us for private consultations, although can be expensive.

Likuni Mission Hospital (☎ 01-766602; Glyn Jones Rd) A better option than Lilongwe Central Hospital, 7km southwest of Old Town, with public wards, private rooms, and some expat European doctors on staff. Fees for those who can afford them start at US\$100 per day.

Lilongwe Central Hospital (Map p169; ☎ 01-753555) Off Mzimba St. Conditions and facilities are not good, but an 'expat bed' (a private ward) costs about US\$50 per night.

Medical Air Rescue Service Clinic (MARS; ☎ 01-794036, 236644; www.mars.co.zw; Ufulu Rd, Area 4) The best place for major matters. Fees are US\$60 per consultation, US\$120 after hours and US\$100 for an overnight stay. MARS also has ambulances with staff highly trained in emergency treatment. They will rescue you anywhere within 50km of Lilongwe for US\$50 per half-hour, but need proof that you are insured or can pay. MARS is linked to Health International and can arrange evacuation to Harare or Jo'burg if things get really serious.

Money

Money Bureau (City Centre Map p169; ☎ 01-772239; Centre House Arcade, City Centre Shopping Centre; City Centre Map p169; ☎ 01-750789; Crossroads Complex; Old Town Map p171; ☎ 01-750659; Nico Shopping Centre, Kamuzu Procession Rd, Old Town) has good rates and quick service, and doesn't charge commission.

National Bank of Malawi (City Centre Map p169; African Unity Ave; Old Town Map p171; Kamuzu Procession Rd; ☎ 8am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) You can change money here and get a cash advance on your Visa card. There's a 24-hour ATM that accepts Visa, Mastercard, Cirrus and Maestro.

Stanbic Bank (City Centre Map p169; African Unity Ave; Old Town Map p171; Kamuzu Procession Rd) Offers the same facilities as National Bank of Malawi.

Victoria Forex (Map p171; ☎ 08-825545; Nico Shopping Centre) Offers a similar service to Money Bureau.

Photography

Lee Photo Studio (Map p171; Nico Shopping Centre) Print film, developing, printing, prints from digital cameras and instant passport photos are available here. Digital printing costs US\$0.80 per photo. Developing from film costs US\$9 for a roll of 24 and US\$11 for 36.

Post

Post office (Map p171; Kamuzu Procession Rd; ☎ 7.30am-12pm and 1-5pm, Mon-Fri)

Post office (Map p169; ☎ 7.30am-12pm and 1-5pm, Mon-Fri) Located next to the City Centre Shopping Centre.

Telephone & Fax

Many lodges and hotels have phones that their guests can use to make international phone calls. In addition, several internet cafés also offer an international telephone service, or can hook you up to the Sykpe web telephone service on their computers. At **Globe Computer Systems** (Map p169; ☎ 01-774834; ADL House) and the **Telekom Centre** (Map p169; Kamuzu Procession Rd) you can make international calls for US\$4 per minute to anywhere outside Africa, at any time.

Tourist Information

Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Wildlife (Map p169; ☎ 01-771295; Tourism House; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri & 8-10am Sat) The tourist office is located here, off Convention Dr, but information and advice is minimal. For details on tours, flights and hotels you're better off at a travel agency. There's also a bimonthly magazine, called *The Traveller*, which carries features on lodges, restaurants and events in the Malawi tourist calendar. You can normally find copies in tourist offices, hotels, cafés and on Coachline buses.

Immigration office (Map p171; ☎ 01-754297; Murray Rd)

Travel Agencies

Land & Lake Safaris (Map p171; Mandala Rd; ☎ 01-757120; www.landlake.net) Well-established and knowledgeable company organising tours for all budgets in both Malawi and Zambia.

Ulendo Safaris (Map p171; Old Town Mall; ☎ 01-754947; info@ulendo.malawi.net) Organises a variety of tours and safaris in Malawi and Zambia as well as hotel bookings and air charter flights.

Wilderness Safaris (Map p169; Bisnowaty Complex; Kenyatta Dr; ☎ 01-771393/153; www.wilderness-safaris.com) Excellent operator providing top-end safaris and lodge bookings throughout Southern Africa.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Muggings and the occasional stabbing have become a serious problem around the Nature Sanctuary over the past few years, and if you plan to visit get a taxi to inside the gate. Even inside the sanctuary, it's wise to get a guard to show you around if you're alone. Even minibuses can be unsafe, as the bus stop itself has become a target. Walking there is extremely risky. Ask at your lodge, hostel or hotel for up-to-date info regarding security around this area.

During the day, once you leave Malangalanga Rd, things are OK and you can walk to Area 3. 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.

Scams

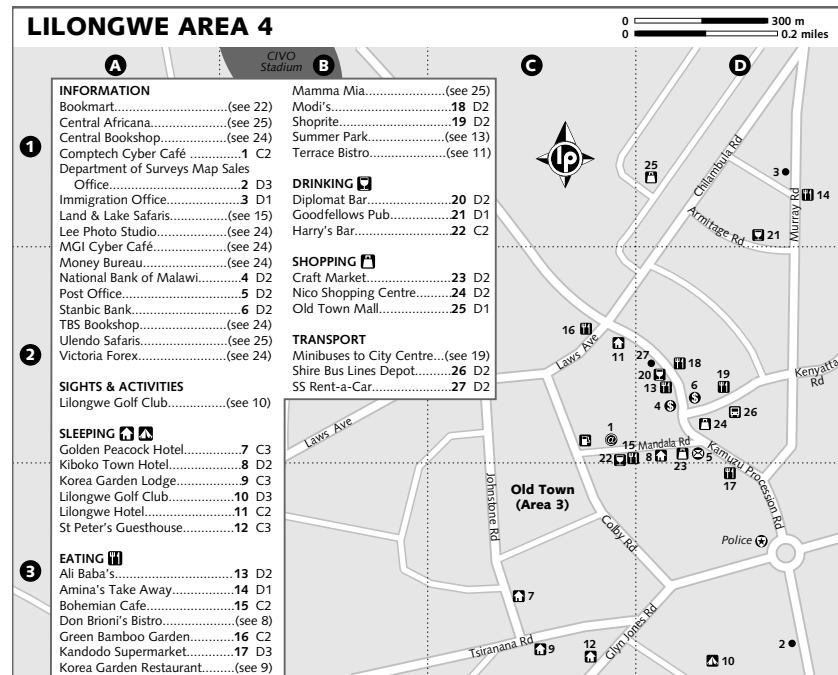
Bus tickets should be only bought at the bus station or the Shire Bus Lines depot near Shoprite; some travellers have been conned out of money by buying tickets on the street when there is no such service.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The main **market** (Map p169; Malangalanga Rd) is a pocket of frenetic activity, with traders, market stalls and food vendors packed into a swarming, small area. It's also a good place to pick up cheap bootleg CDs from the dozens of little stores that line the streets immediately around the market.

For a view of Malawi's economic heart, go to the public gallery overlooking the **tobacco auction floors** (☎ 01-710377; Kenango Industrial Area; admission free) at the vast Auction Holdings warehouse about 7km north of the city centre, east of the main road towards Kasungu. This is best reached by taxi, but local minibuses serve the industrial area. The auction season is May to September. See the boxed text, p172 for more information on this vital commodity.

For a total change of pace, however, head for the **Nature Sanctuary** (Map p169; Kenyatta Rd; admission US\$0.50; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat), an incredibly peaceful wilderness area by the Lingadzi River. Take a taxi here, though; it's not safe to walk (see Dangers & Annoyances, left). There is a signposted network of walking trails, and the information centre lists the



TOBACCO

Tobacco is Malawi's most important cash crop, accounting for more than 60% of the country's export earnings, and Lilongwe is the selling, buying and processing centre of this vital industry. Most activity takes place in the Kenango industrial area on the northern side of Lilongwe, the site of several tobacco-processing factories and the huge and impressive tobacco auction rooms.

Tobacco was first grown in Malawi by a settler called John Buchanan, who planted the crop on his farm near Blantyre in the 1880s. Large-scale tobacco farming started in the area around Lilongwe in the 1920s and has grown steadily in importance ever since. Two types of tobacco are produced in Malawi: 'flue', which is a standard quality leaf, and 'burley', which is of a higher quality and in demand by cigarette manufacturers around the world.

Tobacco is grown on large plantations or by individual farmers on small farms. The leaves are harvested and dried, either naturally in the sun or in a heated drying room, and then brought to Lilongwe for sale (in southern Malawi the crops go to auction in Limbe).

In the auction room (called auction 'floors'), auctioneers sell tobacco on behalf of the growers. It's purchased by dealers who resell to the tobacco processors. The tobacco comes onto the floors (the size of several large aircraft hangars) in large bales weighing between 80kg and 100kg and is displayed in long lines. Moisture content determines the value of the leaves: if the tobacco is too dry, the flavour is impaired; if it's too wet, mould will set in and the bale is worthless.

A small proportion of tobacco is made into cigarettes for the local market, but most gets processed in Malawi before being exported to be made into cigarettes abroad. Most processed tobacco goes by road to Durban, South Africa, to be shipped around the world.

Budget

All the budget places to stay are in Old Town.

Kiboko Camp (Map p169; ☎ 01-754978; www.kiboko-safaris.com; Livingstone Rd; camping 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. Staff can give you info and tips on travelling in Malawi. The reception doubles as a small bar (it closes at 10.30pm) and breakfast, lunch and evening meals can be ordered, although order well in advance if you're eating dinner. If arriving at the bus station at night grab a taxi here for around US\$5.

Lilongwe Golf Club (Map p171; ☎ 01-753598/118; camping per person US\$5; 📍) A clean, safe and comfortable (hot showers!) option for campers, just off Glyn Jones Rd. Discounts are common for two or more people, and rates include access to the members bar, restaurant and swimming pool.

Golden Peacock Hotel (Map p171; ☎ 01-756632; Johnstone Rd; s/d/tr with shared bathroom US\$7/8.50/10.50) Has large but shabby rooms, which vary considerably in size and condition so check out a few. There's a nice terrace café dishing up good burgers and Indian food.

St Peter's Guesthouse (Map p171; ☎ 01-752812, 08-317769; Glyn Jones Rd; r with shared bathroom US\$8.50, 3-bed

birds and animals that may be seen. There is also a small, and rather unpleasant 'zoo' area, which consists of a few rather precarious-looking cages filled with mangy-looking monkeys, hyenas and crocs.

If you'd prefer a political view, head to the **Parliament Building** (Presidential Way), which moved from Zomba in the mid-1990s to the palace of former president Banda on the outskirts of Lilongwe. At least this obscenely grandiose monstrosity is being used now – during Banda's rule he stayed here only one night.

If you're the sporting type, **Lilongwe Golf Club** (Map p171; see right) offers daily membership for US\$10. This allows you to enter the club and use the bar or restaurant. To use the sports facilities there's a small extra charge.

TOURS

Kiboko Safaris (p236) do an excellent half-day tour of Lilongwe, which incorporates both the tobacco auction floors, the Nature Sanctuary and the Parliament Building.

SLEEPING

Lilongwe has a number of decent accommodation options, although there's not much in the top-end bracket. Most budget options are located in the Old Town, the most convenient area of the city to stay due to its eating, drinking and transport facilities.

dm US\$4) Offers excellent, clean and safe rooms with nets, all of which open onto a peaceful courtyard garden. It's quiet and part of the parish so guests should be respectful.

Sunset Lodge (Map p169; ☎ 01-724770, 724718; sunsetlodge@globemw.net; Glyn Jones Rd; s/d from US\$11/22) Upstairs in a large building near the bus station. The bright blue exterior hides a pleasant, airy lodge, with wide corridors, breezy rooms with fans, mosquito nets and hot water. Ask for a room overlooking the river at the back, as these are much quieter. Bathrooms come equipped with plastic cups and buckets if you fancy bathing traditional style. Breakfast is US\$2.

Korea Garden Lodge (Map p171; ☎ 01-753467, 757854; Tsiranana Rd; s/d with shared bathroom US\$18.40/23.30, s/d US\$29.40/44.65; www.kglodge.net; 📍 📍) A large complex with a variety of rooms for most budgets, a bar, pool and the Korea Garden restaurant set by the pool in a grassy backyard. All rooms have nets and fans, but the cheapest ones are best avoided – you'll feel like an extra in a prison drama. It also offers business facilities including internet, which is free for the first 30 minutes.

Midrange

The following all have restaurants for residents and rates include breakfast, unless otherwise specified.

Annie's Lodge Area 47 (Map p169; ☎ 01-762163; Area 47/3; s/d US\$25/28) This place is all jungle prints and wooden décor with a small bar and a pleasant veranda, although the staff's obsession with Western pop music may interrupt any plans for relaxation. Breakfast is included for one guest only, regardless of occupancy.

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

Annie's Lodge Area 10 (☎ 01-794572; annieslodge@globemw.net; Area 10/285; r US\$38-45) Area 47's classier and more sedate cousin has a variety of tranquil rooms, some with private bathroom. There's also an inviting TV lounge, and the restaurant serves inventive meals (US\$5 to US\$11). Breakfast is included for one guest only, regardless of occupancy.

our pick Kiboko Town Hotel (Map p171; ☎ 01-752201; imperial@eomw.net; Mandala Rd; 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. There's a good little café downstairs, complete with children's play area constructed around an old 4WD. Best of all is the beautiful residents bar with its low Moroccan-style seating, twinkling fairy lights, open-air fireplace and mellow atmosphere. The staff are helpful and charming, and there's wireless internet available.

Heuglin's Lodge (☎ 01-795364; Area 43; s/d from US\$40/60) A lovely guesthouse with tasteful rooms, pleasant gardens and a pool. There's also a great wildlife library here. It's 3km north of the City Centre.

Lingadzi Inn (Map p169; ☎ 01-754166; lingadzi@sndp.org.mw; Chilambula Rd; d US\$78) It's a little faded and the bar and restaurant are a tad poky, but the rooms are comfortable and there's a picturesque, sprawling garden out the back. Rates don't include breakfast.

Top End

Facilities at the following include travel and car hire agents, business centres, swimming pools, restaurants and bars.

Lilongwe Hotel (Map p171; ☎ 01-756333; Kamuzu Procession Rd; d from US\$95; 📍 📍) Set amid sprawling, manicured gardens, this hotel is well appointed (there's a business centre, car hire and an Air Malawi desk) but rather uninspiring. If you do stay here, it's best to part with the extra cash for one of the superior rooms, which are huge with comfy velvet sofas and doors opening onto the gardens.

Capital Hotel (Map p169; ☎ 01-773388; capital@sunbirdmalawi.com; Chilembwe Rd; s/d from US\$106/142; 📍 📍) This hotel with its leafy compound and good facilities attracts top-end tourists, business travellers and diplomats. Superior rooms are nice, but the standard ones are looking a bit rough around the edges and the staff aren't that friendly. Prices include breakfast. It also has Tidy Restaurant (p174).

Cresta Crossroads Hotel (Map p169; ☎ 01-750333; Crossroads Complex, Mchinji Roundabout; www.cresta-hospitality.com; 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. There's a large central courtyard and the reception is pretty jazzy, with large windows and a sunken lounge area. It also has a wonderfully cheesy drinking hole called the Cat-chy Saloon.

EATING

Lilongwe has a good selection of places to eat, from cafés serving cheap, local food (mostly found around Old Town) to stuffy, European-style places, as well as very good Indian and Chinese restaurants.

Restaurants

Korea Garden Restaurant (Map p171; ☎ 01-753467; starters US\$1-3, mains US\$5-10; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Within the Korea Garden Hotel, this place serves a large selection of Korean meals including vegetarian options and *bulgogi* dishes. The food is plentiful if a little bland.

Modi's (Map p171; ☎ 01-757694; Kamuzu Procession Rd; 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.

Green Bamboo Garden (Map p171; ☎ 01-750075; Laws Ave; starters US\$2.50, mains US\$10; ☺ lunch & dinner) This place, opposite the Lilongwe Hotel, serves great, fresh Chinese food (the stewed fish head in brown sauce is actually quite tasty); and for those of you who wish to reveal your inner diva, there are three private rooms that have karaoke thrown in for free.

Don Brioni's Bistro (Map p171; ☎ 01-756998; Mandala Rd; 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 sure to come over and chat. Excellent steak, fish, chicken accompany pizzas and pastas on the menu.

Mamma Mia (Map p171; ☎ 01-758362; Old Town Mal; mains US\$5-7; ☺ lunch & dinner) A light and airy restaurant away from the maddening crowds, serving plenty of pizzas and pasta dishes as well as tasty Lake Malawi chambo and steaks.

Buchanan's Grill (Map p169; ☎ 01-772846/772859; 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 gardens of beautiful Four Seasons 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.

Hotel Restaurants

Most of the midrange and top-end hotels listed have restaurants open to nonresidents, where standards and prices are on a par with the hotel.

Kiboko Town Hotel (Map p169; ☎ 01-752201; dishes US\$3-6; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Has a courtyard restaurant serving tasty sandwiches, omelettes and a nice selection of savoury Dutch pancakes.

Terrace Bistro (Map p171; ☎ 01-773388; Lilongwe Hotel; light dishes from US\$4; ☺ lunch) This place is open-air and a popular lunch spot and meeting place for business travellers and well-heeled tourists.

Tidye Restaurant (Map p169; ☎ 01-773388; Capital Hotel; starters US\$5-8, mains US\$10-15; ☺ dinner) This is suitably stylish with exquisite dishes to match – it's all roast salmon and spiced guinea fowl here with not a chambo or chip to be seen.

Cafés & Quick Eats

Summer Park (Map p171; dishes US\$1-3; ☺ breakfast & lunch) Behind Ali Baba's; chose from a small selection of sundaes, milkshakes, burgers and pizzas at the counter and then your choice is brought out to you in the large garden. Enormous yellow-striped awnings provide shade, and there's a constant stream of African pop hits.

Ali Baba's (Map p171; ☎ 01-751523; Kamuzu Procession Rd; light dishes US\$2, mains US\$3-7; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Fast-food joint serving good burgers and shawarmas, but with a smattering of chicken, steak and fish dishes.

Annie's Coffee Shop (Map p169; Conforzi Rd; dishes US\$2-3; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Dishes up tasty breakfasts, curries, burgers and sandwiches in a cosy bistro-style restaurant.

Amina's Take Away (Map p171; Murray Rd; 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 makeshift gazebo.

Bohemian Cafe (Map p171; ☎ 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.

Café Delight (Map p169; Kamuzu Procession Rd; dishes US\$3-6; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Serves Lebanese and Indian fast food, shawarmas, samosas and curries. The plastic tables overlooking the Total petrol station don't make this the most romantic of settings, but the food is mighty tasty.

Self-Catering

There are decent supermarkets all over the city. **Shoprite** (Map p171; Kenyatta Rd) in Old Town

has the best range. **Kandodo Supermarket** (Map p171; Kamuzu Procession Rd) has more limited and cheaper stock. Near the City Centre Shopping Centre is the large PTC Hypermarket (Map p169), where you can get everything from imported South African biscuits to camping supplies.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT Bars & Nightclubs

In Old Town the streets near the market have several bottle stores, which are basic bars that play music loud and late. This area has a very hard edge, so go here only with a streetwise friend, enough money for an evening's supply of beer and nothing that you can't afford to lose.

Africana Hotel (Map p169; off Independence Dr) A lively place with a large outdoor patio that is popular with nearby office workers and government types. It's easy to make friends here and you're sure to strike up a conversation with one of the locals over a few beers.

Chameleon Bar (Map p169; Four Seasons Centre, Presidential Way) Swanky cocktail bar that has 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 (Map p171; Mandala Rd) 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.

Legends (Map p169; Onions Rd; admission US\$2; ☺ 5pm-late) This is a bar most evenings and a nightclub at weekends, where young expats and well-to-do Malawians mix it up in a happy and energetic atmosphere. The music is a fair blend of Western and African.

Lilongwe Hotel (Map p171; ☎ 01-756333; Kamuzu Procession Rd) Has a smart residents' bar open to nonguests, while the nonresidents' bar is livelier. A disco or live band performs on some evenings, when a US\$2 cover charge is applied.

Diplomat Bar (Map p171; Kamuzu Procession Rd; ☺ Mon-Sat, noon-late) Tiny little bar with a few outdoor tables overlooking the street. It gets lively at the weekends when it throngs with a mixed crowd of expats, backpackers and locals.

Goodfellows Pub (Map p171; Armitage Rd; ☺ 11.30am-late Mon-Sat) Another lively spot and an expat haven. You can socialise at the pool tables,

find a cosy corner, or plant a stool at the impressive wooden bar.

Zebra Disco (Map p169; Lingadzi Inn; admission US\$2; ☺ Fri & Sat) The place to go for a more local feel. It plays mostly African music to a mostly Malawian clientele.

Spectator Sport

Football matches are played at the **CIVO stadium** (Map p169; Area 9), off Kamuzu Procession Rd, on Sunday, and at the Area 47 stadium. Look out for posters, or ask local fans for information.

SHOPPING

Nico Shopping Centre (Map p171; Kamuzu Procession Rd) has a bookshop, travel agency, pharmacy and several other shops.

Old Town Mall (Map p171; Off Chilambula Rd) houses a small corridor of shops including African Habitat, selling a variety of African arts and crafts, and Central Africana with an impressive selection of decorative and antique maps well worth framing.

Crossroads Complex (Map p169; Kamuzu Procession Rd) is Lilongwe's newest shopping area and houses banks, a swanky hotel, minigolf, a variety of upscale shops, supermarkets and services, and a branch of the South African Steers.

City Centre Shopping Centre (Map p169), off Independence Dr, is a collection of buildings containing shops, travel agents, restaurants, a bank and a post office.

Markets

To see what Malawians buy go to the city's main market (Map p169) by the bus station. It's always lively and colourful, and is a great place to buy second-hand clothes, although photography is not appreciated. Note also that pickpockets operate in the crowds and that some visitors with large bags have been violently robbed, so travel lightly here.

There's also a craft market (Map p171) outside the Old Town post office, where vendors sell everything from trinket woodcarvings, basketware and jewellery to traditional Malawi chairs. If you go late in the day you're likely to get a better deal.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

For details of flights, see p231 and p233. If you're buying a ticket, it's worth trying an

agent first (see p170) as they offer a wider range of options, charge the same rates as the airlines and sometimes have special deals. Airlines with offices in Lilongwe include the following:

Air Malawi (☎ 01-700811; Lilongwe International Airport)

KLM & Kenya Airways (Map p169; ☎ 01-774227; City Centre)

South African Airways (Map p169; ☎ 01-772242; Capital Hotel, City Centre)

Bus

Coachline buses run between Lilongwe and Blantyre (US\$20, four hours, two daily) Book tickets at the **Shire Bus Lines Depot** (Map p171; ☎ 01-756226; Kenyatta Rd), 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 bus station near the market in Old Town. 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). For information on any route, go to the back of one of the booths (you may have to look for one that's open) and speak to the supervisors inside. You can buy tickets once the buses have pulled into the station.

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 Nkhotakota (US\$2.50, 4½ hours, two daily). Getting to Monkey Bay can be a nightmare (see p201).

Long distance minibuses depart from behind the bus station to nearby destinations such as Salima, Mchinji and Dedza (all around US\$1.50).

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Lilongwe international airport is 21km north of the city. A taxi from the airport into town costs US\$15.

The Airport Shuttle collects passengers from most of the hotels and lodges in town around three hours before a flight departure. The cost is US\$9 and your hotel should be able to make a booking. If you've booked a hotel in advance, the hotel can arrange for

you to be picked up by airport shuttle when you arrive.

Local buses and minibuses run between Old Town and the commercial part of the airport (about 200m from the passenger terminal) for just US\$1, or you can catch any minibus running along the main road towards Kasungu and get off at the airport junction, from where it's 3km to the airport. From the airport, you can hoof it to the main road, where minibuses run to Lilongwe, or hitch.

Bus

The most useful local minibus service for visitors is between Old Town and City Centre. From Old Town, local minibuses (marked area 12) leave from either the bus rank near the market, or outside Shoprite. They then head north up Kenyatta Rd, via Youth and Convention Drs or via Independence Dr, to reach City Centre. From City Centre back to Old Town, the bus stop for the return journey is at the northern end of Independence Dr. The fare between the two centres is US\$0.50.

Taxi

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. Taxis also congregate outside Shoprite in Old Town. The fare between Old Town and City Centre is about US\$4. Short journeys within either City Centre or Old Town cost around US\$3. It's always best to negotiate a price with the driver first.

AROUND LILONGWE Dzalanyama

Dzalanyama is a beautiful forest reserve in a range of hills about 50km by road southwest of Lilongwe. The log cabin-style **Forest Resthouse** (Map p195; s/d with shared bathroom US\$18/24) is run by Land & Lake Safaris (p170) and offers walking trails, mountain biking (at US\$5 per day), bird-watching or simply relaxing. It also arranges transfers to the forest for US\$22, as there's no public transport here.

Dedza

Dedza is a small town 85km southeast of Lilongwe, just off the main road between Lilongwe and Blantyre. It's surrounded by forested hills, and the opportunity for good walks and spectacular views in the nearby

Dedza Mountain Forest Reserve, as described in *Day Outings from Lilongwe* (see p227), are the main attractions. The road south of Dedza skirts the border of Mozambique, revealing on both sides vast plains broken by conical granite peaks and a quilt of farmland, trees, rust-red earth and grass.

For camping, the **Golf Club** (camping US\$2.50, s/d with shared bathroom US\$4.50/9) is close to the wooded backdrop, but its camping terrain is dry and the rooms are fairly uninspiring. You're better off at one of the cheapie resthouses on the main street. **Rainbow Resthouse & Restaurant** (☎ 01-223403; s/d US\$3/4) is clean, friendly and good value.

On the northern outskirts of town is **Dedza Pottery** (☎ 01-223069; www.dedzapottery.com; ☎ 6am-7pm), with garishly kitsch ceramic products aimed squarely at the expat and tourist market. The **coffee shop** (lunches US\$2-3), however, makes for a pleasant stopover, dishing out good cheesecake, as well as excellent filter coffee.

If you're a serious hiker, the Forest Resthouse, 8km north of town in the forest reserve, makes a good base, although at the time of writing, Dedza Pottery was about to open a few chalets with private bathroom overlooking the mountains.

NORTHERN MALAWI

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

In contrast to the more densely populated region of central and southern Malawi, the north has an air of the remote about it, and holds some of Malawi's most fascinating attractions – the beautiful wilderness of the Nyika Plateau, the colonial hilltop town of Livingstonia and the laid-back, lakeside backpackers favourite, Nkhata Bay.

KARONGA

In the surrounding dry and dusty country, Karonga is a relaxed little town with wide streets, wandering cattle and shop fronts straight out of a western; you can almost see the tumbleweed rolling down the street. 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 and a couple of internet cafés. It's very spread out, which can be tough work with luggage, but there are plenty of bicycle taxis that will take you anywhere you want to go in town for around US\$0.50.

The pretty, green town is strung out for about 2km along the main street between a roundabout on the north-south road and the lakeshore.

Culture and Museum Center Karonga (CMCK; www.palaeo.net/cmck; ☎ 01-362574/579) is Karonga's biggest tourist attraction and home to the Malawisaurus – a 130-million-year-old fossil that was unearthed some 45km south of Karonga. The museum also holds a display entitled 'From Dinosaurs to Democracy' that chronicles the history of the area, and a cultural activity space that hopes to become host to a regular range of drama, dance and musical productions.

For transport details, see p233.

Sleeping & Eating

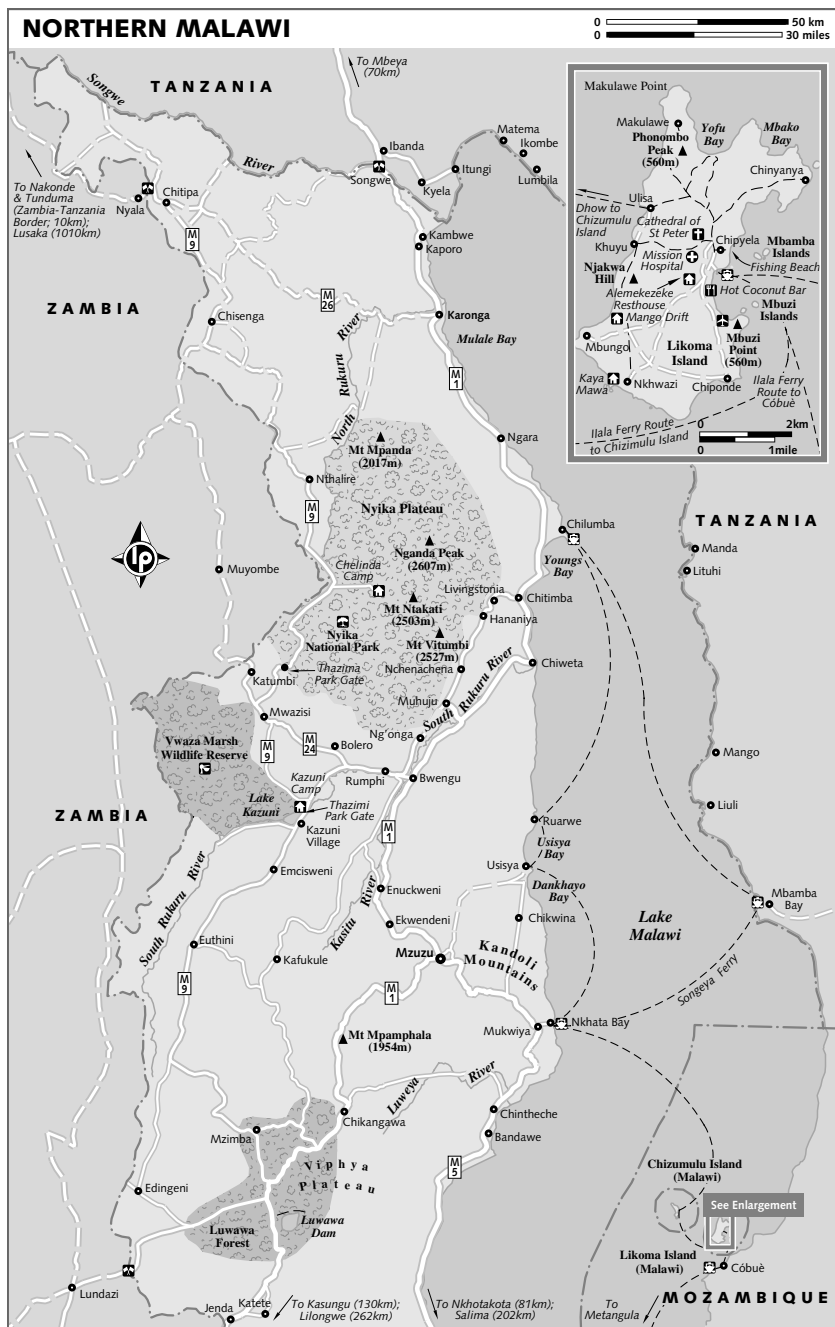
Mufwa Lakeshore Lodge & Camping (☎ 01-362390; camping US\$2, s/d with shared bathroom US\$10/14, s/d US\$14/19) This is a large, quiet property that can be difficult to find – there is no identifying sign and it's set back from the road; the turn-off is located between Club Marina and the National Bank of Malawi. There's a large grassy camping ground with plenty of trees but the rooms are quite small and dark. Still, it's a good deal cheaper than Club Marina down the road and it's wonderfully located, bang on a long stretch of beach. Rates include breakfast.

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

Safari Lodge (☎ 01-362340; s/d US\$6/8) On the road to the lake, this is a friendly place, but the rooms, although large, are rather spartan and shabby.

Club Marina (☎ 01-362302; standard chalet s/d US\$20/30, superior chalet s/d US\$40/55) Near Mufwa is this excellent, upmarket place. 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.

Half Cast Fast Food (mains US\$0.80-1.50) is a hole in the wall near the roundabout selling sausages, burgers, samosas and other cheap and tasty snacks.



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. It's a nice place to chill out, especially if you've just travelled down from Tanzania, but otherwise there's little to see or do.

Sleeping

There are four places to stay close to the junction with the main road. They can store your gear and arrange a guide if you want to walk up to Livingstonia.

Mdokera's Beach Campsite (camping US\$2, beds in tree or tent US\$4) About 5km north of Chitimba, this place is close to the road and the beach, run by a friendly Malawian couple and comes complete with a bed in the tree and a tree shower! Meals in the simple and clean restaurant range from US\$1 to US\$4, and there's a visitors book of hints and comments, which your host will proudly show you.

Namiashi Resort (camping US\$2, s/d US\$10/15, chalet US\$20) About 5km south of Chitimba, this resort may have seen better days, but it's quiet and has a couple of enormous trees that offer good shade for lazing on the beach. Rooms are a decent size (although only one has nets) and the chalet is particularly good for families. Room rates include breakfast.

Chitimba Campsite (camping per person US\$3, dm US\$5, stilt chalets with shared bathroom US\$10, d US\$15) 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 plenty of space for party animals.

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

Getting There & Away

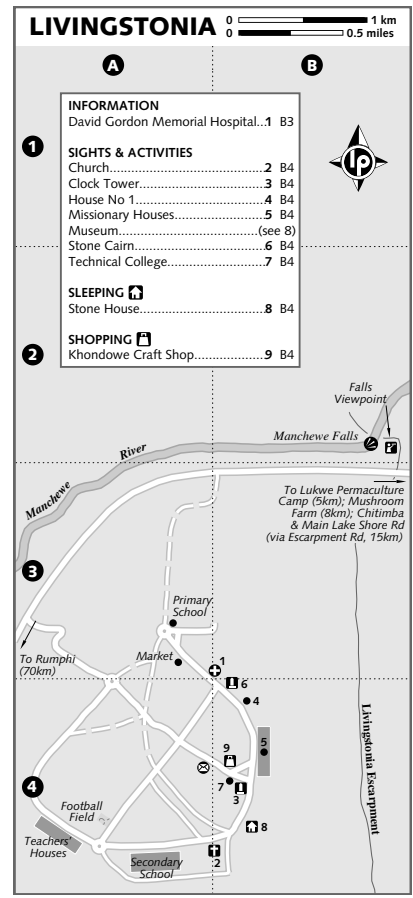
A minibus or *matola* (pick-up) between Chitimba and Mzuzu or Karonga is around MK600.

LIVINGSTONIA

The story of the founding of Livingstonia is covered on p159. The town provides a fascinating glimpse into Malawi's colonial past; and the mixture of old colonial architecture, wide, dusty tree-lined streets and panoramic views of the hills and the lake 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. On display is an excellent collection of original magic-lantern slides, letters and photos, and an early anaesthesia machine. More bizarrely, there's a stuffed bird and a broken chicken leg, displayed in a drawer along with one of Dr Laws' cloaks. Outside the Stone House, embedded in the grass, are huge stone letters, designed to be read by anyone who happens to be flying overhead in a small plane. They read *Ephesians 2-14*. Visit the museum for an explanation.

Nearby is the **church**, dating from 1894, with a beautiful stained-glass window featuring David Livingstone with his sextant, his medicine chest and his two companions, with Lake Malawi in the background. Sunday services are conducted, and visitors are welcome to attend the English one at 8am.

Other places of interest include the **clock tower**. The nearby **industrial block** was built by the early missionaries as a training centre and is now a technical college. The excellent **Khondwe Craft Shop** sells inexpensive carvings and crafts made by local people; all proceeds go to directly to the hospital and mission.

Down the road from here is the **David Gordon Memorial Hospital**, once the biggest hospital in Central Africa, and the **stone cairn** marking the place where missionary Dr Robert Laws and his African companion Uriah Chirwa camped in 1894 when they decided to build the mission here. Also nearby is **House No 1**, the original home of Dr Laws before he moved into the Stone House.

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 a hundred 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.

The more adventurous can also arrange abseiling trips for half a day or longer. For more details contact either Lukwe Permaculture Camp or Mushroom Farm (below).

Sleeping & Eating

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

with stunning views over the lake, hot solar showers and composting toilets. It offers a range of adventure activities in the area including waterfall abseils and rap jumping. The food, produced in most part from the organic veggie gardens and animals, is raved about. The owner provides regular transport to and from Chitimba Beach Camp.

Lukwe Permaculture Camp (☎ 08-204648, 01-332261; www.lukwe.com; camping per person US\$2.50, 2-bed cabins per person US\$7.50) On the northern side of the escarpment road, above the steep zigzags, an hour's walk east (downhill) from Livingstonia, or about 10km from Chitimba if you're coming up. It's a beautiful, shady, restful place, with stunning views, great chill-out area with fire pit, comfy chairs and a friendly atmosphere. Hot showers with a view and clean compost toilets complete this sustainable paradise. All food comes from the garden, with meals costing around US\$2 to US\$5. Hikes, with or without local guides, can be arranged to surrounding hills and peaks, or down to Chitimba.

Stone House (☎ 01-368223; camping per person US\$3, dm incl 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. The wooden-floor dorms have the feel of a Victorian boarding school and the views from the veranda are superb. Meals are around US\$6, but the food leaves much to be desired. You can provide your own food for the cook to prepare, or simply use the kitchen yourself.

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. The road varies between dirt road, very rutted and difficult track, and smooth, recently paved concrete. There are plans to pave the entire road, but so far this hasn't been completed. 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 four hours from Chitimba if you follow the road. There are short cuts that can cut it to three or four hours, but these are even steeper. Local children will

offer to carry your pack for about US\$2. Take care on this road; isolated incidents of muggings have occurred so it's best to check the latest situation before you set off, or take a local guide.

The other way to reach Livingstonia, especially if you're coming from the south, is to go to Rumph (see following), and catch a minibus or *matola* up the scenic 'old road' (west of the main north-south road) to Livingstonia (US\$3.80). Sometimes these go only as far as Nchenachena (17km from Livingstonia) or Hananiya (7km from Livingstonia), from where you'll have to walk the remaining distance. If you're driving this route, a 2WD is adequate in dry conditions.

A third option is to walk to Livingstonia from the Nyika Plateau. See the boxed text, p182 for details.

RUMPHI

Rumph (rum-pee) is a small town west of the main road between Mzuzu and Karonga, which you'll probably visit if you're heading for Nyika National Park, Vwaza Marsh or Livingstonia.

The **Chitukoko Resthouse & Restaurant** (☎ 01-372394; d US\$5.50) on the main road has small clean rooms with hot water. Also on the main road and a better option is the lurid green **Country Lodge** (☎ 01-372395; s/d US\$5/7), where clean and spacious rooms come with electricity, nets and fans. It is also the home of **Chef's Pride Restaurant** (snacks US\$1, mains US\$2-3.50), which serves a variety of meals all day, including toasted sandwiches, chicken and beef stews, veggie dishes and curries.

Matola to Nyika (US\$6) and Vwaza (US\$3) leave from opposite the Rumph Superette. You can ask here about *matola* to Livingstonia (US\$4). Minibuses also run to Mzuzu (US\$1.50).

NYIKA NATIONAL PARK

Established in 1965, Nyika National Park is the oldest and the largest in the country, covering some 3000 sq km; much of the park is above 1800m. The main feature of the park is the Nyika Plateau, with a landscape and climate unique in Malawi, and unusual in Africa – almost like the Scottish highlands with more exotic inhabitants. The plateau is a vast range of high rolling hills, sweeping wide valleys and flower-studded grasslands; and there's a pocket of dense pine forest, where the

air is cool and crisp, and the views (on clear days) are endless. What is most appealing about Nyika is the sense of peace; you won't see many other tourists here and can quite easily spend the day hiking in the hills without happening upon another soul. There's a wild, mystical air to the place that is at its most seductive in the mornings, when the air is cold and crisp and the hills enveloped in blue mist.

Wildflowers contribute to the park's visual feast; the best time for viewing them is during and just after the wet season (December to April), when the grassland is covered in colour and small outcrops turn into veritable rock gardens. Around 200 species of orchid alone grow on the plateau.

Rather than simply wildlife viewing, what also makes Nyika alluring is the chance to explore a unique and preserved patch of the African wilderness in a variety of ways: trotting over the plains on horseback, taking a more energetic route on a mountain bike, rambling through the hills on foot, or simply sitting down by a stream for a spot of fishing. Common animals here include zebras, bushbucks, reedbucks and roan antelopes (rare elsewhere), and you may also spot elands, warthogs, klipspringers, jackals, duikers and possibly hyenas and leopards. In the grassland, spotting is easy – in fact the Nyika zebras seem to delight in posing for photos on the skyline. More than 400 species of bird have been recorded here.

Entry fees are payable (see p166). 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.

It can get surprisingly cold on the Nyika Plateau, especially at night from June to August, when frost is not uncommon. Log fires are provided in the chalets and rooms, but bring a warm sleeping bag if you're camping. During dry periods, sectors of the park are burnt to prevent larger fires later in the season. Before setting off for drives or walks, inquire at the park headquarters and avoid areas that are being burnt.

Activities

WILDLIFE WATCHING

To appreciate the animals and flowers of Nyika, you can tour the park tracks in your

own car (but you'll need a 4WD to access most areas), or arrange a guided wildlife-viewing drive at Chelinda Camp. Morning or night drives last around two hours (US\$25 per person), but you can also go all day (US\$50). Wildlife viewing is good all year, although in July and August the cold weather means the animals move to lower areas. Bird-watching is particularly good between October and April when migratory birds are on the move.

DAY HIKING

Although you can't enter the park on foot, hiking is allowed once you've checked into camp. There are several spots where you can leave your car and walk for an hour or all day; staff can advise you on routes. One of the most popular options is to park at the Jalawe roadhead, north of Chelinda Camp, then follow the path for 5km to Jalawe Peak. Beyond the summit is a rocky outcrop overlooking the Chipome Valley, a thousand metres below. You can sometimes spot elephants here.

You can hire a guide for walks lasting 2½ hours (US\$15 per person) or all day (US\$30). Various paths and tracks wind through the plantation woodland, or across the grassland to nearby dams. For longer walks of more than a day, see the boxed text, below.

HIKING & TREKKING ON THE NYIKA PLATEAU

There are a good variety of long-distance routes available on Nyika, and the Nyika Safari Company, based at Chelinda Camp, is a useful first port of call. They can provide you with the obligatory guides and porters, who have their own sleeping bags, tents, cooking pots and food. You must provide all the equipment and food you need.

When walking in the park you can either follow the set park tracks, paths and wildlife trails or strike out on your own and walk across the trackless grassland. Some routes are more popular than others, however, and those to the peaks and viewpoints on the western and northern escarpments are especially popular. There are no set camp sites either. The wilderness trails are not designed to help you get the best animal close-ups with your camera, but rather to show you that animals are part of a wider environment and to help you best enjoy the feeling of freedom and space that Nyika provides. If you discuss your interests with Chelinda Camp, they can advise a suitable route.

The only set route on Nyika – and by far the most popular – goes from Chelinda to Livingstonia. It's a hugely rewarding and spectacular walk, crossing east through high grassland, then dropping steeply through the wooded escarpment and passing through villages and farmland to reach the old mission station at Livingstonia. This route takes three days. The third night is spent in Livingstonia, and you can walk down to Chitimba at the lakeshore on the fourth day. For further information, there's a chapter on Malawi in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa*.

Organised hikes can usually be run with only a day or two's notice, but advance warning is preferred. Two-day hikes cost \$40 per person. The Livingstonia trail (three days, two nights) costs \$80 per person. Fees cover the guide and all their costs. Porters are also available.

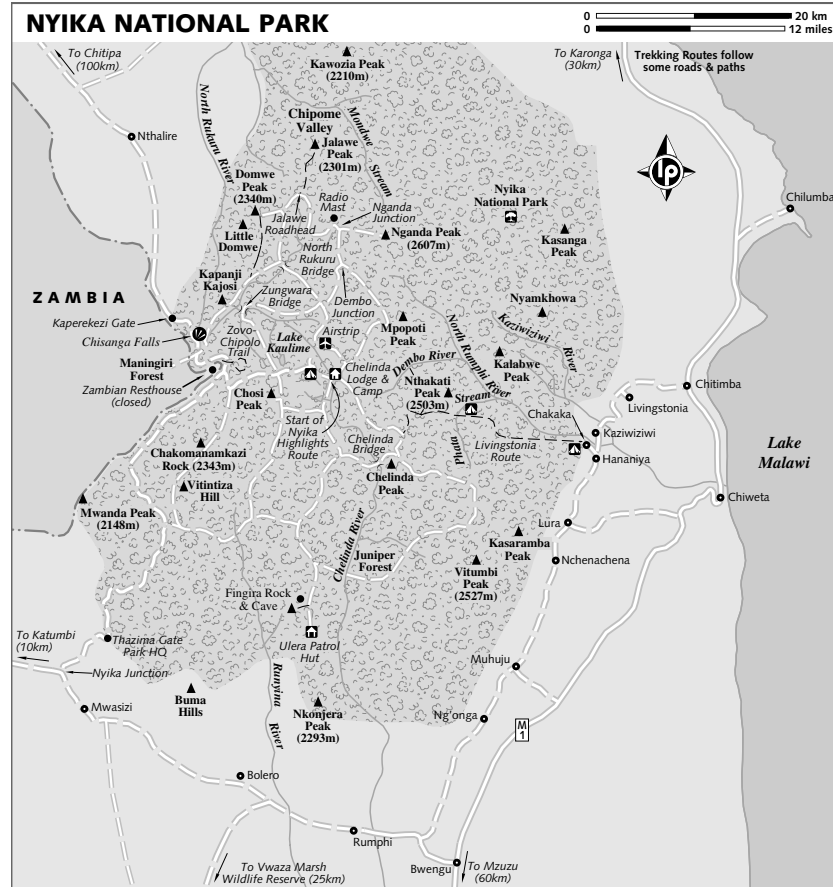
MOUNTAIN BIKING

Nyika's network of dirt roads is ideal for mountain biking. You can base yourself at Chelinda and go for day rides in various directions or camp out overnight (for which you'll need to hire a guide). This is a fun way to cover more ground than you would on foot. Mountain-bike hire is available by the hour or day (US\$5/25) or you can bring your own bike in.

HORSE RIDING

Nyika's wide, open landscape lends itself perfectly to horse riding, and this is by far the most enjoyable and exhilarating way to experience the plateau. The tussock grass and boggy valley bottoms that can tire hikers are crossed easily by horse, and the extra height means the views are excellent. You can also get much closer to animals such as zebras, elands and roans when on horseback. Best of all, you don't need to be a dexterous equestrian to enjoy yourself; Chelinda Camp has good-quality horses suitable for all levels, which you can hire by the hour (US\$15) or day (US\$60).

For a really thorough look at Nyika's vast beauty, there are horse safaris available between May and October. These last anywhere from two to 10 days and include all meals,



rides and accommodation in luxury safari tents (hot showers and all!). Rates are from US\$320 per person per night. Alternatively you can use Chelinda Lodge as a base and explore the park daily from there.

FISHING

Some anglers reckon Nyika offers some of the best rainbow trout fishing in Malawi. The best time of year to fish is October and November. Fishing is allowed in the dams near Chelinda Camp and in nearby streams (Dam One has the lion's share). You'll need a daily licence (US\$4), and rods can be hired by the day (US\$5). Only fly fishing is permitted and there's a limit of six fish per rod per day to maintain numbers.

Sleeping

Camping Ground (camp sites per person US\$5) About 2km from the main Chelinda Camp, this camp 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, Chelinda Camp has atmospheric rooms and chalets dressed with pine and juniper furniture and stone fireplaces. The chalets also contain lounge rooms and fully equipped kitchens; you provide your own food, and each chalet has a cook who will prepare meals for you. Chalet guests can also order

meals in the restaurant (continental breakfast US\$5, buffet breakfast or lunch US\$10, dinner US\$15), where full-boarders are catered for. There's a cosy bar, where a beer by the roaring fire after a day's activities is one of Malawi's great pleasures. There's also a shop at reception.

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 fairytale. Rooms are in luxurious log cabins housing tasteful furniture, Victorian baths, roaring fireplaces and individual balconies (deck chairs provided). Each affords stunning views over the plateau; and rates also include full bar, wildlife drives and walks.

All self-caterers should stock up in either Mzuzu or Rumphu. There's a small shop at Chelinda for National Parks staff but provisions are often basic and supplies sporadic.

Getting There & Away

Despite most maps showing otherwise, there is *no road of any sort* between Chelinda and Livingstonia or any other town on the eastern side of the plateau.

AIR

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. It also flies to other Malawian destinations as well as Tanzania and Zambia (see p231 for details) and it has regular promotional offers. Contact the company for more information.

BICYCLE

It's possible to bring a mountain bike into Nyika and you can cycle from Thazima gate to Chelinda, but an early start is recommended due to the distance.

BUS

There are no public buses into the park; the nearest you can get is the service from Mzuzu to Rumphu (US\$1). From there, you can get a *matola* or minibus to Chelinda Camp (US\$6). To get from Chelinda Camp to either Nthalire in the north or Rumphu, contact the radio operator at Chelinda Camp, who will advise *matola* or minibuses heading through the park to divert to Chelinda for you.

CAR

The main Thazima gate (pronounced and sometimes spelt Tazima) is in the southwest of the park, 54km from Rumphu; to Chelinda Camp it's another 55km. The road is dirt after Rumphu and in fair condition as far as Thazima gate. In the park the tracks are rough and really only suitable for 4WD vehicles or 2WD vehicles with high clearance, although at the time of writing the road to Chelinda Camp was about to be upgraded to a full-gravel standard, making it accessible to all cars. Kaperekezi gate, in the west of the park, is rarely used by travellers. Fuel is available at Chelinda but in limited supply, so it's best to fill up before you enter the park.

TAXI

You can hire a taxi (or a *matola*) in Mzuzu or Rumphu to take you all the way to Chelinda Camp. This costs around US\$100 (less from Rumphu), which is not too bad if you get a few people together. Of course, if the taxi has to wait around for a few days to take you out again this will be more expensive, but we've heard from several travellers who used this method to reach Chelinda and then hitched out a few days later, or walked off via the Livingstonia route. If you take the taxi option, it's essential to leave early in the morning so your driver has time to get back.

VWAZA MARSH WILDLIFE RESERVE

For one reason or another this reserve seems to be one of Malawi's best-kept secrets, but it's possibly your best chance to get up close and personal with elephants and well worth a visit. 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 are payable (p166). All tourist activities, places to stay and charter flights are operated by the Nyika Safari Company (see p181 for details).

The main camp is conveniently located a safe but rewarding distance from the hippo-heavy Lake Kazuni, which also lures impalas, buffaloes (rumoured to be particularly aggressive here), waterbucks, elands, roans, sables, zebras, hartebeests and pukas. The main attraction, however, is the 160-plus elephants within the park. There are regular parades in front of the camps, and between July and September, diners at Kazuni Safari Camp

often have to share their personal space with bulls munching on nuts around the restaurant. Vwaza's bird-watching is also excellent – this is one of the best places in Malawi to see waders. 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.

There's a range of vegetation and habitats in the reserve, from large areas of open swamp to more dense woodlands. The Luwewe River runs through the reserve (draining the marshland) and joins the South Rukuru River (the reserve's southern border), which flows into Lake Kazuni.

A good network of driveable tracks in the reserve is easily explored in a 4WD or high-clearance vehicle; if you're in a 2WD, ask at Kazuni Camp for advice on the condition of the tracks. The best driving route is along the southern edge of the reserve, parallel to the river, heading to Zoro Pools. A better way to witness wildlife is on foot – either around Lake Kazuni or on a longer wilderness trail, but you must be accompanied by a guide (US\$5 per person).

It's also possible to arrange a **cultural tour** at Kazuni Safari Camp. The local Natural Resources Committee (p166) has established cultural centres in three of the surrounding villages, where visitors can witness traditional dancing, singing (participation is encouraged!) and day-to-day activities including blacksmithing, agricultural activities and cooking. It's a rewarding experience and an excellent opportunity to meet Malawian people in a genuine setting. Tours (US\$8 per person) can be done by car or bicycle and all proceeds go to education, health and welfare programmes within the villages. An additional donation after the tour is appreciated and can be as small or large as you like. You can also arrange to stay overnight, sleep in a traditional village hut and sample some traditional Malawian dishes.

Sleeping

Kazuni Camp (camping per person US\$5, chalet s/d with shared bathroom US\$10/20) Has simple, rustic chalets with beds, clean sheets and mosquito nets. They are separated by a decent stretch of bush, so you still get a sense of privacy and wilderness while being within a camp; and they're close to the water so that elephants and hippos are frequent night-time visitors. You must

bring food, and there are cooking stations with barbecues. It's best to stock up in Rumphu or Mzuzu.

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. Rates also include game drives and walks, but if you don't want the whole package, cheaper rates may be available.

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 the 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 1km.

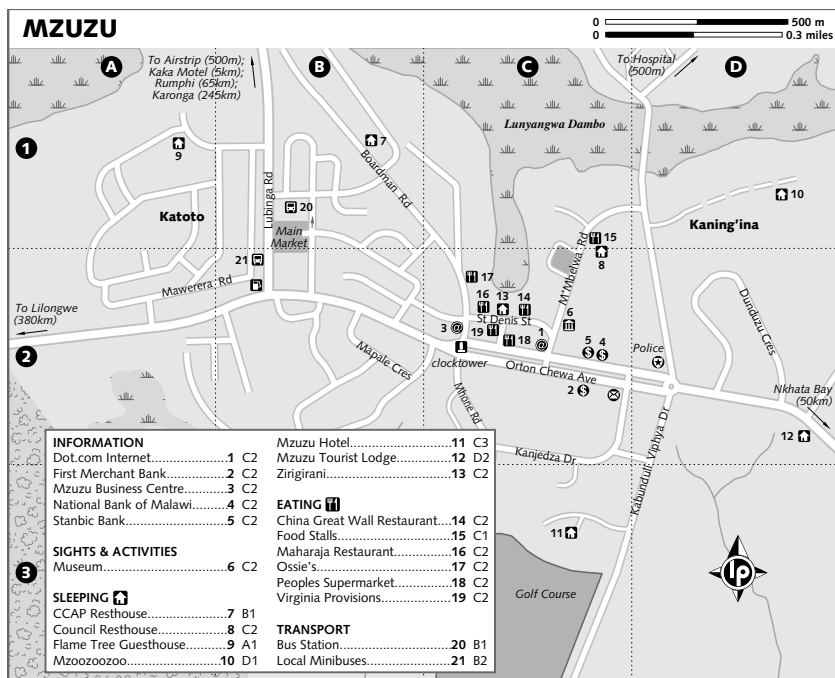
MZUZU

Mzuzu is the largest town north of Lilongwe and the transport hub for all north-related activities. Most travellers will stay in Mzuzu for at least one night as a stopover on the north-south route, or as a jumping-off point for Vwaza, Vipha, Nyika or Nkhata Bay. 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 St; per hr US\$10), or at the **Dot.com Internet** (Orton Chewa Ave; per hr US\$9) next to the Peoples Supermarket.



Sights

The **museum** (museums@malawi.net; M'Mbelwa Rd; admission MK200; ☎ 7am-noon & 1-5pm) has interesting displays on the history of African and European peoples in northern Malawi and a section on indigenous plants and wildlife. The best feature, however, is the cultural dancing, which staff can organise if they know visitors are coming.

Sleeping

CCAP Resthouse (William Koyi Guest House; ☎ 01-333050; Boardman Rd; camping per person US\$0.80, dm US\$2.50, r with shared/private US\$6/9.50) Northeast of the bus station, this is spotless and well organised. It's operated by the church so a respectful code of conduct is appropriate.

Mzoozoozoo (☎ 08-864493; camping US\$1, dm US\$3, d US\$7) This is Mzuzu's only hostel and the friendly owners make it a good one. Dorms are in a big timber bungalow, and a stream of activity buzzes around the funky outdoor bar. There's tasty food (dishes MK700), and the place is a mine of info about the locale.

Council Resthouse (s/d US\$1.50/3) Off M'Mbelwa Rd, near the small market, this place has basic

rooms that will suffice if you're really short of cash.

Zirigirani (☎ 01-332622; mzh@sdnp.org.mw; St Denis St; s/d US\$3/6) Mzuzu's newest offering for budget travellers had just opened and was in final stages of development at the time of research. It was shaping up to be a good choice, though. Bang in the centre of town, it has clean, simple and cheap rooms opening onto a pleasant courtyard.

Kaka Motel (☎ 01-332337; s/d with shared bathroom US\$3.80/5, d US\$13-15) This place, 6km north of town, has plenty of clean and simple rooms in a sprawling bush setting. Breakfast is included, the staff are accommodating and there's secure parking.

Mzuzu Tourist Lodge (☎ 01-332097; Orton Chewa Ave; camping per person US\$5, s/d with shared bathroom US\$20/27, s/d US\$29/36) Set on a pretty property east of town, the Mzuzu has pleasant but arguably overpriced rooms (although the room rates do include breakfast) and a green and secure camping area. The evening meals cost around US\$3.

Flame Tree Guesthouse (☎ 01-333053; r with shared/private bathroom US\$12/15) A relaxed option,

with clean, cool and homely rooms, and a lovely veranda restaurant overlooking the flower-filled courtyard. Rates here include breakfast.

Mzuzu Hotel (☎ 01-332622; mzh@sdnp.org.mw; s/d US\$50/64) Mzuzu's plushest 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 (starters US\$3, mains US\$5 to US\$10) and a quiet bar for residents. It's off Kabunduli Viphya Dr. Next to the hotel the Choma Bar provides loud evening entertainment with a local flavour.

WHERE TO ON THE LAKE?

Dominating the country's landscape, the irresistible Lake Malawi draws in visitors with the promise of clear waters, beautiful marine life and days spent lazing on picture-perfect beaches. It has often been described as an inland sea and, when trying to spot Mozambique's hazy silhouette on the horizon, it's easy to see why. The lake's enigmatic weather often entertains storms thick enough to rouse 5m waves and intimidating swells, shifting within an hour to flawless blue skies reflected in the water's glassy veneer.

The lakeshore's environment changes starkly from dramatic escarpments in the north to flat, sandy bays in the south. It can be tough figuring out where to go, so the following should help you decide.

The North

The least developed section of the lake is home to Chitimba, which serves as a magnet to overland trucks coming in from Tanzania. To escape from the partying hordes, head for the remote and tranquil villages of Ruarwe and Usisya.

Nkhata Bay

This scenic town is the most popular backpackers' haunt on the lake. There's a wide range of accommodation here that will satisfy most tastes and budgets, and the excellent diving, kayaking, socialising and laid-back atmosphere leads to many an unintentionally long visit.

Likoma & Chizumulu Islands

Sublime beaches, unparalleled diving, breathtaking walks, preserved cultures and a beautiful missionary cathedral make these islands a must-see. There's excellent accommodation, from budget beach huts to five-star luxury, and a rare opportunity to immerse yourself in untainted village life.

Chintheche Strip

A secluded collection of camping grounds, lodges and resorts pepper this picturesque stretch of the lake, a hop, skip and jump from the wooded hills of the Viphya Plateau.

Senga Bay

The nearest beach paradise to Lilongwe offers a wide range of places to stay, excellent snorkelling and bush walking, and trips to the nearby islands to see giant monitor lizards.

Cape Maclear

The crowds once swarmed this popular backpackers' haunt in Malawi, but have now moved on, prompted by increasing hassle from beach boys. It's still a nice spot to swim, sail and dive, though, and perfectly placed to explore Lake Malawi National Park.

Monkey Bay to Mangochi

A smattering of top-end hotels, midrange resorts and budget lodges here all have a few kilometres of private beach and the facilities to keep you from moving far.

Eating

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.

China Great Wall Restaurant (☎ 01-333609; St Denis St; starters US\$1.30, mains US\$1.50-3; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Serves a huge assortment of tasty Chinese dishes in virtually any variation, including seafood and vegetarian.

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.

Virginia Provisions (St Denis St; meals US\$2) Neat little place serving local Malawian food on a wide, wicker-filled balcony overlooking the street.

For cheap eats, there are food stalls around the market and the Council Resthouse. Self-caterers can stock up at the **Peoples Supermarket** (Orton Chewa Ave).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Air Malawi flies between Lilongwe and Mzuzu (see p233 for details).

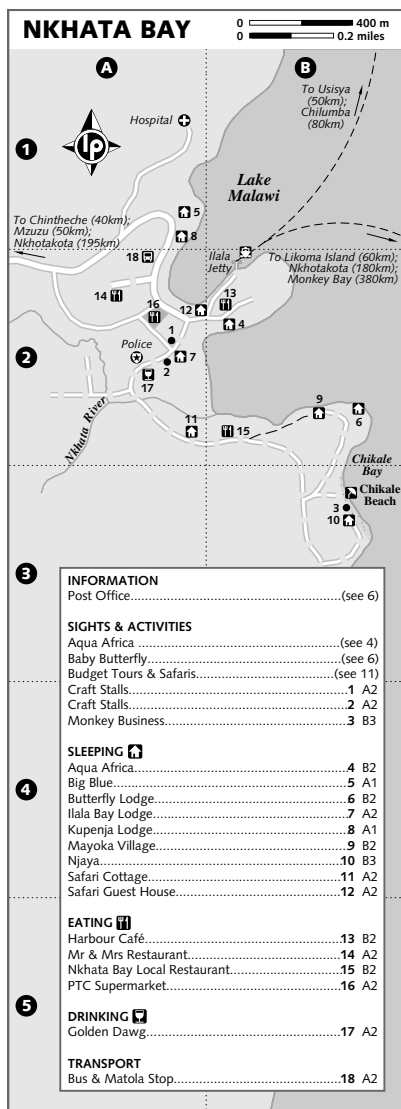
BUS

The Sacramento bus runs between Mzuzu and Lilongwe (US\$18, four hours, Monday, Wednesday, Saturday) and express buses travel 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) through 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 sun-



set, and most recreation certainly involves a good deal of lounging by the water. 'Town', nestled into a gully with the bay to the west and a gentle rise of dense forest to the east, is a bustling clutch of markets, craft stalls, local activity and visitors. The good cross section of 'lodges' here are all fully equipped to entertain you from dawn to well past bedtime,

and it's easy to get lulled into eating, sleeping and drinking within their confines. However, patronising local eateries, mixing with the locals and general meandering are good fun and well worth the extra energy.

Information

There's nowhere to change money so make sure you cash up in Mzuzu, Nkhota Kotota or Lilongwe. Alternatively, several of the lodges accept credit cards, US currency and travellers cheques for payment. Internet access is available at Aqua Africa (p190).

Dangers & Annoyances

Although security is less of a problem here than it was a couple of years ago, it still pays to be cautious. Travellers have been attacked and robbed when walking outside the town centre (especially to/from Chikale Beach), so take extra care when walking this route. Most travellers will encounter a fair amount of hassle from local beach boys offering a bewildering amount of services from beach barbecues to personalised key rings. If you're not interested, be polite but very firm and they should leave you alone.

Activities

SWIMMING

On the southern side of Nkhata Bay, **Chikale Beach** is a popular spot for swimming and lazing on the sand, especially at weekends. Snorkelling equipment is free for guests at most of the lodges.

KAYAKING

For something more active, **Monkey Business** (☎ 01-252365) on Chikale Beach operates fully inclusive (meals, kayaks, guides and tents) kayak excursions from two to seven days, from US\$35 per person per day. Typical itineraries include idyllic spots along the northern lakeshore such as Usisya and Ruarwe, or spectacular trips to Likoma and Chizumulu Islands, sailing aboard the *Ilala* ferry, then paddling around the Mozambique shore. Journeys are broken by stopovers at fishing villages and empty beaches, and these trips are a great way to explore the area. It also arranges one-day kayak-bushwalk-dive tours for US\$40 per person.

DIVING

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 courses for US\$260 and casual day dives for US\$20. Travellers rave about these guys, particularly the company's attention to safety; groups are a maximum of six people. You should try to book in advance, but if they're full you only have to wait a few days for the next course to start.

VOLUNTEERING

If you want to give something back to the community during your stay, **Africa Unplugged** (☎ 09-471742; www.africaunplugged.org.uk) is an excellent place to start. Run by the owner of Kupenja Lodge, it has several projects in the area including a victim support centre, learning and resource centre and a nursery school. In return for lending their support, volunteers can stay at Kupenja (below) at a reduced rate.

Tours

Baby Butterfly (☎ 09-265065; Butterfly Lodge; www.lake-paradise.com) Based at Butterfly Lodge; organises tours on request to Likoma and Chizumulu Islands, Mozambique, Usisya and Ruarwe on a speed boat for US\$300 per day (maximum four people).

Budget Tours & Safaris (☎ 09-278903; www.budget-safaris.com) Based at Safari Cottage; organises well-run and interesting safaris around northern Malawi. A five-day safari to Vwaza Marsh Reserve, Nyika National Park, Livingstonia and Karonga costs from US\$195, including all meals and camping. For those who want to explore the region with a bit more flexibility, they can also arrange a car with driver from US\$110 per day.

Sleeping

Nkhata Bay has several places to stay, all strung out in a line along the road into town and along the lakeshore. Places are described roughly north to south. All beds at the following have mosquito nets. To get from town to the lodges at Chikale Beach, stay on the dirt road, cross the bridge and head up hill and down dale (always seems harder with a backpack). It's about 30 minutes' walk.

Big Blue (☎ 01-352316; bigblue@sdnp.org.mw; camping per person US\$1.50, dm/s/d with shared bathroom US\$3/4/6) Large, ramshackle place that 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.

Kupenja Lodge (☎ 09-471742; camping US\$1.50, s/d US\$3.50/5) 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 (see Volunteering, p189); volunteers get a discount at the lodge) and ploughs a lot of profits back into the local community.

Safari Guest House (☎ 01-352371; s/d/tr with shared bathroom US\$2/2.50/3) Has small, clean, safe rooms with fans and a secluded garden laden with brilliant bougainvillea.

Butterfly Lodge (☎ 09-265065; www.lake-paradise.com; camping per person US\$3, dm US\$4, hut s/d with shared bathroom US\$8/15, cottages per person US\$17) Quieter than its neighbours, with comfortable rooms, a good restaurant and an atmospheric bar, all scattered over a rocky, tree-coated incline. Cottage rates include breakfast, and use of the kitchen is free for self-caterers.

Njaya (☎ 01-352342; www.njayalodge.com; camping per person US\$3, dm \$5, bandas per person US\$8, chalets US\$20, cottages from US\$25) Offers Asian-style reed chalets (*bandas*) on Chikale Beach and a range of cabins and bungalows strewn over the hillside overlooking the lake on a wide sandy beach. The bar/restaurant has panoramic views, but the food is only average. You can get your laundry done here, and for all you city slickers, credit cards are accepted.

our pick Mayoka Village (☎ 01-352421; info@mayoka-village.com; camping US\$3, chalet s/d with shared bathroom US\$5/8, chalet s/d US\$15/20) A very popular place and deservedly so – it's a sprawling, buzzing collection of picturesque chalets and beach huts, all meticulously constructed out of stone, bamboo and wood, with fans and private chairs and tables overlooking the bay. There's no beachfront to speak of, but there are plenty of chill-out spots near the water, perfect for sunbathing and shooting the breeze. There's also an extensive menu and the food is excellent, helped by vegies and herbs grown in their very own garden. What really attracts people, though, is the infectious, lively atmosphere. The energetic bar – an open, breezy spot overlooking the water – plays host to regular barbecue nights and Malawian buffets, as well as 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.

Ilala Bay Lodge (☎ 01-352362; B&B s/d US\$15/20) Clean simple rooms with good bathrooms and balconies, set on a private stretch of beach.

It's mostly popular with Tanzanians and Malawians and has a more local feel than other places, so is a good place to stay if you want to avoid the backpacker hordes.

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, which has a superfast connection for US\$6 an hour.

Safari Cottage (☎ 09-278903; www.safari-cottage.com; cottage per day/week/month US\$45/215/520) An excellent self-catering option if you fancy a change from the lodges. It has three bedrooms, kitchen, living room and a great big veranda with those prerequisite stunning views of the lake. The price includes secure parking, 24-hour security, satellite TV and a daily cleaning service.

Eating & Drinking

Mr & Mrs Restaurant (mains US\$1; ☎ 11am–7pm) On a small side road leading off the main drag, this is a small local joint offering healthy portions of fish and meat with *nsima* (boiled maize meal) or rice. It's a great place to watch the world go by while listening to the reggae tunes blasting out of the barbers next door.

Harbour Café (snacks & mains US\$1-4.50; ☎ 10am-9pm) Opposite Aqua Africa is this open-air place with views of the lake as well as the village streets. It serves good breakfasts and light lunches as well as more substantial dinners, such as toad-in-the-hole, pizzas and roasts. It also does a great line in homemade cakes.

Nkhata Bay Local Restaurant (mains US\$2-3; ☎ noon-9pm) A small and charming wood, reed and thatch café, complete with jaw-dropping views over the bay, perched on the side of the hill on the road up to Chikale Beach. Dishes from the small menu (butterfish is their speciality) 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.

Golden Dawg (☎ 01-352397; ☎ 11am-late) Named after the resident Golden Retriever, this is a large bar with a (normally empty) dance floor and a big screen TV for those all-important footy matches. There's also a movie theatre (ie a room with a big TV in it) at the back, which can be rented for a couple of hours for up to 15 people; there are a selection of DVDs to choose from and the whole deal costs \$10.

For self-catering, the PTC Supermarket on the main drag is the best bet, although the range is rather limited.

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 *matola* 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 p234).

AROUND NKHATA BAY

North of Nkhata Bay, the steep slopes of the Rift Valley escarpment plunge straight down to the lake, and there's no room for a road alongside the shore. The isolated villages along this stretch provide a remote experience that is well worth the trek.

Usisya Lodge (bigblue@sdpn.org.mw; hammocks per person US\$1.30, camping per person US\$2, dm US\$2.50, reed hut s/d with shared bathroom US\$5/10), approximately 50km north of Nkhata Bay, is a small, Robinson Crusoesque beach lodge, sheltered by dense vegetation and spectacular mountains. An open bar furnished with cushioned benches, planted firmly near the water's edge, makes for some healthy lazing and free-flowing conversation, as do the communal meals.

Fifteen kilometres further north and barely perceptible from the water is **Wherearewe** (www.lake-paradise.com; camping per person US\$1.30, dm US\$2, chalet s/d with shared bathroom from US\$5/10). This hidden retreat, near the village of Ruarwe, has stone and thatch chalets and an impressive bar sculpted around natural rock formations, with rock art and pillars carved by Nkhata Bay artists. A troop of fish eagles, kingfishers and otters regularly entertain guests, and on a clear day it's possible to spot tin roofs shimmering in the distance on the Tanzanian mountain ranges. This is also a great base to walk for an hour, or three days, on paths well trodden by local feet.

The *Ilala* ferry (see p234) stops at both Usisya and Ruarwe villages, which are a 20-minute walk north and south of the lodges respectively. Both lodges also transfer guests from Nkhata Bay by speed boat. It takes around 4½ hours to get to Usisya Lodge and six to Wherearewe, and both destinations cost US\$20. Book at the Big Blue (p189) for

Usisya Lodge or at Butterfly Lodge (opposite) for Wherearewe.

It's also possible to walk south from Chitimba Bay. This journey takes two to three days, and you should be well prepared with water, food and a tent. The tracks are clear, and it's an excellent way to explore the untouched northern shore and visit the many villages along the way. Speak to the lodges at either end before you set out for an update on track conditions.

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 traveller. They all lie between 2km and 5km east of the main road that runs between Nkhata Bay and Nkhotakota, and usually involve a drive or walk along a dirt track through forest or farmland. If you're travelling by bus, the express services may not stop at every turn-off, but minibuses stop almost anywhere on request.

Chintheche is the site of the **Lake of Stars Malawi Music Festival** (www.lakeofstarsfestival.co.uk), every September. It attracts live music acts from around Africa and the UK and lasts for three days. Proceeds go to the charity Children in the Wilderness.

Activities

VOLUNTEERING

A good place to lend your support is **Ripple Africa** (www.rippleafrica.org). Formerly the budget Mwaya Beach Lodge, it now serves as a base for the charity and mostly houses volunteers, although the occasional tourist may pass through. Projects to get involved in include reforestation, tree conservation and the construction of a new secondary school. Volunteers are given free accommodation in return for their assistance, and available positions include teaching assistants, health care assistants and environmental volunteers. They don't accept walk-in applicants, so you must apply in advance, preferably from your home country.

DIVING

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.

YOGA

If you've come to Malawi to find inner peace, this is the place to be. **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. For an extra US\$40, you can add on a Reiki attunement to the end of your course. Lushes and carnivores be warned: all retreats are run in strict observation of a yoga lifestyle and there's no smoking, booze or red meat allowed.

Sleeping

London Cottages (☎ 01-357291; camping US\$2.50, chalets US\$6.50) A second track leading west culminates here, with slightly neglected two-bed chalets, set on a sprawling, green site by the beach. There's also a bar and restaurant (dishes US\$2) serving the usual chicken or *chambo* and chips fare.

Flame Tree Lodge (camping per person US\$2.50, chalets US\$19) About 2km down the main road, and another 2km along a track, this is a peaceful place with smart and pleasant two-bed chalets set on a beautiful promontory jutting into the lake. The showers are hot, and there's an open-air bar and restaurant (dishes US\$5). This is a suitable place for families, couples or small groups.

Nkhwazi Lodge (camping US\$3) A good place overlooking a small sandy cove. It can be found by travelling another 1km south down the main road where you'll reach a signpost to the 'CCAP School' (also called New Bandawe); go through here to reach this South African-run place. There are basic but clean ablution blocks, and a 'pub' with home-cooked meals from US\$3 to US\$5.

Kande Beach Camp (☎ 01-357376; www.kandebeach.com; camping US\$3, dm US\$5, chalets US\$30) About 7km from the Makuzi turn-off (55km south of Nkhata Bay). It's a legendary stop for overland trucks, where beach life, good times and late-night partying is the name of the game. All accommodation is excellent (chalets sleep three to four people) and the smorgasbord of facilities include a large bar, a games room, a book exchange and the Soft Sand Cafe (dishes US\$4 to US\$6), which serves great pizzas. For

activities, there's Aquanuts PADI resort and Kande Horse Trails offering three-hour rides (including swimming on horseback!). If that doesn't float your boat you can hire mountain bikes, canoes, kayaks, sailboards, windsurfers or snorkelling equipment. Pick ups from any lodge on the strip for activities.

Kawiya Cottages (sosmalawi@globemw.net; camping per person US\$5, chalets US\$10) About 3km north of Chintheche 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.

Chintheche 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 with bathroom and, although you need to bring your own food, the friendly caretaker will cook it for you.

Chintheche Inn (☎ /fax 01-357211; chininn@malawi.net; camping per person US\$5.50, s/d US\$59/88) A grand and beautiful property, with cabanas on the beach and cane furniture under shady trees on the expansive lawns. Tasteful and elegant rooms each have their own veranda and path leading to the beach, and rates include full buffet breakfast. The restaurant (dishes US\$5 to US\$10) serves very good food. Activities on offer include windsurfing (US\$2 per hour), village visits and birding walks. If you want to reserve a room and can't get through, call Wilderness Safaris (p170) in Lilongwe.

Makuzi Beach Lodge (☎ 01-357296; www.makuzibeach.com; camping per person US\$10, chalet s/d US\$82/144) This can be found by continuing 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 (lunch US\$5 to US\$7, dinner US\$17 to US\$20) 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 ISLAND

Likoma and Chizumulu Islands are on the Mozambican side of Lake Malawi, but are part of Malawi.

The blissful island of Likoma measures 17 sq km and is home to around 6000 people. Isolation from the mainland has enabled the locals here to maintain their reserved culture, shaped partly by the religious legacy of missionaries, but also by the lack of any transient

population – international or domestic. These are possibly the friendliest people in Malawi and there is no crime on the island.

Likoma's flat and sandy south is littered with stately baobabs, and has a constant panorama of Mozambique's wild coast only 40km away. In the hilly north, prolific eucalypts and mango trees compete for views over the vast enormity of the lake. The main drawcard is an abundance of pristine beaches and the activities revolving around them, but there's a healthy dose of other activities, both cultural and physical, to fill several days here. Those looking for wild parties or another beach to conquer will be disappointed, however; Likoma's beauty is its preservation, and both the lodges and locals are happy to keep it that way.

See the map on p178 for details of facilities on Likoma Island.

Sights

In Chipyela, the impressive Anglican **Cathedral of St Peter** should not be missed (see the boxed text, below). You can climb the tower for spectacular views. Nearby, the neat **market place** contains a few shops and stalls, and an old baobab overtaken by a strangler fig, now rotted away from underneath and used by the locals as a storeroom. Down on the lakeshore is a beach where local boats come and go, and the people wash and sell fish. Don't be surprised if some people greet you in Portuguese;

traders come here from nearby Mozambique to sell firewood, vegetables and – bizarrely – fish. The *Ilala* stops at another beach about 1km to the south.

Activities

Swimming is a must on Likoma and best on the long stretches of beach in the south, although Yofu Bay in the north is also good. The tropical fish population has been unaffected by the mainland's overfishing, and the **snorkelling** is excellent. For a closer look, Mango Drift (below) arranges four-day open-water PADI **scuba-diving** courses for US\$250, including accommodation. The island's compact but diverse area is perfect for **walking** or **mountain biking** – you can bring bikes across on the ferry or hire them from Mango Drift for US\$10 per day.

When exploring, remember that this isn't the Costa del Sol – the people here live a very traditional way of life, so keep your clothing and behaviour suitably modest.

A greater understanding of Chewa culture can be experienced by a consultation with Likoma's witch doctor. His clinic is near Khuyu Village and you will need to make an appointment.

Sleeping & Eating

Mango Drift (camping per person US\$1, dm US\$3, chalet s/d with shared bathroom US\$4/8) A series of simple stone and thatched chalets and a bright, breezy bar,

LIKOMA MISSIONARIES & THE CATHEDRAL OF ST PETER

European involvement on Likoma Island began in 1882 when members of UMCA (Universities Mission to Central Africa) established a base here. The leaders of the party, Will Johnson and Chauncey Maples, chose the island as protection from attacks from the warlike Ngoni and Yao peoples.

Maples became the first bishop of Likoma, but he died only a few months after being appointed, drowning in the lake off Monkey Bay. Despite the setback, missionary work on the island continued. Between 1903 and 1905 the huge cathedral was built and dedicated to St Peter – appropriately a fisherman. Today it remains one of Malawi's most remarkable buildings.

The cathedral measures over 100m long by 25m wide, and has stained-glass windows and elaborate choir stalls carved from soapstone. The crucifix above the altar was carved from wood from the tree where Livingstone's heart was buried in Zambia.

It was built at a part of the island called Chipyela, meaning 'Place of Burning', because the early UMCA arrivals had witnessed suspected witches being burned alive here. The island's main settlement grew up around the cathedral and is still called Chipyela today.

The UMCA missionaries remained on Likoma until the 1940s. During that time they were hard at work – they claimed 100% literacy among the local population at one point. The cathedral fell into disrepair but was restored in the 1970s and 1980s, and local people are understandably very proud of it.

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.

Alemekezeke Resthouse (s/d with shared bathroom US\$2/3.80) In Chipiyela, this place offers basic rooms with nets around a central courtyard. It has a small restaurant (dishes US\$3) and is a nice place to immerse yourself in the village atmosphere.

Kaya Mawa (www.kayamawa.com; full-board chalets per person from US\$180) Run by the same friendly bunch as Mango Drift. This luxury lodge 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. There are two honeymoon islets, one of which even has its own loveseat cable car. 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. The owners have gone to painstaking length to be unobtrusive on both the landscape and local population, and this aim is fully realised.

Hot Coconut Bar (mains US\$0.50-1) A little dive where you can grab a drink and a snack and converse with the locals.

Getting There & Away

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

The *Ilala* ferry (see p234) stops at Likoma Island twice a week, usually for three to four hours, so even if you're heading elsewhere, you might be able to nip ashore to have a quick look at the cathedral (see the boxed text, p193). Check with the captain before you leave the boat.

Heading south, the *Ilala* then sails to Cóbue (*kob-way*) and Metangula on the Mozambican mainland. Local dhows also sail to Cóbue for US\$0.80. Alternatively, if you're planning to go to the exceptional **Mchenga Nkwichi** (Lake Niassa, Mozambique) nearby on the opposite side of the

lake, this lodge can organise a boat transfer. For more details, see p284.

CHIZUMULU ISLAND

'Chizzie' is smaller than Likoma (and just a few kilometres away) and even more detached from the mainland. Stretches of lucid azure water and white rocky outcrops give this island a Mediterranean flavour, while the backdrop of dry scrub is positively antipodean. The slow and friendly village activity on the perimeter of idyllic beaches, however, is unmistakably Malawian. If you want to visit both islands, transport links make it best to go to Chizumulu first.

Wakwenda Retreat (camping US\$2, dm US\$2.50, r from US\$4), smack bang on a postcard-perfect beach, is utter chill-out material. The sizeable 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. Snorkelling gear is free, and you can hire diving equipment for US\$15 to US\$25 depending on where you dive.

About 4km south on Mocho Beach, there's a basic resthouse where rates are cheaper.

The *Ilala* ferry (see p234) stops right outside Wakwenda Retreat, so even if you're not staying on the island you can pop over for a drink. A dhow ferry departs Mocho Beach daily between 10am and 1pm, and sails to Ulisa on Likoma Island (US\$1.30). The trip can take anything from one to three hours depending on the weather; it's an extremely choppy ride when the wind is blowing, and potentially dangerous if a storm comes up. If you're unsure ask Nick at Wakwenda for advice.

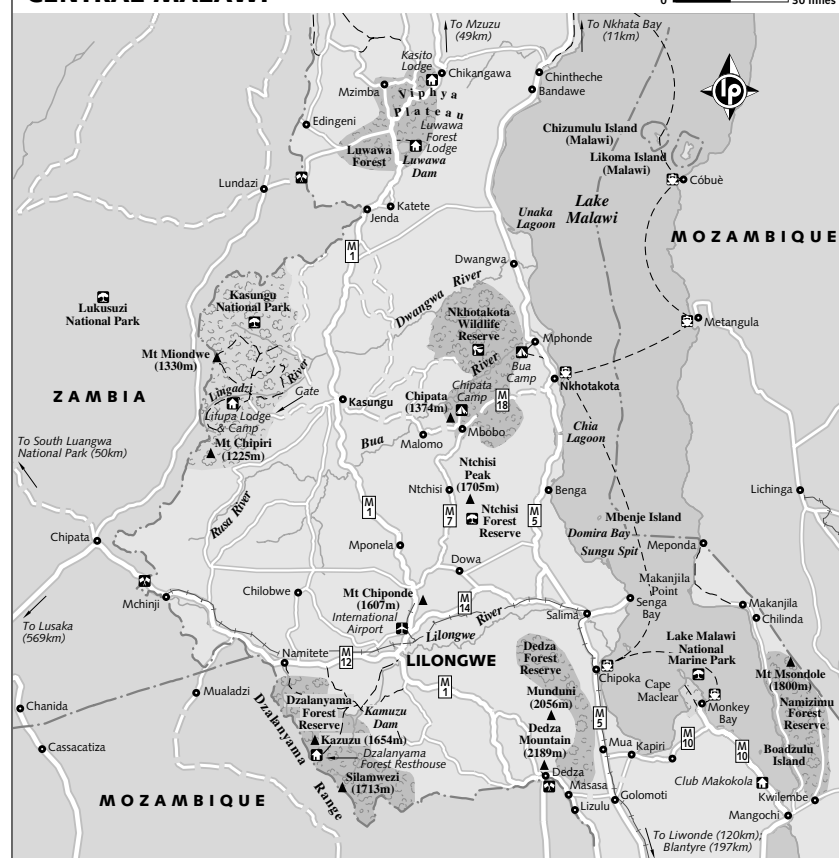
CENTRAL MALAWI

Central Malawi is home to the country's most popular beach resorts and a fantastic cultural museum at the Mua Mission. This section covers most parts of Malawi's Central Province with the addition of the Viphya Plateau. Places are described north to south.

VIPHYA PLATEAU

Viphya Plateau is a highland area, running like a broad backbone through northcentral Malawi. Despite its name, this area is not flat but consists mostly of rolling hills, cut by river

CENTRAL MALAWI



valleys and punctuated by occasional rocky peaks. The dense bush of the plateau's south gives way to pine plantations and colourful patches of jacaranda trees in the beautiful north. The journey along the main road between Kasungu and Mzuzu is stunning, particularly when a sunny day reveals distant mountains breaking through the western horizon (but don't be surprised if there's dense mist and rain). If you've got a few days to spare this is a good area to relax away from the hubbub of towns or cool down from the heat of the lakeshore.

Sleeping

Kasito Lodge (Map p195; ☎ 01-343219; camping per person US\$1.30, s/d with shared bathroom US\$6.50/13) Less than

1km west of the main road between Kasungu and Mzuzu, this is an absolute gem. There are five rooms in this colonial house, each varying in bed number, and some still have their original furniture. The communal showers are hot, the toilets are clean and the large, stately lounge has a roaring wood fire. You can supply your own food and the friendly staff will cook (a tip is appropriate), or you can utilise the restaurant. There are excellent views of the surrounding forests inside and out.

To reach Kasito by car from the south, you continue 27km beyond the Mzimba junction on the main sealed road towards Mzuzu; the lodge is signposted on your left. Coming from the north, you pass a large wood factory at Chikangawa village, and the turn-off to the

lodge is a few kilometres beyond here on the right. If you're travelling by bus, ask the driver to drop you at the junction. Kasito Lodge is less than 1km from the junction.

Luwawa Forest Lodge (Map p195; ☎ 08-829725; www.plusdata.uklinux.net; camping per person US\$5, chalets from US\$50) Lies 8km east of the main road between Kasungu and Mzuzu; take the signposted road marked Luwawa D37. The lodge used to belong to the forestry department, but it's managed now by the energetic George Wardlow. The comfortable chalets include a kitchen and sleep two to four people. Breakfast and lunch costs US\$5, and a hearty three-course dinner is US\$15. But you'll soon work off the calories with the activities offered by the lodge: walking trails, mountain biking (US\$5 per hour), sailing, boating (US\$10 per hour), fishing and long-distance wilderness walks, and rides to Chintcheche on the lakeshore. There's no public transport to Luwawa, so if you haven't got wheels you'll have to walk, although you may be lucky and be able to get a ride from the main road on a logging truck.

KASUNGU

Kasungu is a fairly large town, just off the main north-south road, and about 130km northwest of Lilongwe. It has no major attractions, but you may find yourself changing transport here.

A good option is **Teja Resthouse** (☎ 01-253387; s/d US\$2.50/3.50). It looks a little dilapidated outside, but the clean rooms have nets and some have bathrooms (for the same price) so look at a few. It's east of the bus station, just as the sealed road becomes dirt. The **Kasungu Inn** (☎ 01-253306; s/d with bath US\$36/48), at the western end of town on the main road, is set in pleasant and picturesque grounds and has neat and spacious rooms.

There are several cheap local restaurants on the main street and around the market. **Golden Dish** (breakfasts US\$1, mains US\$1.30), on the main road, is a clean and friendly joint serving the usual meat and *nsima* fare. Of similar quality and price is the nearby Mr Spice. The bar at the Kasungu Inn is a nice place to relax with a beer.

All buses and minibuses between Mzuzu and Lilongwe come through the town, and there are infrequent *matola* along the road through Nkhhotakota Wildlife Reserve to the lakeshore.

KASUNGU NATIONAL PARK

Kasungu National Park lies to the west of Kasungu town, and covers more than 2000 sq km. The gently rolling hills, with a few pointed rocky outcrops, are covered in miombo woodland, which is relatively dense because the park's elephant population (which would naturally act as 'gardeners') has been seriously reduced since the 1970s by poaching.

Optimistic estimates suggest about 200 elephants still remain, and the chances of seeing some is best in the dry season (May to October). Buffaloes, zebras, hippos and several antelope species, which were also drastically reduced due to poaching, have begun to reappear in recent years. The bird life is excellent, with woodland and grassland species, and waders.

Entry fees are payable (see p166). The park has a network of driveable tracks that can be toured in your own vehicle or on a wildlife drive (US\$40) organised at Lifupa Lodge. Guided walks can also be arranged here.

Sleeping

Lifupa Camp (Map p195; camping per person US\$5) Near Lifupa Lodge. If you're taking this option you'll need to bring your own food (you can stock up at the Peoples Supermarket in Kasungu), which you can prepare in a communal kitchen.

Lifupa Lodge (Map p195; ☎ 01-70576; s/d US\$108/132) Has a tall thatched central bar and restaurant with a beautiful veranda overlooking the dam (where animals often come to drink). The simple, stylish twin-bedded chalets have private balconies, and rates include breakfast. The lodge has been taken over by Wilderness Safaris and is undergoing renovations.

Getting There & Away

The park entrance is 35km west of Kasungu town. From the entrance, it's 17km by the shortest route to Lifupa Lodge. There's no public transport, so without a car you'd have to hitch from Kasungu – the best place to wait is the turn-off to the park (signposted) near the petrol station on the main road.

NKHOTAKOTA

This was once the centre of slave trading in this region and is reputedly one of the oldest market towns in Africa. Today it's strung out over 4km between the busy highway and

the lake. Nkhhotakota makes a good break in any journey along the lakeshore, but don't expect much action. Nevertheless, the sleepy and quiet pace in the village-like outskirts may be just what's needed after buses and tourist mayhem. There's a branch of the Commercial Bank of Malawi on the main north-south road, which offers foreign exchange facilities but no credit-card withdrawals.

Things to see include the **mission**, with a spectacular tree in the grounds, under which Livingstone persuaded Chief Jumbe to end the slave trade in the 19th century. In the part of town called Kombo is another '**Livingstone Tree**', where an aspiring politician called Hastings Banda made political speeches in the 1960s. Next to the BP petrol station and set back from the highway, an aspiring group of artists headed by the affable Oster runs **Black History** out of a thatched shack, where you can pick up good wooden carvings, pottery and batiks.

Sleeping & Eating

Pick & Pay Resthouse (☎ 01-292459; camping US\$2, r with shared/private bathroom US\$3/5) A clean and basic option off the highway. Follow the signpost from the main road and head towards the lake for 500m. There are nets and fans in the rooms, and the restaurant (dishes US\$2) serves filling portions of barbecued fish.

Kulinga Resthouse (r with shared bathroom US\$2.50) Next door to Pick & Pay, this is more basic, and the shared bathrooms are best described as rustic.

Nawo Guesthouse (☎ 01-292453; s/d US\$3.80/5) On the main north-south road, it offers the most accommodating rooms in town and has safe parking.

Yamikani Restaurant & Bar (mains US\$1-2.50) On the main road, it serves simple, tasty meals, as does the Prime Kitchen Restaurant, a few doors down.

Getting There & Away

You can get to Nkhhotakota by the *Ilala* ferry (see p234). To get here by bus from Lilongwe, take the 'Mzuzu via Lakeshore' ordinary bus (US\$2.50, 4½ hours, two daily), which also stops in Salima. The bus will drop you off roughly outside Nkhhotakota's BP petrol station, which is on the highway. *Matola* leave 100m further north and go to Salima (US\$1.80, three hours) and Nkhata Bay (US\$4, 5½ hours).

SOUTH OF NKHOTAKOTA

About 24km south of Nkhhotakota is the entrance to **Chia Lagoon**, a large bay linked to the main lake by a narrow channel, which is crossed by a bridge near the main road. Local people fish here using large triangular nets on poles, and seem resigned to having their photos taken by tourists on the bridge.

Nkhhotakota Pottery (☎ 01-292444; www.dedza.pottery.com; s/d US\$12/24) is signposted another 2.5km further south from the main road. If you feel like resting here for a few days you could do a pottery course. They run a bewildering array of courses from a couple of days to a few weeks. Course participants are housed in lovely chalets on the beach and accommodation is included in the price. Courses start at around US\$90.

Sleeping

Sani Beach Resort (☎ 01-292511; camping per person US\$1.30, hut s/d US\$10/19, chalet s/d US\$13/24) A few kilometres off the main north-south road. Simple huts and larger brick and thatch chalets sit on a sandy beach, but aside from the great bar, which almost has 360-degree views, it's a little lacking in atmosphere.

Njobvu Safari Lodge (☎ 01-292506; camping per person US\$2.30, s/d US\$35/50) Has appealing round chalets with thatched roofs and cane décor, all right on the lakeshore. Rates include breakfast, and meals in the stylish restaurant (snacks US\$1.50, dishes US\$2.50 to US\$6) include roasted guinea fowl, vegetarian stir-fries, curries and of course fresh fish. The owners know a lot about wildlife in the area and arrange day safaris to Nkhhotakota Wildlife Reserve (below) for US\$60, including meals, transport, entry fees, professional guide and a good chance of spotting elephants.

NKHOTAKOTA WILDLIFE RESERVE

Nkhhotakota Wildlife Reserve lies west of the main lakeshore road, and covers around 1800 sq km of dense miombo forests with pockets of evergreens carpeting hills and escarpments. It's the largest reserve in Malawi, but was virtually abandoned during the 1980s and early 1990s. There's a healthy elephant population here, as well as roan and sable antelopes, waterbucks, buffaloes and even a few lions and leopards. Several large rivers cross the reserve, so the bird life is also varied and rewarding. Walking is the best way to experience the area, and at least a few hours is needed to spot wildlife.

Entry fees are payable (see p166). You can hire a scout (ranger) here to be a guide or do a day safari from Njobvu Safari Lodge (p197).

There are some dilapidated rondavels at Chipata Camp (Map p195), the reserve headquarters, which is about 5km north of the end of the dirt road from Lilongwe, about 35km southwest of Nkhotakota town. The best place to aim for is **Bua Camp** (Map p195; camping US\$3), a beautiful clearing on the banks of a rocky river. The turn-off to Bua is 10km north of Nkhotakota town, then 15km on a dirt track; without your own wheels the only way to get here is on foot.

SALIMA

The town of Salima is spread out about 20km from the lake, where the road from Lilongwe meets the main lakeshore road, a wide sweeping central boulevard, bustling with bicycle traffic.

Mai Tsalani Motel (☎ 01-262622; s with shared bathroom US\$3, d US\$5-13), about 10 minutes' walk from the bus station and close to the PTC Supermarket, has a variety of rooms from small and basic singles with shared bathrooms and bathrooms. Bed and breakfast rates are also available.

Mwambiya Lodge (☎ 262314; s/d US\$10/12.50), across the train line from the bus station, is more of a hotel set-up, with bland but clean rooms. Rates include breakfast.

To reach Salima from Lilongwe, it's easiest to take a minibus (US\$1.50). Minibuses and *matola* also run frequently between Salima and Senga Bay (US\$1) and less frequently to Nkhata Bay (US\$6.50), Mzuzu (US\$8.50) and Blantyre (US\$4), via Mangochi. There are also ordinary buses to Mzuzu (US\$6, seven hours, two daily) via Nkhata Bay (US\$5.50, five hours).

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. Senga Bay is also very spread out, and you might have to take bicycle taxis to get from place to place.

Dangers & Annoyances

Take great care when swimming near the large rocks at the end of the beach at Steps Camp-

site; you'll find there's a surprisingly strong undertow. Some of the beaches here are flat and reedy – perfect conditions for bilharzia, so get advice from your hotel or lodge to see if it's safe.

Many travellers have complained about persistent hassling from local youths, all wanting to sell souvenirs or arrange boat rides. Be aware especially of the enthusiastic guys at the craft stalls who offer to wrap your purchase – they'll charge more for this than you paid for the carving, and swapping your souvenir for a lump of wood has been tried more than once. Be polite and firm in your dealings, and you should be OK.

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. Many lodges and local guides can arrange this and it should cost about US\$25. Alternatively, you can go hiking in the nearby **Senga Hills**. It's best to hire a local guide to show you the way (also because there have been isolated incidents of robbery and harassment here). The bird-watching is excellent, with a good range of habitats close by. If you're looking for souvenirs, there's a strip of craft stalls a few kilometres out of Senga Bay, on the Salima road.

About 10km south of Senga Bay is **Stewart Grant's Tropical Fish Farm** (☎ /fax 263165), which breeds and exports cichlids. If you're genuinely interested you can do a half-hour tour of the farm (US\$0.50). **Red Zebra Tours** (☎ 01-263165; www.lakemalawi.com), based here, offers lake safaris with an experienced guide from US\$25/30 per person for a half/full day. For something less active, two-hour sundowner cruises are also available for US\$15 per person (minimum charge for the boat US\$50). Children are half price.

Sleeping & Eating

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

Bobab Chalets (☎ 01-263495; camping per person US\$1.30, s/d US\$14/15) Near Carolina, it has small brick chalets and a few grassy patches to pitch a tent. On weekends this is a popular spot for Malawians.

Carolina Holiday Resort (☎ 01-263220; shelagh@malawi.net; camping per person US\$1.50, dm US\$5, s/d with

CICHLID FISH

There are around 500 species of fish in Lake Malawi. Most of these are of the family *Cichlidae* – the largest family of fish in Africa – and 99% of these cichlids are endemic to the lake. *Chambo*, familiar to anyone who has eaten in a restaurant in Malawi, are one type of cichlid. Others include the small *utaka*, which move in big shoals and are caught by fisherman at night. But Lake Malawi is most famous for the small and colourful *mbuna*, of which there are many species. As well as being attractive to snorkellers and divers, *mbuna* are popular with aquariums, and for scientists they provide a fascinating insight into the process of evolution. *Mbuna* identification and classification is an ongoing process, and it is thought that many species of *mbuna* remain undiscovered.

Cichlids have evolved over the millennia from one common species into many hundreds, yet they have continued to coexist. This has been achieved by different species developing different ways of feeding. *Chambo* eat phytoplankton, which they filter out of the water through their mouths, whereas *mbuna* have different methods of feeding. Some have developed special teeth to help them scrape algae off the rocks; there are also 'snail eaters' with strong flat teeth, perfect for crushing shells; and 'sand diggers', which filter insects and small animals out of the sand.

Also interesting is the cichlid breeding process. The male attracts the female with his bright colours and, if suitably impressed, she lays eggs, which she immediately takes in her mouth for protection. The male has a pattern near his tail resembling the eggs, which the female tries to pick up, at which point the male releases his sperm into the water, which the female invariably inhales. This process is repeated until all or most of the eggs are fertilised. The female keeps the eggs in her mouth, and when they become baby fish, they stay there for protection. They emerge only to feed, but at the slightest sign of danger, the mother opens her mouth and the young swim straight back in.

shared bathroom US\$18/23, chalets US\$35) This is 3km down a dirt road, at the western end of the main street. It's a friendly spot with a good restaurant (dishes US\$3 to US\$5), and breakfast is included in the rates. There's also a bar, outside terrace and shady gardens overlooking the lake. While the chalets have verandas and are quite spacious, the double and single rooms are tiny and poor value.

our pick Wheelhouse Marina (☎ 01-263139; wheelhouse@m.w.celtelplus.com; camping per person US\$2, caravans \$12, 2-/10-bed house US\$30/50) A rambling, ramshackle paradise with a sense of character and charm; it consists 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. The cottages are lovely with shaded veranda and great views onto the beach and the lusciously green gardens. The camp site has clean ablutions, barbecue facilities (with clean grills!) and picnic tables. To up the romance factor you can have a barbecue or dinner in the ruins of the marina. There's also a quirky round bar raised above the water on stilts that serves great steaks and fish.

Steps Campsite (camping per person US\$3) Beautifully situated on a wide clean sandy beach right beside the water, with plenty of shady

areas to put up your tent, a beach volleyball pitch, excellent security and socket points for fridges. The bathrooms are spotlessly clean and have hot showers. There's a good circular bar, and food can be brought to you from the restaurant at the Livingstonia Beach next door.

Red Zebra Lodge (☎ 01-263165; www.lakemalawi.com; s/d US\$15/20) Based at Stewart Grant's Tropical Fish Farm; has several brick bungalows with spacious and comfortable interiors. More expensive B&B rates are also available, and the restaurant (dishes US\$4 to US\$6) cooks up a good variety of dishes, including vegetarian options.

Cool Runnings (r with shared bathroom US\$20) An extremely homely and friendly place; small enough to feel cosy and intimate but with enough space to chill out on your own if you choose. 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; and each bedroom is named after a different African country, with corresponding maps and framed snippets of information adorning the walls. Best of all, though, is the tantalising 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.

Lakeside Hotel (☎ 01-263400/500; s/d/f US\$25/38/102; 📍) On the same dirt road as Carolina Holiday Resort, this place is a tad sterile, but the commodious rooms come with TV, fridge, air-con and expansive verandas with lake views and breakfast. There's also a garden and a large outdoor bar. The facilities and room to move in this hotel make it a good choice for families.

Safari Beach Lodge (☎ 01-263143; safwag@malawi.net; s/d US\$44/65) This is 1km off the main road; turn off just before the gates to Livingstonia Beach. Clean and airy rooms in a colonial-style building look out to the gardens or the water. There are also safari tents perched on the side of the hill with fans and electricity, wooden balconies with superb lake views and private open-air bathrooms attached by wooden walkways. There is an elevated wooden walkway leading from the lodge gardens down to the shore, and a fantastic wooden platform built into the surrounding rocks. It's home to the bar and makes a great spot for sundowners or dining al fresco.

Kambiri Holiday Resort (☎ 01-263052/352; kambiri@alexanderhotels.net; s/d US\$45/90) Large rambling hotel with airy rooms (slightly spoiled by the unfortunate satin bedspreads) and gardens leading down to a large empty stretch of beach. The resort attracts a mostly Malawian clientele.

Livingstonia Beach (☎ 01-263222; livingstonia@lemeridienmalawi.co.mw; s/d US\$115/130; 📍) All glistening white and opulent, it sits at the end of the main street, past a set of imposing gates. It's a stylish affair; perfectly spaced sunlounges under thatched shades line the beachfront and the rooms house a host of comforts including telephone, TV, tea- and coffee-making facilities, fans and private verandas overlooking the beach. On site is a tennis court, swimming pool (in case the lake at your doorstep is too far), bar and restaurant, all set amid lush gardens and made-for-a-brochure views.

Tophill Restaurant (dishes US\$1-2.50) Just down the road from Red Zebra Cafe, this has simpler surroundings and fare, and its speciality banana pancakes are excellent.

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. It's deco-

rated with jolly murals of palm trees and seaside scenes and has shady verandas; there's also a simple menu of burgers, pizzas, *chambo* and curries.

Getting There & Away

First get to Salima (for details see p198). From here, local pick-ups 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.

MUA

Mua is a small town between Salima and Balaka, and consists mostly of a large mission with a church, a school and a hospital, which has been here since the beginning of the 20th century. It is also home to the **KuNgoni Art & Craft Centre** (☎ 01-262706; admin@kungoni.org), which features a library and research centre, a school and workshop for wood carvers – you can visit to see them in action – and a craft shop, full of paintings and wood sculptures by local people. Some is of very high quality and quite unusual, covering religious and secular subjects. Prices are reasonable. There's accommodation here in two-bed chalets (US\$30 including breakfast), and meals can also be provided for overnight guests. They also run sporadic courses on Malawian history and culture, and there are frequent performances of dances and songs from Chewa, Ngoni and Yao cultures. Contact the centre for further details.

For a deeper understanding of the ideas behind the sculptures, a visit to the **Chamare museum** (📍 8am-5pm Mon-Sat) is an absolute must. It has three exhibition rooms – beautifully decorated with vibrant murals depicting scenes from Malawian history – that concentrate on the three main cultural groups of the region (Chewa, Ngoni and Yao) and their approach to traditional beliefs, with fascinating exhibits from rituals and rites of passage. A guided tour is essential; it takes an hour and costs US\$5.

See opposite for transport connections to/from Mua.

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.

The **Back to School Foundation** (www.monkeybay.bravehost.com) is based at Njovubu Backpackers. Volunteers get free accommodation and airport pick-up and drop-off in return for helping this scheme, which raises money to send children and young adults to secondary school. The friendly host also arranges trips for volunteers to areas of interest around Malawi.

Sleeping

Venice Beach Backpackers (camping per person US\$1.30, dm US\$2, d with shared bathroom US\$2.50) This place is about 1.5km from the main road and offers dorms and rooms in a two-storey thatch building set on a beautiful stretch of beach. There's a bar with a small menu of local food; fish and *nsima* is about US\$2. It seems to have been permanently under renovation for the past few years, though, and plays host to a number of beach boys keen on giving the hard sell.

Njovubu Backpackers (☎ 01-587214; www.monkeybay.bravehost.com/backpackers.htm; camping US\$1.50, dm/r US\$1.50/3; 📍) Just off the main street is this small and friendly joint with an internet café, tidy rooms and dorms, and splendid home-baked cakes. Many of the guests are volunteers working for the Back to School Foundation, and a new annex was under construction at the time of writing.

Ziwadi Resthouse (☎ 01-587232; s/d with shared bathroom MKUS\$2/3, s/d US\$3.50/4.50) Just off the main road. Offers tidy, simple rooms, as well as a basic restaurant, but there's a lot of noise from the street.

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). From Lilongwe you're probably better off going by minibus to Salima (US\$1.50), from where you might find a minibus or *matola* going direct to Monkey Bay. If not, take a minibus towards Balaka, get off at the Matakataka road junction near Mua (look out for the craft stalls), then take a *matola* (US\$2) along the Matakataka road to the main road between Monkey Bay and Mangochi. Another option if you're in a group is to charter your own *matola*.

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.

To avoid the bus hassles, many travellers use the *Ilala* ferry to travel up and down the country to or from Monkey Bay (see p234).

From Monkey Bay, a *matola* ride to Cape Maclear should cost US\$1, although some travellers have reported paying more so be assertive when negotiating. Although not far away, it can take all day to get there and you could wait anything from 30 minutes to five hours for a *matola* departure.

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 picturesque and relaxing place to experience the beauty, lifestyle and activities of the lake, however. There's nowhere to change money in Cape Maclear, so make sure you bring enough with you.

Dangers & Annoyances

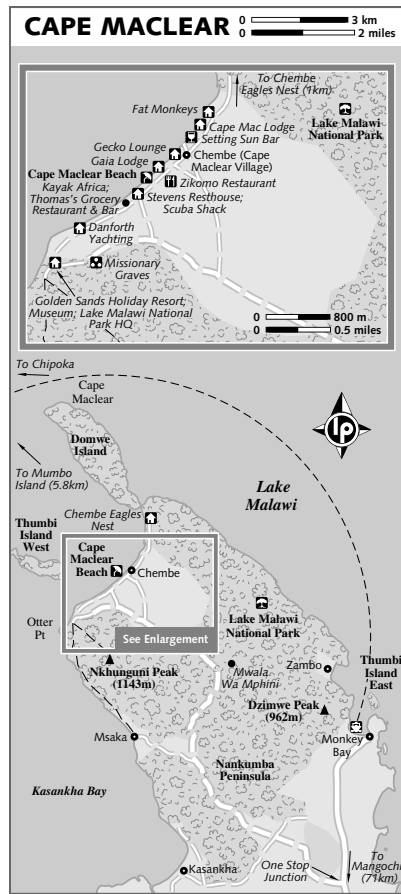
Scams to watch out for at Cape Maclear include the boys who take money in advance for a boat ride or barbecue and then disappear, or who take you on a boat then go through your day-pack while you're snorkelling. Real robberies do occasionally happen on the beach or surrounding hills; violence is very unlikely, but don't carry anything valuable.

Sights

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. The park headquarters are at Golden Sands Holiday Resort.

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. The information is nontechnical and well presented.

Near the entrance gate to the Golden Sands, 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 p159 and p179).

Activities

SNORKELLING

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, including snorkelling and lunch (fish and rice cooked on an open fire). If you want to stretch this out into a night or two on the islands, the cost is US\$25/45 for one/two days, including tents. Your lodge can put you in contact with

guides, but before you arrange anything, get recommendations from other travellers and negotiate a price.

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). Otter Point, less than 1km beyond Golden Sands, is a small rocky peninsula and nearby islet that is very popular with fish and snorkellers. You may even see otters here.

DIVING

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 (p204). All three offer PADI open-water courses for around US\$250, as well as casual dives for experienced divers. Scuba Shack also has an Instructor Development Centre (IDC) so you can become a qualified instructor here.

KAYAKING

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, which can be hired from around US\$12 for a few hours. A day trip with lunch costs from US\$50. The best option, if you've got the money, is to take a guided two- or three-night island-hopping trip, using Kayak Africa's delightful camps on Domwe and Mumbo Islands. The charge per night is US\$150 per person for Mumbo Island and US\$130 for Domwe, and includes a tent with mattress and duvet, good meals, hot showers, snorkel gear and park fees. Anyone who's done this trip raves about it.

BOAT CRUISES

Yet another option is sailing on a yacht with an outfit called **Danforth Yachting** (☎ 09-960077; www.danforthyachting.com). A sunset cruise around Cape Maclear aboard the *Mufasa* costs US\$25 per person (minimum six people required); a full-day island-hopping cruise costs US\$75 per person (minimum four people), including lunch; and an overnight cruise including all meals as well as snorkelling and fishing equipment costs US\$150 per person (minimum four people). The owners also have exquisite accommodation (see p204).

HIKING

There's a good range of hikes and walks in the hills that form a horseshoe around the plain

behind the village and the beach. You can go alone (see p201) or arrange a guide, either from the village or at the national park headquarters at Golden Sands Holiday Resort; the park's rate for a guide is US\$9 for a full-day trip. The main path starts by the missionary graves and leads up through woodland to a col below **Nkhunguni Peak**, the highest on the Nankumba Peninsula, with great views over Cape Maclear, the lake and surrounding islands. It's six hours return to the summit; plenty of water and a good sun hat are essential.

Another interesting place to visit on foot is **Mwala Wa Mphini** (Rock of the Tribal Face Scars), which is just off the main dirt road into Cape Maclear, about 5km from the park headquarters. This huge boulder is covered in lines and patterns that seem to have been gouged out by long-forgotten artists, but are simply a natural geological formation.

If you want a longer walk, a small lake-side path leads southwest from Otter Point, through woodland above the shore, for about 4km to a small fishing village called **Msaka** (which has a small bar/shop serving cold drinks). From here a track leads inland (west) to meet the main dirt road between Cape Maclear and Monkey Bay. Turn left and head back towards Cape Maclear, passing Mwala Wa Mphini on the way. The whole circuit is about 16km and takes four to five hours.

VOLUNTEERING

Billy Riordan Memorial Trust (www.billysmalawiproject.com) was set up in memory of a young man, Billy Riordan, who sadly drowned in the lake in 1999. The trust provides medical care in the area and is currently working on establishing an HIV/AIDS treatment centre. The trust needs medical volunteers (doctors, nurses, lab technicians) as well as builders, electricians and carpenters. Work in administration, agriculture and horticulture is also available. They prefer volunteers who can commit for a minimum of three months.

Sleeping

Golden Sands Holiday Resort (camping per person US\$0.50, 1-/2-/3-person rondavels US\$1/1.50/2) At the far western end of the beach. This is also Lake Malawi National Park headquarters, and as it's inside the park you have to pay fees (see p166). It offers camping and basic, small rondavels. The beach here is cleaner and the atmosphere is generally much quieter than some

other places in Cape Maclear, so it's ideal for families, drivers and people who don't want to drink and smoke all night.

Stevens Resthouse (☎ 01-587541; camping per person US\$0.50, s/d US\$4/7; 📺) Large, simple rooms with nets are good value, and there are pleasant camping areas close to the water. The bar and restaurant are close to the beach, although both have seen kinder days and better maintenance. There's a book exchange, though, and an internet café (US\$9 an hour).

Fat Monkeys (☎ 09-948501; camping 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, 374631; gaiahouse@mw.celtelplus.com; camping US\$2, dm US\$2.50, s/d US\$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, 966507; www.chembenest.com; camping US\$6, half-board cottages & safari tents per person US\$60) At the far 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 private beach, strewn with palm trees and shaded tables, nestled against the side of the hills. There are airy thatch and brick rooms with wooden four posters and spacious verandas. There's a catamaran for hire (\$35 per person for a full day including lunch), and a swimming pool is being built.

Gecko Lounge (☎ 09-833856; kite@africa-online.net; dm US\$10, d US\$40) From the beach, you can't miss this place – with its bright orange building 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; the menus change daily.

Cape Mac Lodge (☎ 09-966520; rogerl@africaonline.net; s/d/f US\$65/85/90) Has dark pink thatch buildings, manicured lawns and well-appointed rooms with fans, large, plush bathrooms and cool tile floors. All rooms have large verandas with great views of the lake. It also has a restaurant, Froggies, which serves excellent French cuisine.

Danforth Yachting (☎ 09-960077; danforth@malawi.net; full-board r per person US\$150) About 500m towards the village, this is by far the swankiest place on the cape. Plush and pristine rooms sleep up to four people, and rates include use of all equipment and activities (including cruises). There's also a bar, restaurant and outdoor lounge area in front of a stretch of rich grass with prime views of the lake.

Eating & Drinking

Zikomo Restaurant (breakfast \$1.20, dishes from US\$1) Serves good breakfasts and stews in a sandy courtyard setting off the main drag.

Thomas's Grocery Restaurant and 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 they do serve spaghetti and Indian chapatis), and the outdoor bench seating is the perfect spot to watch the village operate around you.

The Setting Sun Bar is a lively, loud, mural-adorned bar on the waterfront. It's the most popular bar in town and 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* should cost US\$1 (see p201 for more details). 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.

From Cape Maclear, if you're heading for Senga Bay, ask at the dive schools about chartering a boat. It will cost around US\$100, but it's not bad when split between four to six people and much better than the long, hard bus ride.

MONKEY BAY TO MANGOCHI

From Monkey Bay the main road runs south to Mangochi. Along this stretch of lake are several places to stay, catering for all tastes and budgets.

Palm Beach Leisure Resort (☎ 09-943050; www.palmbeach-mw.com; camping per person US\$2, s/d from US\$15/25) North of Mangochi, this was once a smart resort on a beautiful beach surrounded by (not surprisingly) a grove of palm trees. Its large thatched chalets with nets and fans

could now do with a lick of paint, but it's a friendly and pleasant spot with loads of space and lush green lawns for camping. The restaurant (breakfasts US\$1.50, dishes US\$1.25 to US\$4.50) serves fish, steaks, burgers, curries, pasta and good vegetarian dishes. This place is quiet during the week, but livelier at weekends when people come from Blantyre and Lilongwe for boating and fishing.

Boadzulu Lakeshore Resort (☎ 01-594725; camping US\$2.50, walk-in tent s/d US\$5/7.50, s/d from US\$36/54, family chalets US\$68) About 10km further south from Club Makokola, this is a smart, spacious resort and great value for all budgets. The comfortable rooms here come with fans and nets, and for a little extra you can go up in standard to include a TV, lounge and fridge. The restaurant is good, the bar is on the beach and, if you're feeling adventurous, a boat accommodating up to 45 people can be hired to go to nearby Boadzulu Island for around US\$100.

OK Lake Shore Hotel (r US\$7) This place is 1.5km off the main road, and is Malawian-run and a good, quiet, budget option. Basic rooms have nets and, although meals aren't available, you can make use of the kitchen and the chef.

Nkopola Lodge (☎ 01-580444; nkopola@sunbirdmalawi.com; camping US\$12, walk-in tents US\$18, r from US\$60, chalets US\$72) Just 1km down the road from Boadzulu Lakeshore Resort, this is another top-end establishment. Cool and unfussy rooms in well-kept gardens overlook a beach, while the camping area, set further back, has spotless ablution blocks. Room rates include breakfast, and the restaurant (dishes US\$5 to US\$8, weekend buffet US\$12) serves suitably delectable fare. Sailboards, canoes and small sailing boats are free for guests' use; motorboats cost US\$7.50 per person per hour and paddle boats US\$2.50. More-questionable attractions include a bird sanctuary, petting zoo and casino.

Club Makokola (☎ 01-580244/445; www.dubmak.com; s/d from US\$103/165; 🍷) About 50km from Monkey Bay, Club Mak (as it's known) is a luxury holiday resort, with nicely decorated chalets and rooms (the newer bush-style ones are better than the original ones), two swimming pools, restaurants, bars, water sports, floodlit football fields, squash, tennis and volleyball courts, and a long strip of private beachfront. Rates include full buffet breakfast, and a three-course meal costs US\$15. It has its own airport, which is served by Air Malawi

flights to/from Blantyre and Lilongwe (see p233). Based at the club, Scuba Blue offers beginner courses for around US\$250. Paradise Watersports offers fishing, boat trips to the islands, and water-skiing.

MANGOCHI

Mangochi lies near the southern end of Lake Malawi, strung out between the main lakeshore road and the Shire River. This place was once an important slave market, and then an administrative centre in colonial days, when it was known as Fort Johnston. Relics of these times within the wide, tree-lined streets include a large mosque and the Queen Victoria clock tower. Even today the town has a vaguely Swahili feel, with palm trees, Arab-looking people and coconuts for sale in the street. The Shire Bridge is scenic, and the excellent **Lake Malawi Museum** (admission US\$0.80; ☎ 7.30am-5pm) houses ethnographic, environmental and historical exhibits. There's also a replica of the foredeck and bridge of HMS *Guendolin* (see the boxed text, below). Facilities include several shops, supermarkets, a post office and banks.

Sleeping & Eating

The hospitality industry hasn't really taken off in Mangochi but there's a few cheap options.

HMS GUENDOLIN

HMS *Guendolin* was a military boat, made in Britain and assembled in Mangochi in 1899. At 340 tonnes, it was for many years the largest boat on the lake and had a top speed of 12 knots. It also had two powerful guns on board. Such a show of strength was thought necessary by the colonial authorities in order to deter slave-traders, who crossed the lake in dhows with their human cargo, but also because colonial rivals Germany and Portugal had territory facing Lake Malawi and were believed to want to increase their influence in the region.

The Germans also had a gunboat, called *Herman von Wissemann*, but despite the friction between their two governments, the captains of the two ships were apparently great friends, and would often meet at various points around the lake to drink beer and shoot the breeze.

When WWI was declared in 1914, the *Guendolin* was ordered to destroy the German boat. The British captain knew where the *von Wissemann* would be, as he and the German captain had previously arranged a rendezvous.

But the German captain wasn't aware that war had erupted, and his ship was completely unprepared. The *Guendolin* steamed in close, then bombed the *von Wissemann* and rendered it unusable. The German captain and crew were then informed of the commencement of hostilities and taken prisoner. This rather unsporting event happened to be the first British naval victory of WWI and Lake Malawi's only recorded battle at sea.

In 1940 the *Guendolin* was converted to a passenger ship, and one of the guns was set up as a memorial in Mangochi, near the clock tower. Some years later the ship was scrapped. All that remains today is the gun, and the compass and the ship's bell are on display at the museum.

OK Restaurant & Resthouse (r with shared bathroom US\$2.50; 🍷) Near the main minibus station and market, off the main road through town, it only has single rooms, but they're clean and cosy and have fans or air-con. The attached restaurant serves cheap and filling meals.

Mangochi Lodge (r with shared bathroom US\$4.50) Near the clock tower, this place is friendly and offers a few comfortable bedrooms with nets and fans.

Mangochi Holiday Motel (☎ 01-594789; s/d with shared bathroom US\$5/7, s/d US\$7.50/10) Larger than Mangochi Lodge, this place offers simple, clean rooms, a cheap restaurant, big bar and good bakery.

Mangochi Icecream Den & Restaurant (dishes US\$1.25-6) On the highway, it has tranquil outdoor tables amid leafy gardens. Its eclectic menu includes Malawian dishes, steaks, curries, burgers, fish and, of course, ice cream.

Getting There & Away

All buses between Blantyre and Monkey Bay stop in Mangochi. There are minibuses to/from Liwonde (US\$1.20), Zomba (US\$2) and Blantyre (US\$2.50). To get to Liwonde National Park take a *matola* to Ulongwe (US\$1). You can get a *matola* to the border town of Chiponde (US\$3) if you're heading to Mozambique (for border crossing information, see p232).

has very accommodating rooms, and the friendly host is a walking wealth of information on the park's flora and fauna. Delicious, home-cooked meals are taken *en famille* and at night guests gather to chat in the lantern- and candle-lit lounge; or there's a private nook behind the fireplace if you're feeling unsociable. 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 (camping per person US\$5, accommodation-only/full-board chalets per person US\$35/140) Managed by Wilderness Safaris (p170) 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. Alternatively, you can eat at the open-plan thatched restaurant; the food is excellent. There's also a bar and lounge area with wide lake views. Full-board rates include two wildlife activities, and children between four and 12 are charged half price, but those under six are not allowed on wildlife-viewing trips.

Njobvu Cultural Village (full-board huts per person US\$50) This village 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 (p170).

Mvuu Wilderness Lodge (full-board chalets per person US\$240; 🚗) A short distance upriver from Mvuu Camp (and also managed by Central African Wilderness Safaris), this lodge has large luxury double tents with private balconies overlooking a water hole where wildlife and birds are active. There's a maximum of 10 guests, so this place is relaxed and intimate, with attentive staff and excellent food. There's also a small swimming pool. Rates includes park fees and all wildlife drives, boat rides, bird walks etc.

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. This service is free if you're staying at the camp.

Alternatively, if you make a booking in advance for Mvuu Camp through Wilderness Safaris in Lilongwe (see p170), the camp can arrange a boat transfer from Liwonde town for US\$20 per person (it's half price if you're paying full-board at the camp).

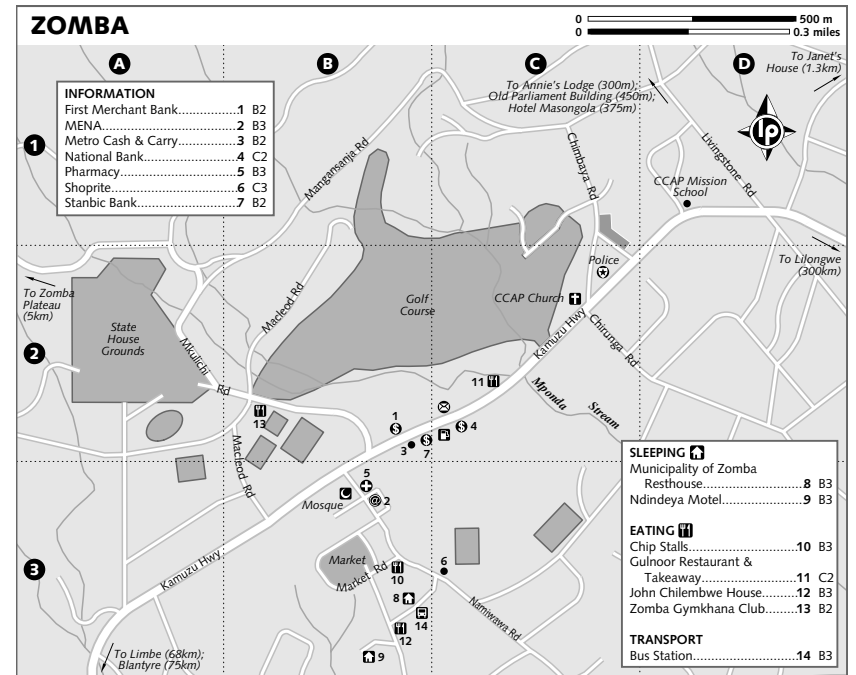
For those without wheels, the best option is to get any bus or minibus between Liwonde town and Mangochi and get off at Ulongwe (make sure you say this clearly, otherwise the driver will think you want to go to Lilongwe). In Ulongwe local boys wait by the bus stop and will take you by bicycle to the park gate (US\$2) or all the way to the boat jetty (US\$3). If you've got a lot of luggage there may be an extra charge or you may need two bikes. The ride takes about an hour, and you should leave with plenty of time before dusk; otherwise you may encounter elephants, and either way your cyclist will demand extra money for the trouble.

Another option is the boat transfer service along the Shire River offered by Waterline River Safaris (p206). Approaching Mvuu by river is very enjoyable; along the way you're likely to see elephants and certain to see some hippos.

ZOMBA

Zomba was the capital of Malawi until the mid-1970s and it's still a large, busy place. It's not as friendly as Blantyre or Lilongwe, though; the town centre is dirtier and you're likely to receive more hassle here than in the large towns further north.

Overshadowing the town, though, is the serenely beautiful Zomba Plateau, and a walk through the suburbs in the lush and peaceful foothills reveals the faded but still impressive old Parliament Building – a reminder of Zomba's historical importance.



Information

Internet access is available at **MENA** (per hr US\$12; 🕒 8am-5pm Mon-Sat), off Namiwawa Rd. There are Stanbic, National and First Merchant Banks in the town.

For supplies, there's a Shoprite and a Metro Cash and Carry.

Sleeping

Municipality of Zomba Resthouse (r with shared bathroom US\$2, d US\$3) If you arrive at the bus station late at night, strapped for cash and unable to walk more than a few metres, then this is the place to come. Otherwise it might be wise to give it a miss. While the rooms are dirt cheap, they're not the cleanest.

Ndindeya Motel (📞 08-855700, 385540; s/d with private bathroom US\$4/8) A good budget option. The rooms are large and all rates include breakfast. The downside is that it's next door to a bar, which is very noisy even during the day.

Janet's House (📞 01-542708; Mulunguzi Rd; s/d with shared bathroom from US\$20/25, d US\$38) A friendly Malawian B&B with a healthy resident dog and cat population. There are only three rooms and the largest is absolutely charming.

Annie's Lodge (Map p211; 📞 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. There's not a great deal of difference between the standard and executive level rooms, so plump for a cheaper one.

Hotel Masongola (Map p211; 📞 01-524688; Livingstone Rd; hotelmasongola@cl.com.net; s/d from US\$40/75) At the top of the hill and price scale. This was the house of the first colonial governor. Rates include breakfast. The older rooms are in the brick bungalows out the back, and rooms in the garden are more expensive and modern. The real attraction here is the pleasant beer garden on the private lawns and the restaurant (dishes US\$5 to US\$10), which serves rare treats including guinea fowl, and fillet steak.

Eating & Drinking

John Chilembwe House (dishes US\$1.50; 🕒 11am-late) A very lively restaurant and bar, near the main bus station, selling cheap beer and Malawi

dishes. It's a good place to strike up a conversation with the locals.

Zomba Gymkhana Club (☎ 01-527818; Mkulichi Rd; dishes US\$1.50-3, 2-/3-course buffet lunch US\$4/7.50; 🍴 lunch & dinner) Another colonial relic, this place offers good curries, stewes, and fish and chicken dishes in pleasant surroundings. Nonmembers need to pay US\$0.70 entry.

Gulnoor Restaurant & Take Away (dishes US\$2-4; 🍴 breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat) Specialises in Pakistani curries and also does Malawian food. *Chambo* marinated in chillies and yoghurt, balti and shish kebabs are on offer.

There are several cheap roadside cafés outside the bus station where you can pick up dishes of *nsima* and meat for around US\$0.80.

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).

ZOMBA PLATEAU

Zomba Plateau is divided into two halves by the Domasi Valley. The southern half has a road to the top, a hotel (the landmark Ku Chawe Inn), a camping ground, several picnic places and a network of driveable tracks and hiking paths that wind through pine forest or patches of indigenous woodland. There are several narrow ridges along the edge of the escarpment, with viewpoints overlooking the plains below. The plateau also has streams, waterfalls and a couple of lakes, where fishing is allowed. Some people prefer to drive around, but Zomba is a good place for hiking. The cool air makes a welcome change from the heat of the lowland areas.

Note that some travellers have reported being hassled by 'ruffians' when hiking on the plateau. Locals say these are outsiders rather than people from Zomba. To avoid trouble, it's recommended to arrange a guide with the forest officer stationed at the Model Hut.

Sights & Activities

A few kilometres from Ku Chawe Inn are **Mandala Falls**, not as impressive as they used to be since Mlunguzi Dam was significantly enlarged in 1999. A nature trail leads upstream

from Mandala Falls, through some beautiful indigenous forest and a trout farm, to **Williams Falls**, another fairly impressive cascade.

A popular place to visit is **Chingwe's Hole**, on the western side of the plateau, supposedly bottomless and the basis of various local legends, although now overgrown and not especially impressive. Nearby, however, is a splendid viewpoint, looking westward over the Shire Valley.

For even more impressive views, head for the eastern side of the plateau, where **Queen's View** (named after Queen Elizabeth, wife of King George VI, who visited Zomba in 1957) and **Emperor's View** (after Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, who visited in 1964) overlook Zomba town and out towards Mulanje.

HIKING

The southern half of the plateau is ideal for hiking. The network of tracks and paths can be confusing, though, so for more help with orientation, there's a 3-D map of the plateau in the **Model Hut**.

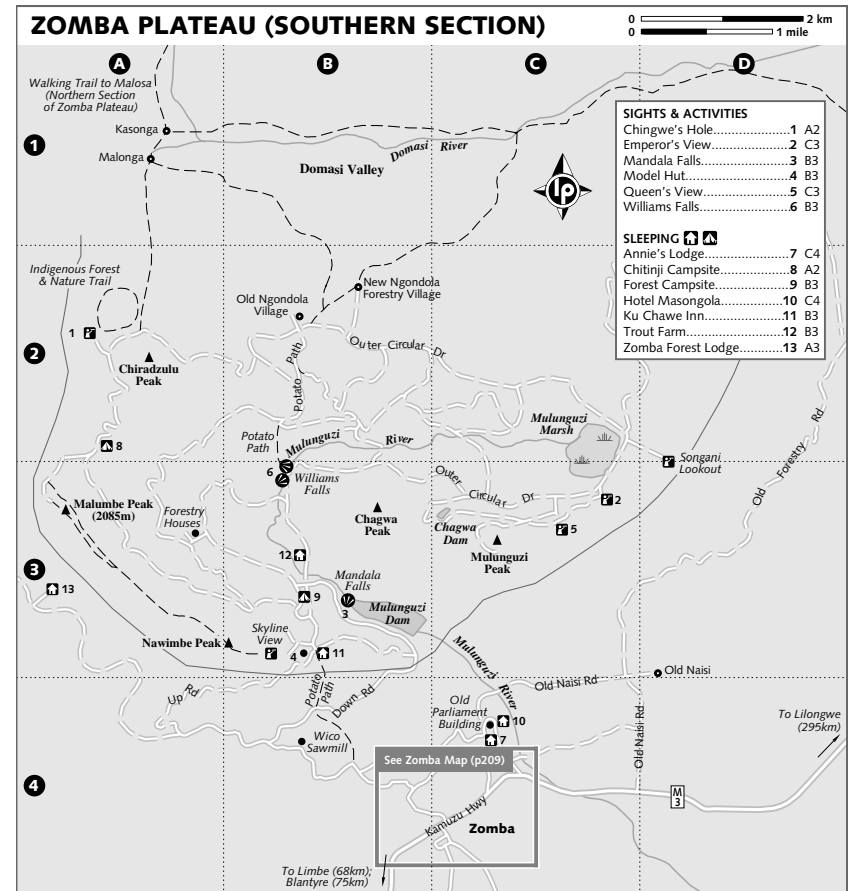
For detailed information on hiking routes on the southern half of the plateau, *A Guide to Zomba Plateau* (US\$2) is a single-sheet map with information on the back, including several suggested hiking routes, produced by the Wildlife Society. It's available in Blantyre and at the Ku Chawe Inn (p212). For more information still, the Zomba Plateau is covered in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa*.

Keen hikers may find the northern half of the plateau more interesting. There are few tracks here, and no pine plantation – the landscape is similar to that of Mt Mulanje and Nyika Plateau. For advice on hiking on the northern plateau, contact Chitinji Campsite (opposite).

It's recommended either to walk in a group or to use a guide when hiking as there have been several robberies on the plateau in recent years. There are guides registered with the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Environmental Affairs based at the Model Hut, who charge around US\$20 per day, although the rate is open to negotiation as there's no set price. More expensive guides are also available from Ku Chawe Inn.

Potato Path

You can hike all the way from Zomba town to the plateau via a direct route called the Potato Path, signposted at a sharp bend



on the road up to the plateau about 2km from Zomba town. The path climbs steeply through woodland to reach the plateau near Ku Chawe Inn.

From near Ku Chawe Inn, the Potato Path then goes straight across the southern half of the plateau, sometimes using the park tracks, sometimes using narrow short cuts, and leads eventually to Old Ngondola Village, from where it descends quite steeply into the Domasi Valley.

The Domasi Valley is well known for its fertile soil, plentiful water and good farming conditions, so here the local people grow vegetables (especially potatoes) and take them along the Potato Path (hence the name) down to Zomba town to sell in the market.

Allow two to three hours for the ascent, and about 1½ hours coming down.

Sleeping & Eating

If you're camping, you should bring most of what you need from Zomba town, as there's no shop on the plateau, although there are a local-style tearoom and some stalls selling fruit, vegetables and (sometimes) bread between the Ku Chawe Inn and the Forest Campsite.

Chitinji Campsite (admission US\$0.80; camping per person US\$2.50, basic r per person US\$5) Near Malumbe Peak in the west, this is an excellent place to stay, although even more likely to be shrouded in mist. The owner can advise on hikes in the surrounding area, and is especially keen to

help people who want to explore the wilderness zone on the northern section of the plateau.

Forest Campsite (camping per person US\$1) An aptly named spot with toilets and wood-fired hot showers all among large pine trees. It's one of those places that is beautiful in sunlight and a bit miserable in mist (you've got a 50:50 chance).

Trout Farm (r per person US\$8) The owner of the Chitinji Campsite has also taken over the running of this place.

Zomba Forest Lodge (☎ 09-926122; landlake@africa-online.net; s/d US\$30/50, full-board s/d US\$40/65) On the western slopes of the plateau, 6km by winding dirt road past the entrance gate to the plateau. This is the former Kachere Forest Resthouse, which was renovated a few years ago, and has a kitchen for self-catering and comfortable rooms; rates include breakfast. You can get more info from Land & Lake Safaris (p170).

Ku Chawe Inn (☎ 01-514237; superior/deluxe r US\$80/110) This 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. Non-residents can drink in the bar or dine here.

Getting There & Away

A sealed road leads steeply up the escarpment from Zomba town to the top of the plateau (about 8km). After the entrance gate, a two-way sealed road, known as the Down Rd, veers east and continues for another 2km, before turning to a dirt track. There is also an Up Rd, but this is now open only to walkers.

There's no bus up to the plateau, but local people hitch by the junction on the main street in Zomba town near the PTC Supermarket. Alternatively, you can take a taxi (negotiable from around US\$8). If this is beyond your means, get a taxi part way through the suburbs, say as far as Wico Sawmill or the Zomba Forest Lodge turn-off, then simply walk up the Up Rd. The views are excellent!

Alternatively, you can walk all the way from Zomba town to the plateau via the road or on the Potato Path (see p210).

BLANTYRE & LIMBE

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', and during the week the city centre is a hive of energy. 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 exploit some interesting sights, the most global selection of cuisine in Malawi, several enjoyable bars, and a fair selection of places to stay. (Unless stated otherwise, every address in this section is in Blantyre, rather than Limbe.)

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 Socho Hotel.

East of the Mount Socho Hotel is a major traffic roundabout, from where the main road north leads to the airport, Mwanza and Lilongwe. This road has no official name but is known as New Chileka Rd. approximately 500m further east is another roundabout, with a small clock on a concrete pedestal in the middle: from here Chileka Rd leads north to the bus station and outer suburbs; and Chipembere Highway, heading south, turns into the Kamuzu Highway, which veers east towards Limbe, and ultimately Zomba, Mulanje and Liwonde.

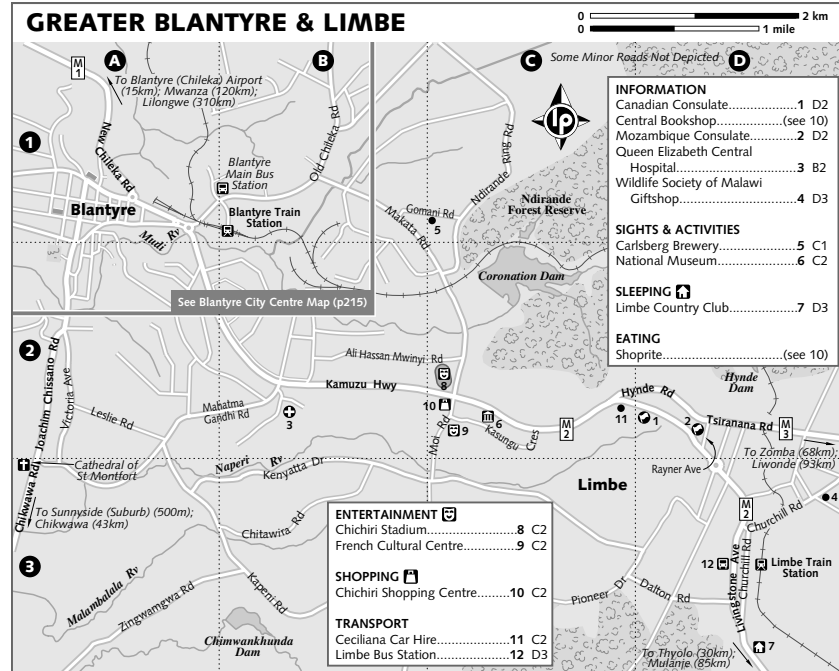
MAPS

Survey maps of Blantyre and the surrounding area are available from the **Department of Surveys Map Sales Office** (Map p215; Victoria Ave). See also p229.

Information BOOKSHOPS

Central Africana bookshop (Map p215; Victoria Ave) Specialises in antiquarian and specialist African titles, plus old prints and maps.

Central Bookshop (Map p213; Chichiri Shopping Centre) For a much wider selection than TBS, visit this bookshop. It stocks stationery, books and guides about Malawi, local-language dictionaries and a good range of novels by local writers. There's also a pleasant coffee shop.



TBS bookshop (Map p215; Victoria Ave) There's a TBS bookshop in town and a smaller one at the Mount Socho Hotel.

Wildlife Society of Malawi giftshop (Map p213; Churchill Rd, Limbe) At the Heritage Centre. Specialises in books about natural history and national parks; its prices are very reasonable.

EMERGENCY

The advice in Blantyre is the same as for Lilongwe; see p168.

INTERNET ACCESS

You will find plenty of internet bureaus in Blantyre.

CelTel Cyber Cafe (Map p215; Victoria Ave; per 30min US\$2)

E Internet Café (Map p215; cnr Victoria Ave & Independence Dr; per 30min US\$2.20)

Icon Internet Café (Map p215; per 30min US\$2) Off Livingstone Ave.

MEDICAL SERVICES

MPL pharmacy (Map p215; Victoria Ave) There's a large MPL pharmacy on Victoria Ave, and several smaller ones elsewhere around the city centre.

Mwaiwathu Private Hospital (Map p215; ☎ 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.

Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital (Map p213; ☎ 01-674333; ☒ 24hr) The Malaria Test Centre at this government-run hospital, off Chipembere Highway, charges US\$10 for a malaria test. Ask for directions as the Test Centre is hard to find.

Seventh Day Adventist Clinic (Map p215; ☎ 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.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Green Photo (Map p215; cnr Livingstone Ave & Henderson St) The large and busy Green Photo sells print film, develops and can provide passport photos.

POST

Post office (Map p215; Glyn Jones Rd; ☎ 7.30am-5pm) Has poste restante.

TELEPHONE

There are several small phone bureaus around the main bus station, from which you can make national calls. Doogles (p216) has international telephone facilities for guests.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Immigration office (Map p215; Building Society House, Victoria Ave) If you need to extend your visa, Blantyre has an immigration office.

Tourist office (Map p215; ☎ 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.

Dangers & Annoyances

Don't wander around alone at night. Some travellers walking between the city centre and Doogles, east of the city, have been attacked at night under the railway bridge on Chileka Rd. During daylight this route is fine but after dark a taxi is recommended (from the centre to Doogles is US\$5). At night taxi drivers will take you from the bus station to Doogles – all of 300m – but still charge US\$1! As always, watch your back in busy bus stations. Limbe (Map p213) is particularly crowded, so stay alert there.

Sights & Activities

Probably the most impressive building in Blantyre is the **CCAP Church** (Map p215), 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 handmade bricks and wood. It has a basilica dome, towers, arches and bay windows. Although extensively renovated in the 1970s, what you see today is pretty much how it looked the day it was completed.

PAMET (Map p215; Paper Making Education Trust; ☎ 01-623895; 10 Chilembwe Rd; www.pamet.org.mw) is

an inspiring project that was set up to teach people how to recycle paper. This is an important issue in Malawi, where some people are too poor to buy exercise books for their children. For US\$0.80 you can take a tour of their workshop to see how it's all done. They sell a lovely variety of cards and other paper products made from a range of different material including elephant dung! To help slow down the rate of deforestation, PAMET makes paper briquettes that are used as an alternative to charcoal and firewood.

The **National Museum** (Map p213; 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** (Map p213; ☎ 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. Some places to stay in Blantyre arrange transport here. Alternatively, you can walk or get a taxi.

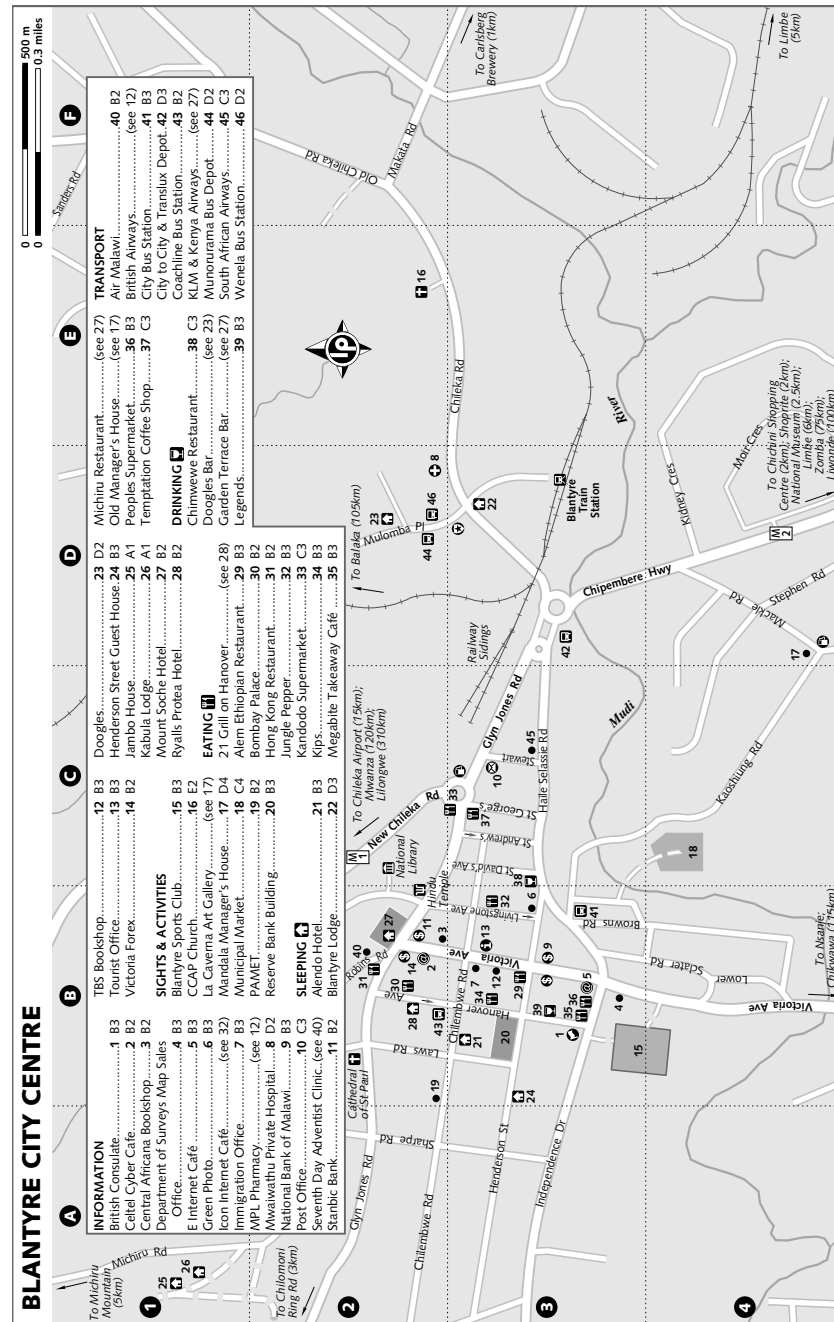
A nice way to spend an hour or two is a visit to the **Mandala Manager's House** (Map p215; ☎ 01-671932; Mandala House; ☎ 8.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat). Set in pleasant gardens, this old colonial house was built in 1882 and is now home to a café, **La Caverna Art Gallery** (lacaverna@malawi.net) and the Society of Malawi Library & Archive.

Blantyre Sports Club (Map p215), off Independence Dr, offers daily membership for US\$5, which allows you to enter the club and use the bar and restaurant. To use the pool or to play squash or tennis costs another US\$0.80. Nine holes of golf costs US\$3; equipment can be hired.

There are very good **craft stalls** (Victoria Ave) outside the Peoples Supermarket. The modern buildings of the **Municipal Market** (Map p215; Kaoshiung Rd) give it a more formal feel than the hectic market in Lilongwe; it's still worth a visit even if you don't want to buy anything.

Sleeping

Blantyre has a couple of good budget options for backpackers, as well as excellent midrange and top-end choices. Most hotels are located in Blantyre city centre, although a couple of the budget options are near the main bus station.



BUDGET

Doogles (Map p215; ☎ 01-621128; www.doogleslodge.com; Mulomba Pl; camping US\$3, dm US\$5.50, chalets with shared bathroom US\$16, d US\$21; 🏠) Backpackers can pitch their tents here, and there's also room for a few trucks and cars with tents. The rooms and dorms are decent enough, but some of the chalets are looking a little rough and it's not the most friendly of places. The bar is open to the general public and is always lively – fine if you want to party, not so good if you want to relax or get some sleep (see opposite). 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. They also run budget tours.

Limbe Country Club (Map p213; ☎ 01-641145; Livingstone Ave, Limbe; camping per person US\$7.50) An alternative for those with wheels. Here you can park and camp on the edge of the playing fields. Rates include club membership, so you can use the showers and restaurant inside.

Kabula Lodge (☎ 01-621216; Kabula Hill; dm/s/d US\$10/35/45; 🏠) Northwest of the city centre, off Michiru Rd, this is highly recommended. Dorms have only two or three beds, and rates for the spotless, comfortable rooms include breakfast. 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. There's also an internet café with cheap, fast access.

Blantyre Lodge (Map p215; ☎ 01-834460; Chileka Rd; r US\$15) Large hotel near the bus station. It has a rather clinical feel to it, but the rooms are good value (although they could do without the wall-to-wall, plush maroon carpeting) and the premises secure.

Henderson Street Guest House (Map p215; ☎ 01-823474, 794572; 19 Henderson St; r US\$21) This small and welcoming guesthouse has five rooms with large baths and DSTV. The house itself sits in a massive garden and is a great place to shut yourself away from the noise of the city. Rates include breakfast.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Jambo House (Map p215; ☎ 01-623709; jambofrica@africa-online.net; Kabula Hill; s/d with shared bathroom US\$30/40, d US\$40/50; 🏠) A homely little place, off Michiru Rd, with just four bedrooms, a swimming pool and gardens with excellent views of the sur-

rounding 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. All prices include breakfast.

Alendo Hotel (Map p215; ☎ 01-621866; 15 Chitembwe Rd; s/d from US\$55/65) In the centre, this is the Malawian Institute of Tourism training school and has super-eager staff and bright airy corridors but tight rooms. The facilities are good, however, and there's secure parking. The attached Kachere Restaurant (three-course dinner US\$10) is good value.

Mount Soche Hotel (Map p215; ☎ 01-620588; mountsoche@sunbirdmalawi.com; Glyn Jones Rd; B&B s/d US\$120/135; 🏠) Popular with business travellers, it also has all the required facilities although it's not quite as swish as Ryalls. Ask for a room at a back; they have balconies with grand views over the hills.

Ryalls Protea Hotel (Map p215; ☎ 01-620955; ryalls@proteamalawi.com; 2 Hanover Ave; s/d US\$210/243; 🏠) 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

Blantyre has a good selection of places to eat to suit all budgets and the widest variety available in Malawi.

RESTAURANTS

Alem Ethiopian Restaurant (Map p215; ☎ 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 *wot* (sauce), but you can also get 'normal' meals like chicken and chips or curry.

Hong Kong Restaurant (Map p215; ☎ 01-620859; Robins Rd; dishes US\$2.50-4; 🕒 lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) Housed in a grand pagoda-style building that belies the rather mediocre food. For a Chinese restaurant the menu is surprisingly limited and the food, although it arrives in large portions, is nothing special.

Bombay Palace (Map p215; ☎ 08-400400, 600600; Hanover Ave; starters US\$2, mains US\$6-10; 🕒 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This place serves the best Indian food in the city. It's stylishly decorated and the food tastes surprisingly fresh and light. Their speciality is the Rumali Basket Masala – a light crispy batter filled with onions, tomatoes and green chillies.

Old Manager's House (Map p215; 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 (p214) and has excellent homemade cakes, salads and good coffee. Mains include homemade lasagne and fishcakes.

21 Grill on Hanover (Map p215; Ryalls Protea Hotel; starters US\$3, mains US\$9-17; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This is a highly rated eatery, with swanky interior complete with soft lighting, mahogany bookcases, comfortable cushioned chairs and the soft tinkle of piano music in the background. Serves seriously good steaks and seafood.

Michiru Restaurant (Map p215; Mount Soche Hotel; mains US\$12-17; 🕒 dinner Mon-Sat) This is the smart, top-floor restaurant at the Mount Soche Hotel. Excellent steak, fish, chicken and prawn dishes come with a hefty price tag, but the views are pretty fine.

FOOD STALLS & CAFÉS

Kips (Map p215; ☎ 01-635247; Hanover Ave; breakfast US\$1, dishes US\$1.30-5; 🕒 8am-10pm Sun-Thu, 8am-midnight Fri & Sat) Dishes up a real mix of pizzas, burgers, fish, steak, Malawian and Indian meals. It's clean and deservedly popular with locals.

Jungle Pepper (Map p215; ☎ 01-635135; pizzas US\$4-5; 🕒 10.30am-9pm Thu-Tue) Off Livingstone Ave. Teems with office workers over the lunch hour, due to a tasty and diverse selection of fresh pizzas and hotdogs.

Temptation Coffee Shop (Map p215; Glyn Jones Rd; dishes US\$2-5; 🕒 8am-6pm) Serves good burgers, tasty Malawian dishes and a tempting selection of pastries for sweet tooth.

Megabite Takeaway Café (Map p215; Independence Dr; dishes US\$1.50-5; 🕒 11am-9pm Mon-Sat) Little courtyard café that is popular with the lunchtime office crowd. Serves fish and chips and Malawi curries.

SELF-CATERING

The main **Peoples Supermarket** (Map p215; Independence Dr) sells food and other goods, much of it imported from South Africa or Europe and sold at similar prices. Cheaper but more limited supplies can be bought at **Kandodo supermarket** (Map p215; Glyn Jones Rd). There's also a huge **Shoprite** (Map p213; Kamuzu Highway) a few kilometres out of town.

Drinking & Entertainment**BARS, NIGHTCLUBS & PERFORMANCE VENUES**

Legends (Map p215; Hanover Ave; admission US\$1, live music US\$3) A popular American-style bar and nightclub that gets hot and busy after 10pm.

Garden Terrace Bar (Map p215; Mount Soche Hotel) Caters to a more composed market and its tranquil surrounds are appealing. At the same hotel, the Sportsman's Bar is favoured by local businessmen and other movers and shakers.

Doogles bar (Map p215; 🕒 to late) Like a constant happy hour, where a fluent stream of travellers chill out and socialise with devoted expats and well-to-do Malawians.

Chimwe Restaurant (Map p215; 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.

French Cultural Centre (Map p213; ☎ 01-671250; ccf@malawi.net; cnr Moi Rd & Kasungu Cres; 🕒 8am-12pm & 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 Angelique Kidjo.

Blantyre Sports Club, off Independence Dr, features live music on the last Friday of every month. Occasional live music is played at both the Mount Soche Hotel and Ryalls Protea Hotel, where entry is about US\$3.

SPECTATOR SPORT

Blantyre's main sports venue is the Chichiri Stadium (Map p213), off Makata Rd, between the city centre and Limbe. This is also Malawi's national stadium; international football and other events are held here. There's no regular programme, but matches are advertised in the newspaper and on billboards around town.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

Blantyre's Chileka airport is about 15km north of the city centre. For details on the airport and flights to/from Blantyre see p231 and p233.

Airline offices in Blantyre include **Air Malawi** (Map p215; ☎ 01-620811; Robins Rd); **KLM & Kenya Airways** (Map p215; ☎ 01-620106; Mount Soche Hotel); **British Airways** (Map p215; ☎ 01-624333; Victoria Ave); and **South African Airways** (Map p215; ☎ 01-620627; Haile Selassie Rd).

BUS & MINIBUS

Coachline buses run between Blantyre and Lilongwe (US\$18, four hours, three daily), stopping at the Total petrol station near Ryalls Protea Hotel on Hanover St. The booking office is also here.

Blantyre's main bus station (for Shire Bus Lines long-distance express and ordinary services) 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. It's often quicker to get a local minibus to Limbe bus station, and then a long-distance bus or 'half-bus' from there rather than wait for the Shire express or ordinary buses in Blantyre. Routes include Zomba (US\$1), Mulanje (US\$1.50), and Mangochi (US\$3).

TRAIN

For information on trains that stop at Blantyre and Limbe, see p232 and p236.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

A taxi from the airport to the city costs around US\$10, but agree on a price with the driver

first. The price can be negotiated down a bit if you're going from the city to the airport. If your budget doesn't include taxis, frequent local buses between the Blantyre city centre bus station and Chileka township pass the airport gate. The fare is US\$0.30.

BUS

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 Highway between Blantyre city centre bus station and Limbe bus station. The one-way fare is US\$0.30.

TAXI

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 from Blantyre to Limbe costs around US\$5.

AROUND BLANTYRE

Blantyre is surrounded by three 'mountains', Michiru, Soche and Ndirande, all actually large hills that can all be hiked to the summit. Some hikers have been attacked on **Mt Ndirande**, so you should go here only with a guide. These can be arranged from Doogles (see p216) for around US\$2 per day. The path up **Mt Soche** starts at Soche Secondary School.

The most rewarding excursion is to **Mt Michiru**, 8km northwest of the city, a conser-

MALAWI'S CUP OF TEA

South and east of Blantyre, on the rolling hills of the Shire Highlands, the climate is ideal for growing tea, and the area is covered with plantations (or 'estates'). The first tea bushes were imported from India during the early days of the Nyasaland colony, and the tea production quickly became a major industry. It's now a major export crop (along with tobacco and sugar), providing thousands of people with jobs.

As you travel along the main road between Limbe and Mulanje, the seemingly endless fields of tea appear as vivid green girds carpeting the hillsides. The tea-pickers (men and women) work their way slowly down the lines, picking just a few leaves and a bud from the top of each bush and throwing them into large baskets on their backs. At the end of each shift, the baskets are taken to a collection area, where they are weighed and each worker's wages are calculated. The leaves are then transported to a tea factory, where they are trimmed and dried before being packed in bags and boxes ready for export. A small proportion of low-quality tea stays within the country to be sold locally.

If you have a genuine interest in tea production it may be possible to arrange a tour of an estate and factory. There is no established set-up; you simply call the estate and ask a senior manager if it's possible to visit. You'll probably need your own vehicle, or have to take a taxi, as most estate offices are off the main road and difficult to reach by public transport. The best place to start with is **Satemwa Estate** (☎ 01-473233/500; www.satemwa.com) near the small town of Thyolo (*cho-low*) on the main road between Limbe and Mulanje. Highly recommended is a night in their Chawani Bungalow (US\$70 per night), which sleeps up to eight guests and includes the services of a caretaker/cook. From the bungalow you can walk through the tea estates or go through the evergreen forest remnants on nearby Thyolo Mountain, which is a popular bird-watching spot.

Another estate that sometimes allows visits is **British Tea Estates** (☎ 01-472266). The tourist office in Blantyre (p214) may have more suggestions.

vation area with nature trails. Animals found here include monkeys, klipspringers and even leopards, but you're unlikely to see very much of them. Bird-watching is much more rewarding – more than 400 species have been recorded in the area. To reach the visitor centre (where the trails start), take Kabula Hill Rd from the city and Michiru Rd through a select suburb and then a township. At the end of the sealed road (3km from Blantyre), a dirt road leads along the eastern foot of the mountain. Take the left turn that is signposted 'nature trails', which takes you to the visitor centre, where you can buy a map. There's no public transport, but you can get a taxi as far as the driver is prepared to go along the dirt road, and then you will need to walk the rest of the way. You may be able to get a lift back with other visitors.

MULANJE

This small town is the centre of Malawi's tea-growing industry. You may stay overnight here if you're going to Mozambique, but most travellers come on the way to Mt Mulanje.

Mulanje Golf Club (☎ 01-466260; camping per person US\$3.80), on the eastern side of town, is planted

in a scenic spot below the mountain. The first night's rate includes membership, so you can use the showers and bar, and consecutive nights only cost US\$2.

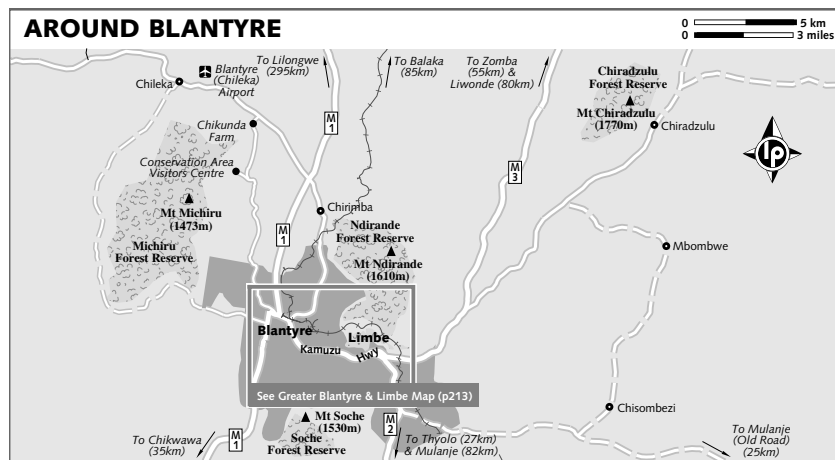
The **Council Resthouse** (r with shared/private bathroom US\$0.50/1), close to the bus station, is bargain basement in price and quality. Heading closer to Likhubula on the main road, **Mulanje Motel** (☎ 01-466245; r with shared/private bathroom US\$3/6.50) is a much better budget option.

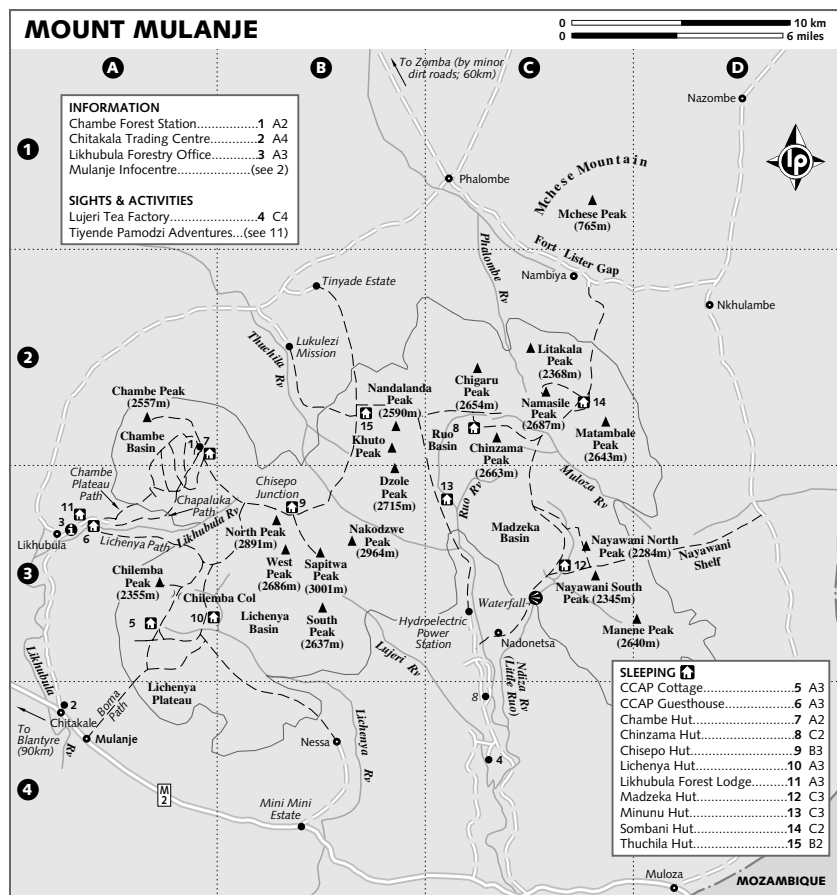
Limbani Lodge (☎ 01-466390; s/d US\$5/7.50, VIP r US\$13), near the School for the Blind, has the best beds in town. Standard rooms are comfy and the 'VIP' rooms contain TV and fully equipped kitchens.

Ordinary buses go to/from Blantyre and Limbe (US\$1.30, 1½ hours, seven daily) as do minibuses (US\$1.50, 40 minutes). If you're heading for the border of Mozambique, minibuses, *matola* and buses all run to Mulozza (US\$0.50, 40 minutes). For more border crossing information, see p232.

MOUNT MULANJE

Mt Mulanje (also called the Mulanje Plateau) rises steeply from the undulating plain of the highlands, surrounded by near-vertical cliffs





of bare rock, many over 1000m high. The cliffs are dissected by vegetated valleys, where rivers drop in spectacular waterfalls. 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.

Mulanje measures about 30km from west to east and 25km from north to south, with an area of at least 600 sq km. On its northeastern corner is the outlier Mchese Mountain, separated from the main massif by the Fort Lister Gap. The massif is composed of several

bowl-shaped river basins, separated by rocky peaks and ridges. The highest peak is Sapitwa (3001m), the highest point in Malawi and in all Southern Africa north of the Drakensberg. There are other peaks on the massif above 2500m, and you can reach most of the summits without technical climbing.

For hikers, it's worth remembering that Mulanje is a big mountain with notoriously unpredictable weather. After periods of heavy rain, streams can become swollen and impassable – do not try to cross them! Wait until the flood subsides (sometimes after a few hours) or adjust your route to cross in safety further upstream. 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 (called *chiperone*) can last several days, and temperatures drop below freezing. None of this is a problem as long as you've got warm, waterproof gear and don't get lost. Otherwise, you risk suffering from severe exposure. In 1999 an unfortunate traveller died up here.

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. The friendly and helpful staff can arrange guides and porters from an official list. You must register here and make reservations for the mountain huts (you can also call or write in advance). Camping is permitted only near huts and only when they're full. Open fires are not allowed – this is especially important during the latter part of the dry season, when there is a serious fire risk. The collecting of plants and animals is forbidden.

Also good for information is the **Mulanje Infocentre** (☎ 01-466466, infomulanje@malawi.net) based at Chitakale Trading Centre, on the corner of Phalombe Rd. It's set up to give travellers all pertinent information about hiking on the mountain and carries a good selection of books and maps.

An excellent company based in the area is **Tiyende Pamodzi Adventures** (☎ 01-467737; www.cholemawli.com/pamodzi). Located at Likhubula Forest Lodge, it gets rave reviews from travellers and offers packages from US\$145 for a two-day package to \$370 for six days.

There is nowhere you can buy food on Mt Mulanje, so you must carry all you need. At Likhubula there's a small market, but you're better off getting supplies at Chitikali (where the dirt road to Likhubula turns off the main

sealed Blantyre–Mulanje road), which has shops, stalls and a small supermarket, or in Blantyre.

Guidebooks & Maps

The *Guide to Mulanje Massif*, by Frank Eastwood, has information on ascent routes and main peaks plus a large section on rock climbing, but nothing on the routes between huts. There's more detail on Mulanje in Lonely Planet's *Trekking in East Africa*, which also covers Nyika and Zomba.

If you need detailed maps, the Department of Surveys prints a map of the mountain at 1:40,000, which shows most of the paths and huts. The 1:30,000 *Tourist Map of Mulanje* covers a similar area, overprinted with extra information for hikers. These maps are usually available from the Department of Surveys Map Sales Offices in Lilongwe (p168) and Blantyre (p212), but stocks occasionally run dry.

Guides & Porters

Porters are not obligatory, but they make the hiking easier, especially for the first day's steep hike from Likhubula Forestry Office. Guides are definitely recommended to help you through the maze of paths.

As you arrive in Likhubula (or Mulanje town) you'll be besieged by hopeful locals looking for work, but you should arrange guides and porters only at Likhubula, as the forest station keeps a registered list, which works on a rotation system. Some porters are not on the list but are 'cleared' by the office staff.

There is a standard charge of around US\$7 per day per porter and US\$8 per guide (regardless of group size), payable in kwacha (you should avoid hiring porters who undercut this price in their eagerness to get work). The total

PINES ON MULANJE

The pine plantations on Mulanje were first established by the colonial government in the early 1950s, mainly around Chambe. The sides of all the massif are too steep for a road, so all timber is cut by hand and then carried down on a cableway (called the skyline) or on the heads of forest labourers. As you're going up the Chambe Plateau Path you'll see these incredibly hardy guys walking downhill, sometimes running, with huge planks of wood balanced on their heads.

The plantations provide employment for local people and wood for the whole of southern Malawi. A bad side effect, apart from the ugliness of the plantations, is the tendency of pine trees to spread slowly across the natural grassland as seeds are blown by the wind. These introduced trees disturb the established vegetation balance – which is always precarious in highland areas.

fee for the whole trip should be agreed before departure and put in writing. Fees are paid at the end of the trip but porters are expected to provide their own food, so about 25% may be required in advance. Make sure guides and porters bring everything they need, and tell them no other food can be provided. Even if you do this, you'll still feel guilty when you stop for lunch and your escorts sit and watch you, so take a few extra packets of biscuits for them. You may want to tip your porters and guides if the service has been good; a rule of thumb is to pay something around an extra day's wage for every three to five days. The maximum weight each porter can carry is 18kg.

Hiking Routes

There are about six main 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.

Once you're on the massif, a network of paths links the huts and peaks, and many different permutations are possible; we outline some choices in the boxed text, below. Be warned that some of the routes are impassable or otherwise dangerous. The route from Madzeka Hut to Lujeri is very steep, and the wooden ladders required to cross the steepest sections have rotted away, making it effectively impassable. On the southwestern side of Mulanje, the Boma Path and the path from Lichenya to Nessa are both dangerously steep and very rarely used.

A MULANJE TRAVERSE

There are many ways to traverse the Mulanje massif. The route we describe briefly here, from Likhubula to Fort Lister, is one of several options, although it seems to be the most popular. It can be done in four days, but there are several variations that can extend this period, and plenty of opportunities for sidetracking, to take in a few peaks and ridges or explore small valleys.

Likhubula Forestry Office to Chambe Hut

There are two options: the Chambe Plateau Path, which is short and steep (two to four hours); and the Chapaluka Path (3½ to five hours), which is less steep and more scenic. From the hut veranda, there are good views of the southeastern face of Chambe Peak (2557m), but if you fancy reaching the summit of this spectacular peak, from Chambe Hut it will take you five to seven hours to get to the top and back. The ascent is stiff and the paths are vague, so you may need a guide. About two to 2½ hours from the hut, you reach a large cairn on a broad level part of the ridge at the foot of the main face. You might be happy with reaching this point, which offers excellent views over the Chambe Basin to the escarpment edge and the plains far below.

Chambe Hut to Chisepo or Thuchila Hut

This route is 12km (five to six hours). About two hours from Chambe, you reach Chisepo Junction, where a path leads up to the summit of Sapitwa Peak (3001m). You can hike to the summit of Sapitwa, but it's a toughie – not surprisingly, perhaps, Sapitwa means 'Don't Go There' in the local language – and the upper section involves some tricky scrambling among large boulders and dense vegetation. From Chisepo Junction you should allow three to five hours for the ascent, plus two to four for the descent. You can then either spend the night at Chisepo Hut or push on through to either Chambe or Thuchila Hut. If you're short of time, you can do a shorter loop by descending from Thuchila Hut to Lukulezi Mission, then hiking or catching a *matola* back to Likhubula.

Thuchila Hut to Sombani Hut

This stage (12km, four to five hours) takes you across a small col and down into the Ruo Basin. About two hours from Thuchila Hut, you reach Chinzama Hut, where you can stop if you want an easy day. The large mountain directly opposite Sombani Hut is Namasile (2687m), which takes about three hours to ascend, plus two hours on the descent. The path is steep and strenuous

It normally takes about three to six hours to hike between one hut and the next, which means you can walk in the morning, dump your kit, then go out to explore a nearby peak or valley in the afternoon.

Sleeping

BELOW THE MOUNTAIN

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

Likhubula Forest Lodge (☎ 01-467737; likhubula@cholemalawi.com; camping per person US\$5, s/d/tr US\$20/25/30) At Likhubula, this stylish lodge has a kitchen, comfortable lounge and several bedrooms and is spotless all over. A cook will prepare your food and wash up. You can camp in the grounds. The entire lodge can be rented for US\$150 a night.

in places, spiralling round the northern side of the mountain to approach the summit from the west. A guide is recommended unless you're competent on vague paths in bad weather.

Sombani Hut to Fort Lister Gap

This stage (5km, three hours) is all downhill, with great views over the surrounding plains. There are a lot of forks, so a guide is useful to show you the way, but otherwise at every fork keep going down. For the last section you follow a dirt track, past Fort Lister Forest Station, from where it's another 8km along the dirt road to Phalombe village. There's little or no traffic, so you'll have to hike (about two hours), but it's pleasant enough. Most porters include this stretch in the fee you pay for the final day.

From Phalombe ordinary buses go back to Likhubula or Mulanje (US\$0.50, one hour, three daily), as do *matola* (US\$1).

CHAMBE-LICHENYA LOOP

This short but beautiful route is not an officially named trail, but we give it this title and recommend it for a good taste of Mulanje if you haven't got time for a traverse of the whole massif. It starts and finishes at Likhubula Forestry Office, and takes three days and two nights, but could be shortened to two days.

Likhubula Forestry Office to Chambe Hut

This stage is the same as the first stage of the Mulanje traverse.

Chambe Hut to Lichenya Basin

This stage is four to five hours. Heading east from Chambe Hut (towards Thuchila), turn right at a junction about 1½ hours from Chambe Hut to reach the Lichenya Basin, and either the CCAP Cottage or Lichenya Hut.

Lichenya Basin to Likhubula Forestry Office

This stage is four to five hours. Go across a col to the east of Chilemba Peak (you could sidetrack up here for fine views – allow two hours return) then descend through beautiful forest to eventually reach Likhubula.

ON THE MOUNTAIN

Forestry huts (camping per person US\$0.80, huts per person US\$1.30) On Mulanje are eight forestry huts: Chambe, Chisepo, Lichenya, Thuchila (*chuchila*), Chinzama, Minunu, Madzeka and Sombani. Each is equipped with benches, tables and open fires with plenty of wood. Some have sleeping platforms (no mattresses); in others you just sleep on the floor. You provide your own food, cooking gear, candles, sleeping bag and stove (although you can cook on the fire). A caretaker chops wood, lights fires and brings water, for which a small tip should be paid.

Payments must be made at Likhubula Forestry Office – show your receipt to the hut caretaker. The huts are an absolute bargain. Camping is permitted near the huts when there are no more beds. Some huts may be full

at weekends, but you can normally adjust your route around this. As the reservation system doesn't require a deposit, some local residents book and then don't turn up – it's worth checking to see if this has happened.

CCAP Cottage (beds US\$1.30) On the Lichenya Plateau, this is similar to the forestry huts, but there are utensils in the kitchen, plus mattresses and blankets. You can make reservations at the CCAP Mission in Likhubula.

Getting There & Away

See p217 and p219 for information on buses between Blantyre and Mulanje town. The dirt road to Likhubula turns off the main sealed Blantyre–Mulanje road at Chitikal, about 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 Chitikal. From here, irregular *matola* run to Likhubula (US\$0.50). If you're in a group, you can hire the whole *matola* to Likhubula for around US\$10. Alternatively, you can walk (10km, two to three hours); it's a pleasant hike through tea estates, with good views of the southwestern face of Mulanje on your right.

LOWER SHIRE

The main road south from Blantyre plunges down the Thyolo Escarpment in a series of hairpin bends to reach the Lower Shire, which is a thin spine of Malawian territory jutting into Mozambique. From the escarpment road, there are excellent views across the Shire River floodplains and out towards the Zambezi on the hazy horizon. Even when it's cool in the highlands, it can be blisteringly hot down here. The sharp change of temperature and landscape, in less than 30km, is most striking.

This is one of the least-visited areas of Malawi, very different from the rest of the country, and it contains Lengwe National Park, the reserves of Majete and Mwabvi, and the Elephant Marsh, a vast area of seasonally flooded swampland. Lengwe, Majete and Mwabvi are often overlooked, but slowly their infrastructure and facilities are improving so this may change in the future.

Majete Wildlife Reserve

Majete Wildlife Reserve lies west of the Shire; it's mainly miombo woodland, with dense patches of forest along the river. Animals re-

corded here include elephants, sables, kudus and hartebeests. Poaching has taken a heavy toll on the mammal population, but numbers are returning. You'll still be able to appreciate the reserve as a beautiful wilderness area, though, and you're almost certain to have the place to yourself. The bird-watching is good, and hiking is allowed (with a game scout). Entry fees are payable (see p166).

The only driveable track in the reserve runs parallel to the Shire River (although not near enough for you to see it from the track), to the Shire River's confluence with the Mkurumadzi River, where you can pitch a tent at the Mkurumadzi Camp ranger post (Map p207; although there are no facilities. This was one of the notorious barriers to Livingstone's exploration; he camped in this very spot in 1858 – for more details see p159).

If you're in a car, this track crosses some steep gullies so high clearance is essential. If you're hiking you can go from the gate to Mkurumadzi in a day, stay the night and hike back. Just past the gate, a track leads east to the spectacular Kapichira Falls, although the view is tarnished slightly by the vast dam and power station.

Majete Safari Camp (Map p207; camping US\$3, chalets per person US\$5) is a friendly camp outside the reserve, just a few kilometres from the gate, overlooking the Shire River and the Matitu Falls, the southernmost of the Shire cataracts. The camp has seen better days but the chalets are fair value. The service is relaxed: there's a bar and a kitchen for self-catering, or you can buy meals (US\$2 to US\$5) if you order long in advance. Motorboat hire for fishing or birding costs US\$2 per hour.

Majete Safari Camp is 15km north of Chikwawa, on the road to Majete Wildlife Reserve. By bus, the nearest you can get is Chikwawa; there are several per day to/from Blantyre. From Chikwawa, *matola* run to Kapichira village, which is on the eastern bank of the Mkurumadzi River (this place has recently grown to house staff from the dam and power station).

Lengwe National Park

Lengwe is Malawi's southernmost park. Much of the surrounding area has been turned into sugarcane plantations, but the natural vegetation – mixed woodlands and grassy *dambo* (wetlands) – is protected here. Mammals include nyalas (at the northern limit of their

distribution in Africa), bushbucks, impalas, duikers, kudus and buffaloes. There's also a large and varied bird population.

Standard entry fees must be paid at the gate (see p166). There's a network of vehicle tracks for driving (some are impassable), but it's more rewarding to walk in the park or spend some time at the hides overlooking water holes; there's one within walking distance of the Visitors Camp.

SLEEPING

Sucoma Sports Club (☎ 01-428200 ext 287; chalets per person US\$5.50) This place, 8km east of Nchalo, is an option if you've got a car and seek more comfortable accommodation. It has comfortable chalets overlooking the river. This club is for senior staff at the sugar estate; meals and drinks are also available.

Nyala Lodge (bookings through Jambo Africa; ☎ 01-623709, www.jambo-africa.com; chalets/d US\$60/100) Large cottages with private bathrooms and spacious verandas sleeping two to four. There's also a pool and a camp site with clean ablutions and barbecue facilities. Antelope are often seen around the lodge.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

By car, take the main road from Blantyre south towards Nsanje. By public transport, take a bus from Blantyre to Nchalo or Nsanje. About 20km from the Shire Bridge a signpost indicates Lengwe National Park to the right. The park entrance is another 10km to the west through sugarcane plantations. If you're without wheels you may be able to hitch this last bit on a tractor.

To reach Sucoma Sports Club, enter the sugar estate at the main gates in Nchalo, then follow the signs to the 'Sports Club' (not the Shire Club).

Mwabvi Wildlife Reserve

In the southernmost tip of Malawi, Mwabvi is the country's smallest (under 350 sq km) and least-visited game reserve, and has a genuine wilderness atmosphere. It consists of low hills covered by mixed woodland, with numerous streams in rocky gorges and spectacular views over the Shire and Zambezi Rivers. Mwabvi was virtually abandoned in the 1980s and early 1990s. Rhinos and lions were once recorded here, but apart from a few buffaloes and nyalas it's unlikely that any large wildlife remains today.

Fees are payable (see p166).

Access is possible only with a 4WD or great determination. The reserve office is reached from the main road between Chikwawa and Nsanje, just east of the village of Sorgin, and about 10km west of Bangula. The Wildlife Society of Malawi is currently involved in projects to protect the reserve that encourage local people to benefit from its resources. These may also improve access for visitors, so it would be worth inquiring about the latest situation at the Wildlife Society of Malawi giftshop in Limbe (see p213).

Elephant Marsh

The Elephant Marsh is a large area of seasonally flooded plain on the Shire River about 30km downstream from Chikwawa, just south of the vast Sucoma sugar estates. Despite the name, there are no elephants here any more, although vast herds inhabited the area less than 100 years ago. Some hippos and crocodiles occur in quiet areas, but the main draw is the spectacular selection of birds – predominantly water species. This is one of the best **bird-watching** areas in Malawi, but it's well worth considering a visit here if you simply want to sample this peaceful and very unusual landscape.

As mornings and evenings are the best times to see birds (it's also not so hot), travellers without wheels may find it convenient to stay overnight in the village of Makhanga, about 10km northeast of Bangula. The Makhanga Leisure Centre has cheap rooms, and the New Makhanga Restaurant offers cheap food. If you have a car, you could stay at Sucoma Sports Club (left).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

The only way to see the marsh properly is by boat. The usual way of doing this is to hire a boatman and his dugout canoe from the Fisheries Depot at a small village called Mchacha James on the east side of the marsh, about 7km from Makhanga.

If you're driving, head southwest of Blantyre for 30km and turn left (east) at Thabwa (the bottom of the escarpment). Makhanga is another 65km or so further south, following the Thyolo Escarpment. From Makhanga, head north towards Muona village. After 2.5km a dirt track leads west for 4.5km through villages and small fields to Mchacha James. This route is not signposted, so ask for

directions – it may be worth arranging a local guide in Makhanga.

If you're without wheels, take the bus from Blantyre that travels to Nchalo and Nsanje. You can get a *matola* from either of these towns to Makhanga. Alternatively, you can get off this bus at Bangula, then walk 3km to the point where the road is washed away, get a canoe across, and then take a *matola* through Chiromo to Makhanga. From Makhanga, you can walk, take a bicycle taxi, rent a bike or charter a *matola* to Mchacha James. Another option is to visit the Department of Fisheries office in Makhanga, on the Muona road, about 1km west of the train tracks – the staff here have motorcycles and may be able to help you with a lift to the jetty.

MALAWI DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

Malawi's range of places to stay has expanded rapidly in the last few years. Several smart new hotels and lodges have been built along the lake and in the national parks. Backpackers are well catered for in lakeshore lodges and cheap resthouses in towns and villages. Mosquito nets are fairly important as malaria is a real problem; fortunately most places to stay provide nets in their rooms.

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\$1 up to around US\$5 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 and self-catering chalets or cabins. Some camping grounds are pretty basic, while others have good facilities.

Backpacker hostels are present in the main cities, and numerous in popular lakeshore destinations such as Cape Maclear and Nkhata Bay. Prices range from US\$3 for a dorm up to about US\$8 per person for a double or triple. Camping is usually about US\$1 to US\$3.

Midrange & Top End

Midrange hotels range from 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.

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

ACTIVITIES

This section provides only a brief overview of what's available throughout Malawi; for more information see the relevant sections.

Lake Malawi's population of colourful fish (see the boxed text, p199) attracts travellers to 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. Places where you can hire scuba gear and learn to dive include Nkhata Bay, Cape Maclear, Likoma Island and Senga Bay, plus Club Makokola and some of the other hotels and camping grounds on the southern lakeshore. Most hotels and camps also rent snorkelling equipment.

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. Canoeing is available at Cape Maclear and Nkhata Bay.

PRACTICALITIES

- Malawi's main newspapers are *the Daily Times*, *Malawi News* and *The Nation*. *The Chronicle* is a smaller publication but with a stronger independent voice (read relentless criticism of the government).
- 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. There are also commercial music stations in the large cities.
- Malawi's national TV station was launched in 1999 and consists mostly of imported programs, news, regional music videos and religious programs. International satellite channels are available in most midrange and top-end hotels.

You can go fishing in Lake Malawi for *mpasa* (also called lake salmon), *ncheni* (lake tiger), *sungwa* (a type of perch), *kampango* or *vundu* (both catfish). There are trout in streams on Nyika, Zomba and Mulanje Plateaus, and tigerfish can be hooked in the Lower Shire.

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, and has some spectacular routes (including the longest in Africa), although local climbers also visit smaller crags and outcrops.

The main area for horse riding is the Nyika Plateau, which lends itself perfectly to travel on horseback. You can go on short rides or longer multiday safaris. If you prefer non-animated transport, Nyika's hilly landscape and good network of dirt tracks are also great for mountain biking.

BOOKS

This section covers books specific to Malawi; titles on the whole Southern Africa region are covered on p24. Literature by Malawian writers is covered on p47.

Field Guides

Birds of Malawi: A Supplement to Newman's Birds of Southern Africa, by KB Newman, 'bridges the bird gap' between species covered in Southern Africa and East African guides.

Cichlids & Other Fishes of Lake Malawi, by A Koning, is encyclopaedic – in both size and coverage.

Guide to the Fishes of Lake Malawi, by D Lewis et al, is sometimes called the 'WWF guide' as this organisation was the publisher. In contrast to Koning's tome, this guide is small, portable and perfect for amateurs, although not easy to find as it was published in 1986.

Trees of Malawi, by JS Pullinger & AM Kitchen, is a large-format book with detailed colour illustrations.

General

Between the Cape and Cairo, by artist Tony Grogan, is a splendid coffee-table book, with a collection of sketches and paintings from all parts of Malawi.

Jungle Lovers, by Paul Theroux, is a light humorous novel, set in a mythical country immediately recognisable to many as Banda-

era Malawi. It neatly captures life in Africa for locals and foreigners.

Malawi – Lake of Stars, by Frank Johnston, features a collection of beautiful photographs with evocative text by Vera Garland.

Malawi – The Warm Heart of Africa, by Frank Johnston and Sandy Ferrar, is a coffee-table book with excellent photography, but meatier text, focusing largely on Malawi's grave environmental issues.

Guidebooks

Malawi, Lonely Planet's specific guide, gives more in-depth coverage of Malawi. *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. They have an emphasis on wildlife and cover a surprisingly wide area. The only problem is that they're aimed mostly at people with cars – thereby precluding many travellers and about 99% of Malawi's population.

Malawi's National Parks & Game Reserves, by John Hough, covers all parks and reserves in the country, with full details of flora and fauna occurring in each.

Lake Malawi's Resorts, by Ted Sneed, covers in detail every place to stay (more than 70) on the lakeshore. It took so long to research that by the time Ted got to the southern end, some new places had opened in the north!

History

Livingstone's Lake, by Oliver Ransford, a classic book on Lake Malawi and the surrounding countries, was published in the 1960s and is now quite rare.

Nyasa – A Journal of Adventures, by ED Young, is a local history book written in the 1870s (reprinted in 1984); it's a missionary's account of the original Livingstonia mission at Cape Maclear.

A Short History of Malawi, by BR Rafael, is difficult to find, but the writing is quite accessible.

Travel Literature

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.

BUSINESS HOURS

Offices and shops in the main towns are usually open from 8am to 5pm weekdays, with an hour for lunch between noon and 1pm. Many shops are also open Saturday morning. In smaller towns, shops and stalls are open most days, but keep informal hours. Bank hours are usually from 8am to 3.30pm weekdays. Post and telephone offices are usually open from 7.30am to 5pm weekdays, sometimes with a break for lunch. In Blantyre and Lilongwe, they also open Saturday morning.

CHILDREN

Malawi isn't awash with childcare facilities or formal children's activities. However, many of the beach lodges have family rooms, and some of the bigger hotels in Lilongwe and Blantyre provide babysitting services. Disposable nappies and formula are widely available in supermarkets and speciality shops in Lilongwe, Blantyre and Mzuzu but can be difficult to find elsewhere.

CUSTOMS

There aren't any restrictions on the amount of foreign currency that tourists can bring into or take out of Malawi. The import or export of more than MK300 is technically forbidden, however a small amount shouldn't be a problem.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Crime

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. Some safety advice is given in the Lilongwe and Blantyre sections. There have also been robberies at popular lakeshore areas such as Cape Maclear and Nkhata Bay, but here violence is very rare.

Scams to be aware of if you're buying curios are the eager young men who offer to wrap your purchase in paper and cardboard, then want more for this job than you paid for the carving. Also on the economic front, beware of locals asking you to break a US\$100 bill into US\$10 bills and US\$20 bills. Naturally, the US\$100 bill is a fake.

Bilharzia (Schistosomiasis)

Bilharzia (or schistosomiasis) is a disease that occurs all over Africa. It is transmitted by minute worms carried by infected humans and water snails (see p770).

Although parts of the lake might be very low risk, in other areas – including some popular tourist destinations – you undoubtedly have a risk of contracting bilharzia. There's no need to panic, and no reason to avoid coming to the lake – but you should be aware of the risk.

If you do decide to swim, and you do contract bilharzia, you might suffer from some symptoms almost immediately, in which case you should seek treatment fast. But usually symptoms do not show until the disease is well established – and this can be weeks or months after exposure. Long-term effects can be very harmful so it is *essential* that you have a check-up for the disease when you get home or reach a place with good medical services.

Wildlife

Potential dangers at Lake Malawi include encountering a hippo or crocodile, but for travellers the chances of being attacked are extremely remote. Crocodiles tend to be very wary of humans and are generally found only in quiet vegetated areas around river mouths (although they may sometimes be washed into the lake by floodwater). Therefore you should be careful if you're walking along the lakeshore and have to wade a river. Popular tourist beaches are safe, although, just to be sure, you should seek local advice before diving in. The most dangerous animals in Malawi are the mosquitoes that transmit malaria.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Malawian Embassies & Consulates

Malawi has diplomatic missions in the following African countries: Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (embassies in the countries covered in this book are listed in the relevant country chapters). Elsewhere around the world, Malawian embassies include the following:

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

France (☎ 01 4070 1846; 20 Rue Euler, 75008 Paris)

Germany (☎ 49 228 343 016; Mainzerstrasse 124, 53179 Bonn)

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 (Map p213; ☎ 01-651450; Accord Centre, Limbe)

Germany (Map p169; ☎ 01-772555; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe)

Mozambique Embassy (Map p169; ☎ 01-774100; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe); Consulate (Map p213;

☎ 643189; 1st fl, Ctelte Bldg, Rayner Ave, Limbe)

South Africa (Map p169; ☎ 01-773722, sahe@malawi.net; Kang'ombe Bldg, City Centre, Lilongwe)

UK High Commission (Map p169; ☎ 01-772400; City Centre, Lilongwe); Consulate (Map p215; Hanover Ave, Blantyre)

USA (Map p169; ☎ 01-773166; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe)

Zambia (Map p169; ☎ 01-772590; Convention Dr, City Centre, Lilongwe)

Zimbabwe (Map p169; ☎ 01-774997; City Centre, Lilongwe) Off Independence Dr.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Lake of Stars Malawi Music Festival** (www.lakeofstarsfestival.co.uk) takes place each September at Chintcheche (p191) and attracts live music acts from around Africa and the UK. It lasts for three days, and proceeds go to the charity Children in the Wilderness.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays in Malawi:

New Year's Day 1 January

John Chitembe Day 15 January

Martyrs' Day 3 March

Easter March/April – Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Monday

Labour Day 1 May

Freedom Day 14 June

Republic Day 6 July

Mother's Day October – second Monday

National Tree Planting Day December – second Monday

Christmas Day 25 December

Boxing Day 26 December

When one of these dates falls at a weekend, normally the following Monday is a public holiday. Islamic holidays are also observed throughout Malawi by the Muslim population.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access is available in Lilongwe, Blantyre and Mzuzu. Internet bureaux are also making an appearance elsewhere in the country but tend to be more expensive. Some hotels and lodges will let guests send or receive email for a nominal fee.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Malawi Ministry of Tourism, Parks and Wildlife (www.tourismmalawi.com) A comprehensive resource for all things tourism in Malawi.

Malawi/Cities.Com (www.malawi.com) A glossy and informative site with some useful links.

Malawi.Net (www.malawi.net) This has links to sites of local newspapers and political parties.

LANGUAGE

English is the official language and very widely spoken. The different ethnic groups in Malawi also have their own languages or dialects.

The Chewa are the dominant group and Chichewa is the national language, widely used throughout the country as a common tongue. The 'Chi' prefix simply signifies 'language of'. Of all the other languages spoken, Tumbuka is dominant in the north and Yao in the south. See p775 for some useful words and phrases in Chichewa, Tumbuka and Yao.

MAPS

Useful maps, available in local bookshops, include the government-produced *Malawi* (1:1,000,000), showing shaded relief features and most roads, and the *Malawi Road & Tourist Map* (same scale), showing all main roads, some minor roads and national parks (but no relief) plus street maps of the main towns.

For more detail, government survey maps (1:50,000 and 1:250,000) are available from the Department of Surveys Map Sales Offices in Blantyre and Lilongwe. Specific maps and guidebooks on national parks and hiking areas are detailed under the listings for these areas.

MONEY

Malawi's unit of currency is the Malawi kwacha (MK). The kwacha is divided into 100 tambala (t).

Bank notes include MK200, MK100, MK50, MK20, MK10 and MK5. Coins include MK1, 50t, 20t, 10t, 5t and 1t, although the small tambala coins are virtually worthless.

Inflation is high in Malawi, so quoting costs in MK is not helpful, as prices may have changed significantly by the time you arrive. Therefore we have used US dollars (US\$) throughout this chapter. Although the actual exchange rate will have changed by the time you reach Malawi, the cost of things in US dollars (or any other hard currency) should not have altered as much. At big hotels and other places that actually quote in US dollars you can pay in hard currency or kwacha at the prevailing exchange rate.

ATMs

Stanbic and National Bank ATMs accept foreign cards and are found in most cities and towns including Lilongwe, Blantyre, Mzuzu, Karonga, Liwonde, Salima and Zomba.

Black Market

There's no real black market in Malawi. You may get one or two kwacha more for your dollar on the street, but the chance of robberies or cons (or fake US\$50 and US\$100 bills) means that the risk is not really worth taking compared to going to a bank or exchange bureau.

Credit Cards

You can get cash with a Visa card at Stanbic Bank and the National Bank of Malawi in Blantyre and Lilongwe. The charge is around US\$5 and it can take several hours. You're best off going to a foreign exchange bureau that will provide the same service for around US\$3 and complete the transaction on the spot.

You can use Visa cards at some but not all of the large hotels and top-end restaurants (be warned that this may add a 5% to 10% surcharge to your bill). It seems even harder to use a MasterCard. If you usually rely on plastic, you're better off using it to draw out cash and paying with that.

Tipping

Tipping is not generally expected in Malawi, as many restaurants and services will add on a service charge to your bill.

Travellers Cheques

You can change travellers cheques at most major banks and foreign exchange bureaus,

although you will need to show them the original purchase receipt. You can sometimes use travellers cheques to pay at large hotels and lodges.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

General aspects of photography in the region are covered on p747. In Malawi film and camera parts are generally available only in Blantyre and Lilongwe.

In the cities, Fuji or Konika 100 ASA 36-exposure print film costs about US\$3.50 and developing and printing costs about US\$9 for 24 exposures or US\$12 for 36. Two passport pictures will cost you around US\$5.

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. Mail from Lilongwe or Blantyre to Cape Town often takes a month. In rural areas, the post can be very slow. Post offices in Blantyre and Lilongwe have poste restante services.

To African destinations, letters less than 10g and postcards cost US\$0.60. To Europe, India, Pakistan and the Middle East it's US\$0.90 and to the Americas, Japan or Australasia postage is US\$1. It's quicker (and probably more reliable) to use the EMS Speedpost service at post offices. Letters up to 500g cost US\$5 to Europe and US\$7 to Australia and the USA.

For airmail parcels it costs about US\$10 plus US\$3 per kilo to send items outside Africa. Surface mail is cheaper.

TELEPHONE

International calls (to destinations outside Africa) from public phone offices cost around US\$4 per minute. Cheaper rates are technically available from 6pm Friday to 7am Monday, but this often doesn't translate at phone bureaus.

Telephone calls within Malawi are inexpensive – around US\$0.30 per minute depending on the distance – and the network between main cities is reliable, although the lines to outlying areas are often not working. Calls to mobiles within Malawi cost around US\$0.50 per minute. Public phones (called 'booths') take new MK1 coins only.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are used everywhere in Malawi. Mobile phone prefixes are 08 or 09 and

the two major networks are Celtel and Telekom. Sim cards are readily available from electronic stores, internet cafés and dedicated mobile-phone stores. They cost around US\$5 and include another US\$3 to US\$4 dollars worth of airtime. You can buy top-up cards at supermarkets, internet cafés, petrol stations and roadside booths, and they come in US\$2, US\$5 and US\$10 denominations.

Phone Codes

The international code for Malawi if you're dialling from abroad is 265.

Malawi does not have area codes, but all landline numbers begin with 01, so whatever number you dial within the country will have eight digits. Numbers starting with 7 are on the Lilongwe exchange; those starting with 6 are in Blantyre, although this will be slowly changing to 8 over the next couple of years; 5 is around Zomba; 4 is the south; 3 is the north; and 2 is the Salima area.

TOURIST INFORMATION

There are tourist offices in Lilongwe (p170) and Blantyre (p214), and an office at the Ministry of Wildlife and Tourism in Lilongwe (p170). Outside Malawi, tourism promotion is handled by UK-based **Malawi Tourism** (☎ 0115-982 1903; fax 0115-981 9418; 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.

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 weekdays. 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 weekdays.

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.

Visa Extensions

You can get an extension on your visa at immigration offices in Blantyre or Lilongwe or at regional police stations. The process is straightforward and free.

VOLUNTEERING

Malawi has some great, grassroots volunteering opportunities in Nkhata Bay (p189), the Chintheche Strip (p191), Monkey Bay (p200) and Cape Maclear (p203).

TRANSPORT IN MALAWI

GETTING THERE & AWAY

This section covers access to Malawi from neighbouring countries only. Information about reaching Southern Africa from elsewhere on the African continent and from other continents is outlined on p752.

Air

Malawi's main airport for international flights is at Lilongwe. It has a pharmacy, a post office, a bookshop, banks and car hire desks, plus a restaurant and bar overlooking the runway where you can use up the last of your kwacha before flying out (although beware of waiters overcharging).

There is also an airport at Blantyre, which is mostly served by regional and domestic flights. It has a small cafeteria, a bookshop and an Avis desk.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Air Malawi (www.airmalawi.net) has a pretty good regional network, with three flights a week to Harare, and 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

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.

get a wider choice of flights), with fares mostly on a par: **Air Zimbabwe** (www.airzimbabwe.com) flies three times per week to/from Harare (with connections to Victoria Falls and other parts of Southern Africa); and **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.

Ethiopian Airways (www.flyethiopian.com) flies four times a week from Addis Ababa.

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).

Border Crossings

MOZAMBIQUE

South

The quickest way to reach Mozambique south of the Zambezi is to take a minibus to the Mozambique border crossing at Zóbuè (*zob-way*; US\$2.50) and then a minibus to Tete (US\$1.50), from where buses go to Beira and Maputo. You could also get a Blantyre–Harare bus to drop you at Tete and then get a bus to Beira or Maputo.

Central

If you are heading for central Mozambique, there are several buses per day from Blantyre to Nsanje (US\$2.80), or all the way to the Malawi border at Marka (*ma-ra-ka*; US\$3.30). It's a few kilometres between the border crossings – you can walk or take a bicycle taxi – and you can change money on the Mozambique side. From here pick-ups go to Mutarara, Nhamilabue and Vila de Sena.

North

There are three border crossings from Malawi into northern Mozambique: Muloza, from where you can reach Mocuba in Mozambique, and Nayuchi and Chiponde, both of which lead to Cuamba in 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. There's a *pensão* (cheap hotel) and bank here if you need them. From Milange there's usually a chapa (pick-up or converted minibus) or truck about every other day in the dry sea-

son to Mocuba (US\$4), where you can find transport on to Quelimane or Nampula.

Further north, minibuses and *matola* run a few times per day between Mangochi and Namwera (US\$2), where there are resthouses. You can also get a bicycle taxi for the remaining 10km to the border crossing at Chiponde (US\$3). If you get stuck at Namwera, you can take a bicycle taxi to Chiponde (US\$3). It's 7km to the Mozambique border crossing at Mandimba and the best way to get there is by bicycle taxi (US\$2). Mandimba has a couple of *pensãos*, and there's at least one vehicle daily, usually a truck, between here and Cuamba (US\$4).

The third 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. Be warned, though, that there's very little transport of any sort on this route so you could be waiting a long time; the Mandimba crossing is a better option.

Boat

The Lake Malawi steamboat *Ilala* (see p234) stops at both Cóbue (*kob-way*) 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. For short visits, you can pay US\$1.30 for a lakeshore pass, which enables you to spend 10 days on the Mozambican lakeshore only (you must return to Malawi).

Another way to get to the Mozambican lakeshore is to take a dhow (local sailing boat) from Likoma Island to Cóbue (US\$0.80). A road connecting Cóbue and Metangula is scheduled for upgrading, so you may be able to hitch a ride. Alternatively, you could do this section by boat (often on the same boat that brought you over from Likoma). A motorboat (US\$5) takes six hours and a dhow (US\$2.50) can take one or two days, so bring your own food and water.

For more information on the Mozambique side of Lake Malawi, see p284.

Train

If you're heading to northern Mozambique, a passenger train departs Limbe on Wednesdays at 7am, travelling via Balaka and Liwonde to Nayuchi. The fare from Limbe to Nayuchi is US\$3.30, but it's more popular to get on at Liwonde, from where it costs US\$2. From

Nayuchi (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 quickly and cheaply, **City to City** (☎ 09-937499) and **Translux** (☎ 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 around mid-afternoon the next day. **Ingwe** (☎ 01-622313, 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 Devil St in Lilongwe. There's a ticket office where you can book; fares are US\$33. If you're travelling from the south, your first sight of a Tanzanian bus – like something from the movie *Mad Max* or the worst carnival ride you've ever had – may be quite a shock. 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 *matola* travel to the Songwe border crossing (US\$1.30). It's 200m across the bridge to the Tanzanian border crossing.

Once you're on the Tanzanian side of the border, minibuses and bicycle taxis travel the 5km distance to Kyela, from where you can get a bus to Dar es Salaam. You can change money with the bicycle taxi boys but beware of scams.

Boat

The *Songeya* ferry sails between Mbamba Bay in Tanzania and Nkhata Bay on Malawi's northern lakeshore every Saturday. The journey takes 3½ hours, and the fares for 1st-/economy-class deck are US\$11/6.50. Cabins are also available; children travel for US\$3.

ZAMBIA

There are three direct buses per week between Lilongwe and Lusaka (US\$25), also departing from Devil St, but it's a long haul

and you're better off doing the trip in stages. There is no specific office to 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.

From the Zambian side of the border crossing, shared taxis run to Chipata (US\$2), which is about 30km west of the border, from where you can reach Lusaka or South Luangwa National Park (for more details see p661).

ZIMBABWE

Although Zimbabwe doesn't border Malawi, many travellers go directly between the two countries. The cheapest option is the daily **Munorurama Bus** (☎ 01-6248735), between Blantyre and Harare (US\$15). The bus departs from opposite the Chileka Rd bus station at 7.30am and arrives in Harare by late afternoon. The service in this direction is good, and on Wednesday and Saturday it continues all the way to Jo'burg (US\$38). Travelling from Harare to Blantyre costs the same, but is a much slower trip because local people bring in loads of Zimbabwean goods and there are big searches at the border. Some travellers have been on the northbound bus for over two days! If you do get interminably stuck at the Mwanza border crossing, you're better off abandoning the big bus and getting a local minibus to Blantyre (US\$2.50).

GETTING AROUND

You can travel around Malawi by air, road, rail or boat. Compared to other countries in the region, distances between major centres are quite short, and generally roads and public transport systems are quite good, making independent travel fairly straightforward.

Air

For domestic flights, departure tax is US\$2.

AIRLINES IN MALAWI

Fares for all vary according to the number of people in your group, so contact these companies direct for more details.

Air Malawi (☎ 01-772123, 753181, 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. Air Malawi's booking system is not always reliable, so be prepared for lost reservations or double bookings.

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.

Bicycle

Bicycles are available for hire at many lodges throughout Malawi. You can also hire bicycles or arrange mountain bike tours through Land & Lake Safaris (p170).

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 p232.) Many travellers rate this journey as a highlight of the country, although there are occasionally nasty storms. If you're unlucky, be prepared for some pitching and rolling.

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

Northbound port	Arrival	Departure
Monkey Bay	–	10am (Fri)
Chipoka	1pm	4pm (Fri)
Nkhotakota	12am	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	12.00pm	2.00pm (Tue)
Nkhotakota	5.30pm	7.30pm (Tue)
Chipoka	3.30am	7.30am (Wed)
Monkey Bay	10.30am (Wed)	–

The *Ilala* has three classes. Cabin Class was once luxurious and the cabins are still in reasonable condition. The spacious First Class Deck is most popular with travellers, due largely to the sociable bar, around which you are likely to meet a new soulmate or two. There are also seats, a shaded area and mattresses for hire (US\$2) in case you're doing the long-haul journey. Economy covers the entire lower deck and is dark and crowded, and engine fumes permeate from below.

Cabin and First Class Deck passengers can dine in the ship's restaurant, where a beef curry, *peri-peri* chicken or meal of similar standard costs US\$5. Food is also served from a galley on the Economy Deck; a meal of beans, rice and vegetables costs under US\$1.

Reservations are usually required for Cabin Class. For other classes, tickets are sold only when the boat is sighted. However, there's no question of anyone being refused – it just keeps filling up! If you travel Economy Class, you can visit the First Class Deck to buy a beer, but you'll have to pay extra for the privilege.

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
Ruarwe	18	10	4
Monkey Bay	50	35	10

When the *Ilala* stops at lakeside towns or villages, the water is too shallow for it to come close; the lifeboat is used to ferry passengers ashore. On its southbound journey, the *Ilala* docks at Nkhata Bay for seven hours and traders come aboard, selling food, drinks and newspapers.

Bus & Minibus CLASSES

There are three options for bus travel in Malawi. Top of the range is Coachline, operated by **Shire Bus Lines** (☎ 01-756226). This luxury nonstop service with air-con, toilet, snacks, steward service and good drivers travels three times a day between Blantyre and Lilongwe (see Getting There & Away under Lilongwe,

Mzuzu and Blantyre for details). There's a daily express service operated between Lilongwe and Mzuzu by Sacramento Bus. You can't reserve in advance, but these are more comfortable than other express buses, with comfortable reclining seats and music. 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.

All journey durations for ordinary buses in this chapter are best estimates of the real length, which is usually double the official length. There are also many private buses and minibuses on the roads, either slotting in between Shire bus services or serving the routes they don't. Fares are about the same as express buses, or slightly more, depending on the route. There are also local minibuses services around towns and to outlying villages, or along the roads that the big buses can't manage. (In Malawi vehicles with about 30 seats are called 'half-buses' to distinguish them from big buses and minibuses.)

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*.

COSTS

As a rule of thumb, express buses charge between US\$1.50 and US\$2.50 per 100km, and ordinary buses slightly less. In rural areas there are also local services that cover the quieter routes and tend to be slow and crowded. Everyone pays a fare to the driver – normally a bit more than a bus would charge (ie around US\$3 per 100km).

RESERVATIONS

You can buy a ticket in advance for Coachline services and are allocated a reserved seat; a week's notice is sometimes needed, particularly for Friday and Sunday services.

Car & Motorcycle

The majority of main routes are mostly good-quality sealed roads, but in recent years several stretches of road have not been repaired and potholes are opening up. In some areas these have made driving slow, difficult and dangerous. Secondary roads are usually graded dirt

and also vary. Some are well maintained and easy to drive on in a normal car; others are very bad, especially after rain, and slow even with 4WD. Rural routes are not so good, and after heavy rain they are often impassable, sometimes for weeks.

If you're bringing a car into Malawi from any other country without a carnet, a temporary import permit costs US\$2.50 (payable in kwacha) and compulsory third-party insurance is US\$25 for one month. There's also a US\$20 road tax fee – you must produce the documentation for this if you are driving the car out. When you leave Malawi, a permit handling fee of US\$3 is payable. Receipts are issued.

DRIVING LICENCE

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

FUEL & SPARE PARTS

Fuel costs around US\$1 per litre for petrol and US\$0.80 per litre for diesel. Supplies are usually reliable and distances between towns with filling stations are not long in Malawi, so you rarely need to worry about running dry. Spare parts are available in Lilongwe, Blantyre and Mzuzu.

HIRE

Most car hire companies are based in Blantyre and Lilongwe. Those with offices in more than one city can arrange pick-up-drop-off deals. International names include Avis, and there are several independent outfits. You should shop around as companies often have special deals and some will negotiate. You can also hire a car through a travel agent – they may have access to special deals. Whoever you hire from, be prepared for a car that is not up to Western standards. Check the tyres and as much else as you can. If anything is worn or broken, demand repairs or a discount.

Self-drive rates for a small car with unlimited mileage start at around US\$70 per day. To this add 20% government tax, plus another US\$3 to US\$7 a day for insurance.

Rental companies in Malawi include the following:

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

Cecilia Car Hire (☎ 01-643206; Blantyre)

Sputnik Car Hire (☎ 01-761563, 08 823139; Lilongwe)

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

INSURANCE

Third-party insurance is a requirement for all drivers, but this can be arranged through car hire companies or purchased at border posts.

ROAD RULES

Malawians drive on the left, and seat belts are compulsory. Speed limits are 80km per hour on main roads and 60km in built-up areas.

Tours

Several companies organise tours around the country, ranging from a few days to three weeks. Trips into Zambia or Mozambique are also available, although Malawi's safari scene is much smaller than, say, South Africa's or Zimbabwe's. Tours may be 'mobile' (ie moving from camp to camp every few days) or based in one place, with excursions each day. Most are vehicle-based, although some outfits also organise walking trips, horseback safaris, or boating on the lake. Tours normally include transport, accommodation and food, but prices vary considerably according to standards – from budget to luxury. There are only a few budget companies that can arrange tours on the spot – most prefer advance bookings, although sometimes a couple of days is enough. Budget tours usually cost between US\$30 and US\$50 per day. Most midrange and top-end companies also need advance bookings, and charge from US\$80 per person per day, easily climbing to US\$200 per day or more.

The following is a list of major tour operators in Malawi, with a variety of budgets to suit most wallets.

Barefoot Safaris (☎ 01-707346; www.barefoot-safaris.com) Offers budget and midrange tours, mostly geared towards wildlife watching in Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania. It also arranges good walking tours, encompassing Lengwe National Park, Mt Mulanje, Liwonde National Park and Lake Malawi. Whether you're walking or viewing, tours cost from US\$85 per person per day and include all meals and accommodation.

Jambo-Africa (☎ 01-823709; www.jambo-africa.com) Based at the Mount Soche Hotel in Blantyre. They offer tours to Lengwe National Park for US\$385 per person and Mt Mulanje hiking packages from US\$230 for three days.

Kayak Africa (☎ 09-942661; www.kayakafrica.net)

Based in Cape Maclear, it 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.

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

Monkey Business (☎ 01-352342; info@njayalodge.com; Nkhata Bay) Offers excellent kayak excursions along the northern lakeshore. Typical itineraries include idyllic spots such as Usisya and Ruarwe, or spectacular trips to Likoma and Chizumulu Islands. Journeys are broken by stopovers at fishing villages and empty beaches, and these trips are a great way to explore the area. Tours cost from US\$30 per person per day (you can design your own itinerary ranging from two to seven days), which includes meals, kayaks, guides and tents. It also arranges one-day Kayak-Bushwalk-Dive tours for US\$40 per person.

Nyika Safari Company (☎ 01-330180; www.nyika.com) Operates purely indulgent horseback safaris on the Nyika Plateau from US\$320 per person per day, which includes all meals, rides and accommodation in luxury safari tents (hot showers and all) or at the luxurious Chelinda Lodge. These tours operate only between May and October and last anywhere from two to 10 days.

Red Zebra Tours (☎ 01-263165; www.lakemalawi.com) Based in Senga Bay, it specialises in diving and lake safaris with an experienced guide.

Wilderness Safaris (☎ 01-771393; info@wilderness.malawi.net; Bisnowaty Service Centre, Kenyatta Rd, Lilongwe) Operates all accommodation and facilities in Liwonde National Park. It can also arrange flights, air charters, car hire and mid- to top-end safaris to South Luangwa National Park in Zambia, starting from US\$500 per person all inclusive.

Train

Trains run every Wednesday between Blantyre and Balaka (US\$1.50), but passengers rarely use them as road transport on this route is 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 p232.

The twice-weekly train service between Limbe and Nsanje (US\$2), in the far south of Malawi, is popular as the line reaches areas where road transport is limited. Since a bridge washed away in 1998, trains terminate at Makhanga.

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