

# Malawi Country Guide

elevate destinations



# Welcome to Malawi!

In this document you will find information that will be useful during your journey to Malawi. The information listed in this guide includes cultural guidelines, communication tips, health and safety recommendations, and so much more. Please note that all information specific to your trip, such as inclusions and exclusions, staff contact numbers, flight information, etc. is listed in your Online Trip Portal. For any questions unanswered by either the country guide or the online portal, please don't hesitate to reach out to an Elevate staff member.

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# Know Before You Go

## Passport

Travelers to Malawi should ensure that the validity of their passports extends at least 6 months beyond the end of their intended stay, and should have at least 2 blank (unstamped) visa pages in their passport to enter the country. The last 2 amendment pages are unacceptable for visas and immigration stamps. Note that you will need to renew your passport if you are out of visa pages, as the State Department no longer provides additional pages. If you need to renew your passport, please do so as soon as possible.

## Visa

Citizens from the US do not need a visa to visit Malawi for stays less than 90 days.

## Medical and Travel Insurance

Elevate Destinations will purchase emergency evacuation coverage for you. This policy covers emergency evacuations due to medical, political, or natural disasters for your trip dates. This policy also provides \$5,000 of emergency medical coverage. More details about this coverage can be found in your online trip portal.

This coverage does not include trip cancellation or interruption benefits and also does not cover pre- or post-trip days of travel. We strongly suggest you purchase additional coverage to cover your non-refundable expenses in the event you need to cancel your trip or have additional expenses incurred on the trip.

Elevate strongly recommends purchasing additional travel and medical insurance and Cancel for Any Reason Coverage (CFAR) coverage to cover trip related expenses. Please note that some CFAR insurance options are time-sensitive. Please be ready to purchase an insurance policy within 14 days of making your first trip payment.

Below are two insurance brokers that Elevate Destinations recommends.

- USI Travel Insurance Services  
**Email:** [info@travelinsure.com](mailto:info@travelinsure.com)  
**Phone Number:** (800) 937-1387
- Travel Insurance Center (Dan Drennen)  
**Email:** [dan@travelinsurancecenter.com](mailto:dan@travelinsurancecenter.com)  
**Phone Number:** (402) 343-3621

Guests may acquire medical insurance through USI, The Travel Insurance Center, or any other insurance company of their choosing. Elevate Destinations is not equipped to answer specific questions on insurance. Please contact the insurance broker or company for specific information.

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### Smart Traveler Tip!

Have electronic and paper copies of your passport in case something happens to it while you are traveling.

- Scan a copy of your passport and email it to yourself.
  - Take a photo of your passport and save it to your phone in an “Important Documents” photo album- Leave a scanned copy of your passport with friends and family at home.
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### Immunizations

Prior to travel, Elevate Destinations strongly recommends that you look into recommended immunizations for your time in Malawi. Given that we are not a licensed Health Care provider, we cannot advise travelers on which immunizations they may or may not need. We recommend that all travelers do the following:

- a) Consult with a travel clinic or your personal physician regarding immunizations and other precautions you may need to take in order to participate in this journey. You will need to do this well in advance of your trip as some vaccinations require time to take effect, and you may need to allow time between a series of shots.
- b) Visit [the CDC Website for Malawi](#) to view recommended vaccines and medicines, travel health notices for the region and other tips for staying healthy and safe.
- c) Check that your medical insurance will cover you in Malawi or purchase a supplementary medical insurance policy that will.

### Other Health Considerations

We recommend a moderate level of physical agility, as some of the drives may be long, with sections of unpaved, bumpy roads. For the most satisfying experience, and in fairness to your fellow travelers, please note that this trip requires the following:

- Ability to walk at least one mile without difficulty
- Ability to spend extended periods of time on your feet
- Ability to climb sets of stairs without assistance
- Ability to keep pace with an active group of travelers and to be on time for all scheduled activities
- Ability to ride comfortably in a vehicle on unpaved, bumpy roads for extended periods of time

Malawi has a diverse climate (see weather conditions section). Please consider taking some preventative measures against heat and sun exposure such as wearing long, breathable protective clothing and hats and actively hydrating throughout your time in Malawi.

## Medications

Always travel with medications in their original, clearly labeled containers and in your carry-on luggage. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity and keep these handy when entering or exiting any of Malawi's borders.

Elevate Destinations also recommends that all travelers make and print a list of medications and any existing health conditions to bring on your trip. You may choose to carry this on your person or give it to your guide. Having this list could be life saving in the unlikely case of an emergency.

## Safety Recommendations

Your guide will give you current briefings on safety while in-country, but here are some basic ground rules for safety while traveling:

- If you have time sensitive medication including epi-pens and inhalers, keep them on you at all times
- Keep all valuables in the hotel safe.
- Avoid flashing money. Be mindful of your belongings at all time. Keep bags in front of you in crowds and on your lap when at restaurants.
- Pay attention: avoid walking around with your smartphone in hand.
- Be vigilant when crossing roads.
- Stick with the group.
- Always make sure that others know of your whereabouts and movements.
- Avoid street protests or large gatherings.
- Do not wear expensive or sentimentally valuable jewelry while traveling.
- Let your guide know if you have any safety concerns.

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### Smart Traveler Tip!

We recommend that U.S. citizens register for the State Department's [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#). This is a free service provided by the U.S. Government for citizens traveling, or living in, a foreign country. When you enroll, you will enter information about your upcoming trip so that the Department of State can best assist you in case of an emergency. Benefits of this include:

- You will receive information from the Embassy about safety conditions in Malawi
  - The U.S. Embassy in Malawi will proactively contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family-related.
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## Essential Travel Documents

In case of emergency, it is advisable to record all of your important information on one sheet of paper, photocopy it, and distribute a few copies in your luggage and among relatives or friends at home. Also email a scanned copy to yourself. Take a photo of these documents and save them in an “important travel document” photo folder on your phone so that you can access these documents electronically.

*These are the documents you should have printed and with you during your travel:*

- Passport - original and photocopy
- International flight itinerary or e-tickets
- Address and phone numbers of the hotels where you are staying
- Medical/Travel insurance policy details and 24-hour emergency number
- Emergency Contact List from Elevate Destinations
- Contact information of relatives/friends and your primary care physician to be contacted in an emergency
- Debit and credit card information

## Communications

**Wi-Fi:** In most places you will visit in Malawi, Wi-Fi will be available. Speed, bandwidth, and availability will likely be less reliable than you are used to. Oftentimes, connection is stronger in the lobby of hotels than in the rooms.

*The country code for Malawi is +265. To call numbers in Malawi from the US dial 011 + 265 + local number.*

**International Calls:** If you are in Malawi and trying to reach a number in the US, dial 00 before dialing the country code and local number.

**Staying connected:** Here are the most common methods for making local/international calls:

1. **Smartphone apps:** WhatsApp is the most widely used app for communicating (works on both Wi-Fi and cellular). Remember to download these apps *before* you travel!
2. **Getting an international calling package:** Setting up international coverage from your cell phone provider for the duration of your trip is often the simplest option and the best to avoid roaming charges.
3. **Use a local phone / SIM card:** This is a good option for making calls within Malawi as international calls can get expensive. Local SIM cards are inexpensive, can be found at a variety of stores, and often have pay-as-you-go plans where you can “top up” your credit for use in the country. Please be aware of any requirements your phone has in order to accept the local SIM cards (i.e. size of SIM card, jailbroken, etc). This will change your phone number for the duration of time you have a foreign SIM card in your phone.

## Money

The local currency in Malawi is the Malawian Kwacha (MWK), however, most places will gladly accept US Dollars of notes no older than 2013. Click [here](#) to see the current exchange rate. Please note the following denominations below:

- **Bank Notes:** K20, K50, K100, K200, and K500, K1,000
- **Coins:** K1, K2, K5 along with one, five, 10, 20, and 50 tambalas, where one tambala is 1/100 of a kwacha

The small amount of local currency you may need during your stay in Malawi can be obtained at authorized facilities (such as ATMs, hotels, banks and foreign exchange bureaus). In general, we suggest that you limit the amount of money you convert into local currencies and exchange only what you think you will spend before leaving any foreign country. Save all receipts from your currency exchange transactions. If you plan to exchange USD cash, the bills must be:

- **New** (printed in the last 5 years)
- **In pristine condition** (no rips, tears, smudges, markings, creases, etc)
- **Larger denominations** (the \$50 and \$100 bills attract the best exchange rate).

**For your extra personal costs and shopping, \$30-\$50 USD per day is a good rule of thumb.**

**ATM/Debit Cards:** You can use your debit card to withdraw money from ATMs. However, **ATMs in lesser developed regions of the world are not widely available and are often finicky, and may not work on a given hour or day. We recommend traveling with 1-3 crisp \$100 bills stored safely in your carry-on luggage to be exchanged in the case that ATMs are not working for you.**

**Change:** Ask for smaller bills when you change money, or use your large bills at large shops to receive more change. In many cases, people (local vendors especially) don't have change.

**Credit Cards:** Credit cards (Visa preferred) are acceptable in larger establishments, while smaller establishments, local restaurants, shops or markets, merchants will only accept cash. Most merchants will charge an additional 3-5% of the bill for a credit card transaction. Please note American Express and Discover cards are not commonly accepted.

**Gratuities:** Please check your online trip portal to find which gratuities are and are not covered in your trip cost. We recommend tipping your porters at the hotels and leaving behind cash in your room for the cleaning staff. For porters and airport transfer drivers, \$5 USD is appropriate. For housekeeping staff, we recommend leaving behind \$3-5 per day.

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### Smart Traveler Tip!

Be sure you remember your ATM PIN numbers to withdraw cash at your destination.

Most banks and credit card companies do not flag international use as unusual, but if you use a more local bank it would be wise to notify them of your travel plans.

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# In-country info

## Time

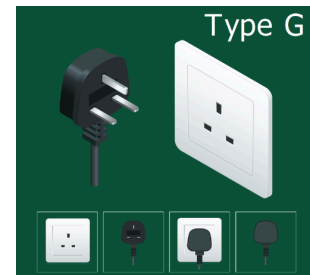
Malawi is in the Central Africa Time (CAT) zone. In comparison to the United States:

- Malawi is 7 hours ahead of Eastern Time Zone (ET) during standard time and 6 hours ahead during daylight savings time.
- Malawi is 10 hours ahead of Pacific Time Zone (PT) during standard time and 9 hours ahead during daylight savings time.

*In 2024, daylight saving time in the United States starts on March 10 and ends November 3.*

## Electricity

Malawi uses a standard of 230V, 50Hz, and plug Type G, which has three rectangular pins in a triangular pattern. The image on the right shows the type of plug and socket you can use while traveling in Malawi. To keep your electronics up and running, we suggest purchasing a universal plug.



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### Smart Traveler Tip!

Download a conversion app, such as [Units Plus](#), for things like currency, temperature, time, and distance while traveling.

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## Water & Food Safety

Tap water is not safe to drink in Malawi. Purified water is affordable and easily accessible throughout the country. Elevate Destinations encourages travelers to pack a reusable water bottle to fill up with clean drinking water, where available. Clean drinking water will be supplied at all meals and water will be available in the van. Depending on how hardy your stomach is, it's generally safe to use tap water to brush your teeth.

## Waste Disposal

Keep in mind that much of the world's waste disposal systems are not as advanced as you might be used to. Oftentimes, landfills are adjacent to conservation land or trash is burned. Recycling is often unavailable. To minimize your impact, please consider the following guidelines:

- Leave no trace – everything that you bring with you should go home with you
- If you plan on shopping, make sure that you have extra room in your luggage or an extra bag to check on your way home (don't dump items to make room!)
- Avoid packing with plastic bags and instead purchase reusable packing cubes, cloth bags, and reusable toiletry bags
- Bring a reusable water bottle that you can refill
- Remove packaging or tags of any newly purchased items before you go



## Local Cuisine

Malawian cuisine is influenced by the country's agricultural produce and traditional cooking methods. Staples in Malawian cuisine often include maize, which is commonly eaten in the form of nsima, a thick porridge made from maize flour. Nsima is typically served with various relishes, vegetables, and meats. Here are some dishes commonly found in Malawian cuisine:

- **Nsima:** As mentioned, nsima is a staple food in Malawi. It's made from maize flour cooked with water to form a thick, dough-like consistency. It's often served alongside relishes or sauces made from vegetables, beans, or meats.
- **Nthochi:** This is a type of bread made from maize flour. It's similar to a thick pancake or flatbread and is often served as a snack or alongside meals.
- **Chambo:** Chambo is a popular freshwater fish in Malawi, often grilled or fried and served with nsima or rice. It's a significant part of the Malawian diet due to the country's proximity to Lake Malawi.
- **Ndiwo:** Ndiwo refers to various relishes or side dishes served with nsima. These can include a wide variety of ingredients such as leafy greens (e.g., pumpkin leaves), beans, tomatoes, onions, and peanuts.
- **Kondowole:** This is a traditional Malawian dish made from pumpkin leaves cooked with groundnuts (peanuts) and sometimes dried fish. It's a flavorful and nutritious dish commonly enjoyed in Malawi.
- **Mbatata:** Mbatata is a sweet potato dish that's popular in Malawi. It can be boiled, mashed, or roasted and is often served as a side dish or snack.
- **Zitumbuwa:** Zitumbuwa are Malawian banana fritters. Ripe bananas are mashed and mixed with flour, sugar, and sometimes coconut milk before being deep-fried.
- **Dziwala:** Dziwala are caterpillars commonly eaten in Malawi and other parts of Africa. They are usually dried, fried, or cooked in a sauce and are considered a delicacy in some regions.

These are just a few examples of dishes commonly found in Malawian cuisine. Malawian food often reflects the availability of locally sourced ingredients and the cultural traditions of the country

## Weather Conditions

Malawi experiences a subtropical climate, which is characterized by distinct wet and dry seasons. The weather can vary depending on the region, but generally, the climate is mild and pleasant. Here's an overview of the weather in Malawi:

- **May to October - Dry Season:** During this time, the weather is generally dry and sunny with lower humidity levels. Temperatures are cooler, especially at higher elevations, making it a popular time for outdoor activities and wildlife viewing. However, nighttime temperatures can drop significantly, so it's advisable to pack layers.

- Daytime temperatures can vary depending on the region and elevation. In lower-lying areas and cities like Lilongwe and Blantyre, daytime temperatures often range from 25°C to 30°C (77°F to 86°F). In higher altitude areas like Zomba and Mulanje, temperatures may be slightly cooler, ranging from 20°C to 25°C (68°F to 77°F).
- Nighttime temperatures during the dry season tend to be cooler, especially in higher altitude areas. In lower-lying regions and cities, nighttime temperatures can range from 10°C to 15°C (50°F to 59°F), while in mountainous areas, temperatures may drop further, ranging from 5°C to 10°C (41°F to 50°F) or even lower in some instances.
- **November to April - Wet Season:** This period is characterized by higher temperatures and increased rainfall. The heaviest rains typically occur from December to March, with some regions experiencing occasional flooding. The landscape becomes lush and green during this time, and it's an excellent time for agricultural activities. However, travel may be more challenging due to muddy roads and potential transportation disruptions caused by heavy rain.
  - Daytime temperatures during the wet season can still be warm, especially in lower-lying areas and cities. Daytime temperatures often range from around 25°C to 30°C (77°F to 86°F) in places like Lilongwe and Blantyre. However, due to increased cloud cover and rainfall, temperatures may not rise as high as during the dry season.
  - Nighttime temperatures during the wet season can also vary, but they tend to be milder compared to the dry season. In lower-lying regions and cities, nighttime temperatures may range from 15°C to 20°C (59°F to 68°F), while in higher altitude areas, temperatures may hover around 10°C to 15°C (50°F to 59°F).

In general, Malawi's weather is influenced by the country's topography, with cooler temperatures in mountainous areas and warmer temperatures in low-lying regions. Additionally, Lake Malawi, one of Africa's largest lakes, has a moderating effect on the climate of nearby areas. It's essential to check local weather forecasts when planning a trip to Malawi, as weather conditions can vary across different regions and seasons

## Cultural Considerations

Experiencing different cultures and ways of life is one of the joys of traveling. Malawi's culture is rich and diverse, influenced by its history, traditions, ethnic groups, and interactions with neighboring countries. Here are some key aspects of Malawian culture:

- **Ethnic Diversity:** Malawi is home to various ethnic groups, each with its own language, traditions, and customs. The Chewa are the largest ethnic group, followed by the Yao, Tumbuka, Lomwe, Ngoni, and others. Despite this diversity, there is a strong sense of national identity among Malawians.

- **Language:** Chichewa (Chewa) is the most widely spoken language in Malawi and serves as a lingua franca, facilitating communication among different ethnic groups. English is the official language and is used in government, education, and business.
- **Traditional Music and Dance:** Music and dance are integral parts of Malawian culture. Traditional music is characterized by drumming, singing, and the use of traditional instruments such as drums, rattles, and xylophones. Traditional dances are performed during various ceremonies, celebrations, and social gatherings, showcasing the country's cultural heritage.
- **Art and Crafts:** Malawi has a rich tradition of artistic expression, including woodcarving, basket weaving, pottery, and beadwork. Artisans produce a wide range of items, including wooden sculptures, masks, baskets, and textiles, which often reflect local traditions and symbols.
- **Religion:** Christianity is the predominant religion in Malawi, with the majority of the population belonging to various Christian denominations. Islam is also practiced by a significant minority, particularly in the northern and eastern regions. Traditional indigenous beliefs and practices are still observed by some communities, particularly in rural areas.
- **Ceremonies and Festivals:** Malawians celebrate various cultural and religious festivals throughout the year. These include traditional ceremonies such as initiation rites, harvest festivals, and rites of passage. Religious festivals such as Christmas and Easter are also widely celebrated.
- **Hospitality and Social Customs:** Malawians are known for their hospitality and friendliness. Social gatherings often involve sharing food, music, and dance, and guests are typically welcomed with open arms. Respect for elders and community values are important aspects of Malawian culture.

Overall, Malawi's culture is diverse, vibrant, and dynamic, reflecting the country's rich history and traditions.

## Language

The official language of Malawi is English. English is used in government, education, business, and official communication. However, Chichewa (also known as Chewa) is the most widely spoken language in Malawi and serves as a lingua franca, facilitating communication among people of different ethnic groups and regions.

Chichewa is spoken by the majority of the population and is used in daily interactions, media, and informal settings. Additionally, Malawi is home to various other languages spoken by different ethnic groups, such as Tumbuka, Yao, Lomwe, Ngoni, and others.

We recommend practicing the below phrases. People will appreciate you attempting to speak in their language!

English	Chichewa
Hello	Moni
Good Morning	Mwawuka bwino
Good Afternoon	Mwachibwana bwino
Good Night	Mwachiona bwino
How are you?	Muli bwanji?
I'm fine, and you?	Ndili bwino, kaya inu?
Thank you (very much)	Zikomo (kwambiri)
Goodbye	Tawonani
Yes	Yewo
No	Ayi

## Photography

Malawi is a beautiful country, and you will want to take lots of pictures. When photographing people, always ask permission first. This is a sign of respect, as the subjects of your photos have the autonomy to consent. You can do this with gestures or ask your guide to translate.

Always be considerate of anyone's desire not to be photographed. There are some places where photography is prohibited; these areas are usually marked. If you are uncertain about whether or not photography is permitted, your guide will be there to advise you.

If you would like some tips on ethical photography practices, check out our blog post, "[Nine questions to help decolonize your photography.](#)"

## Human Trafficking in Travel

Elevate Destinations has signed [The Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism](#) (The Code) and expects all of its partners to refuse involvement, both direct and indirect, in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. A "child" is defined as a person younger than 18 years of age, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We encourage our travelers and suppliers to report the sexual exploitation of children. Information, even the smallest amount, can represent the missing piece of an ongoing investigation by law enforcement. If you are uncomfortable with leaving your name and contact information, you can report anonymously to law enforcement or NGOs. Report a concern [using](#)

[this form](#); alternatively, you can email [protect@ecpat.net](mailto:protect@ecpat.net) to report sexual exploitation of children.

Read about Elevate's values & vision, our [sustainability commitment](#), our programs that give back and more on our website at [www.elevatedestinations.com](http://www.elevatedestinations.com). Our team members are always excited to share more on this topic. We acknowledge that to maintain truly sustainable travel products takes ongoing commitment. We continue to monitor our programs on the ground in order to improve them, and welcome your thoughts, feedback and encouragement!

## Responsible Travel Tips

Elevate Destinations takes pride in its leadership in the field of responsible travel. We take care in selecting our local partners that share our environmental and social values and are avid supporters of locals working in the tourism industry as they are both the most impacted and impactful players at the local level. All of your ground costs on this trip are carbon offset using [Native Energy's Carbon Calculator](#).

Here are a few tips that can help enrich your experience as a responsible traveler:

- **Keep an open mind:** Observe local customs and respect traditional cultures and people.
- **Language:** Learn a few basic greetings and “thank you” in the local language.
- **Local economy:** Support locally owned businesses, restaurants and other services. Shop from local artisans to promote traditional crafts and encourage contemporary arts.
- **Pay a fair price:** Bargaining is acceptable on this trip and a great way to engage with locals. Try to have fun and not be overly aggressive in bargaining for souvenirs.
- **Respect:** It is important to acknowledge the privacy and dignity of others and ask before photographing or filming people. Ask permission before entering sacred places, homes or private land, and take heed of local customs (i.e. remove shoes, hats, cover hair with shawl, etc). Please ask your guide if you are unsure; they are there to support your introduction to the culture!
- **Community and environment:** Contribute to organizations that support traditional cultures and protect the natural environment. Keep to designated trails and do not disturb plants and animals or their natural habitats.
- **Animal products:** Avoid purchasing crafts, clothing, furniture or other products that are derived from members of protected or endangered animal species.
- **Properly dispose of trash:** Avoid using plastic bags and try to minimize the use of other disposables. When traveling in areas away from cities, make sure to take out what you take in. Try using a reusable water bottle and treating your own drinking water when possible. Check out what our friends at [Travelers Against Plastic](#) are doing!
- **Don't feel pressured to give away money or material items:** You will likely encounter instances of poverty and people asking for donations. We try to discourage giving away money or items as it can actually accentuate an unequal relationship between visitors and locals. Additionally, children that receive money, gifts and sweets from you are encouraged to stick around for more rather than to be in school. As difficult as it can be to turn down direct requests, sometimes giving your friendship and respect to locals can

be the best gift of all. If you want to help, consider giving to a trustworthy charity, non-profit, or local school.

- **Tip your housekeeping staff:** Many of the staff cleaning hotel rooms are on the bottom of the economic pyramid. Please consider leaving a tip before you check out. The equivalent of \$3-5 a day is appropriate. This is an easy way to ensure some of your money reaches the hands that need it the most.

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### **Smart Traveler Tip!**

In travel, especially in the developing world, things happen. Expect the unexpected! Keep an open mind, be flexible and enjoy the moment. Sometimes the best memories come out of the unplanned.

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