

# BY THE WATER In Malawi



Go beyond the usual wildlife experience in this African country known to be the most traveller-friendly. **TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEPHEN CUNLIFFE**

Long before I visited Malawi, I had heard talk of a tiny African country rumoured to be home to some of the friendliest people on earth: a small slither of land-locked Africa boasting an idyllic climate, warm water, tropical beaches and wildlife safaris. With Malawi lying over a thousand miles from the nearest ocean, its claim to being a major beach destination sounded dubious to say the least, but my wife and I packed our bags and headed off to discover whether 'magical Malawi' warranted the hype.

Tired and a little irritable after the long flight, we were dreading the inevitable airport bureaucracy at Malawi's Lilongwe International Airport, but our ultra-friendly chauffeur turned out to be well-connected and he marched us straight up to an empty VIP immigration counter, and our arrival formalities were taken care of with the minimum of fuss. The immigration officer even flashed me a smile, if you can believe it, before we were whisked through customs and into what is already living up to its reputation of being Africa's friendliest nation.

We had opted for the quintessential two-week itinerary with a week's safari in the uncrowded parks of this African gem, followed by

seven days of relaxing on the fabled shores of idyllic Lake Malawi. We were anticipating a real treat.

Newly opened Mkulumadzi Lodge in the recently resurrected Majete Wildlife Reserve and the gorgeous Mvuu Safari Lodge deep inside Liwonde National Park were the safari destinations of choice, exposing us to close up sightings of a jaw-dropping array of African animals.

For a country not normally associated with safaris, Malawi treated us to an unforgettable wildlife experience.

While hippos honked in the Shire River, crocodiles basked on sun-soaked riverbanks and, at the water's edge, a seemingly endless procession of antelopes, elephants, buffaloes and rhinos slaked their thirst in full picture-clicking view.

After an active week of early morning game drives, boat cruises and walking safari, we felt we had earned the right to unwind on Lake Malawi. Malawi's most well-known tourist attraction is a staggering 365 mile-long, 52 mile-wide and around a mile deep lake. The 365 miles has given it the rather amusing name, 'Calendar Lake'. In times gone by, legendary Scottish explorer David Livingstone dubbed it the 'The Lake of Stars' and exclusive

Pumulani Beach Lodge advertises itself as 'the brightest star on the lake'; I would be hard-pressed to disagree. A stay at Pumulani can be as relaxed or as active as you wish. For those seeking activity, there is waterskiing, tubing, kayaking, sailing, snorkelling, swimming, diving and fishing on the menu. However, after all the early mornings and safari exertions of the preceding week, we opted for lounging in the stylish infinity pool and lazing on the lodge's private beach. With lake views to die for, crystal-clear water and a well-stocked bar mere metres away, Pumulani—which means 'rest well' in the local Chichewa language—provided a heavenly setting in which to do exactly that.

After days of relaxation and pampering, we did manage to rouse ourselves for a scenic sunset cruise on the lodge's big wooden dhow. This traditional African sailing boat affords visitors a chance to appreciate the serene beauty

of Lake Malawi, while sipping cocktails at the end of a blissfully lazy day.

It took a real effort to tear ourselves away from this piece of paradise and catch our charter flight to Likoma Island. This relaxed isle has gained a deserved reputation for being home to some of the friendliest communities in all of Malawi—no mean achievement in a country famous for beaming smiles and easy-going people. Recently upgraded Kaya Mawa Lodge, with its prime location on a shady boulder-strewn peninsula wedged between two sandy beaches, turns out to be a true island paradise, affording us more time to do nothing, and in style.

Good things come in small packages they say and Malawi, smaller in size than Tamil Nadu, lives up to that. A tiny country boasting a surprisingly diverse array of attractions. We leave Malawi convinced that indeed it is a first-rate combination of idyllic beaches, abundant wildlife and a friendly people.

**TRY OUT**  
*Boma restaurant in Cape Maclear is known to be Lake Malawi's finest cuisine*

## DON'T MISS

- Native arts and local crafts make great mementos from your African holiday experience. There's a gaggle of street vendors selling attractive curios; the dark ebony woodcarvings are especially popular.
- Take a dhow sailing trip on the turquoise waters of Lake Malawi and sip on wine while watching the quintessential African sunset.
- Full list of stay options is on [www.malawitourism.com](http://www.malawitourism.com)



1. Watersports at Likoma island 2. Elephants at Liwonde National Park