

Malawi National Day Special

Scenic vistas, diverse wildlife await visitors

July 1964 marked both the independence of Malawi and the beginnings of its bilateral relations with Japan. Known as "The Warm Heart of Africa," Malawi is a long, narrow country in the continent's south-east that is covered by about one-fifth by Lake Malawi. This culturally diverse nation is home to many tribes, with the Chewa the most numerous at 34% of the population; others include the Lomwe, Yao, Ngoni and Tumbuka.

Lake Malawi dominates both the geography and tourism of Malawi, stretching some 580 kilometers from north to south. There are towns and fishing villages catering to visitors around the lake, and many opportunities for more rustic experiences. The lake is also the scene for many water sports, with kayaking, sailing, canoeing, snorkeling, scuba diving, water skiing, boat trips and fishing excursions all possible here. Lake Malawi National Park, in the south, is the world's first freshwater national park and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The nation's largest park is Nyika National Park, which constitutes 3200 square kilometers in the highlands of north Malawi and serves as home to zebras, hyenas, jackals, elephants, leopards, warthogs, bush pigs, buffalo and over 400 recorded species of birds. Visitors interested in the safari experience can roam the wilderness on foot, bicycle or via off-road vehicles.

Of the cultural sites, perhaps the most important is the Chongoni Rock-Art Area. Just northwest of Dedza, natural shelters

house Stone Age rock paintings by the BaTwa hunter-gatherers. This is the densest cluster of rock art found in central Africa. While there are no reception or visitor centers in this UNESCO World Heritage Site, guides can be found locally and some of the 127 sites are still active locations for rituals and ceremonies.

Mount Mulanje's Sapitwa Peak is the tallest point in Malawi at 3,002 meters. Easily accessible to the east of Blantyre, a major economic hub, there are both easy walking trails to tour the mountain for a few hours, as well as serious climbing options that might take days.

In the south, visitors can find acres of tea estates established during the colonial era of the British Empire. The Thyolo Tea Estates have grown tea since 1908 and now tea is Malawi's second-biggest export.

Many of the estates can be visited and offer tastings and accommodation. There are also opportunities for hiking, bicycle touring and bird-watching in the area.

Other experiences in south Malawi include Liwonde National Park, perhaps the most popular of Malawi's game parks, and Chimwenya Game Park, which boasts six types of antelope — kudus, eland, roan, sable, nyala and waterbuck — as well as giraffe and zebras.

Lilongwe became the capital in 1975 and is home to modern government buildings, but remnants of the colonial era can be found in the bustling Old Town area. The Lilongwe Wildlife Center is Malawi's only sanctuary for rescued, orphaned and injured animals, showing a commitment to nature conservation.

As they say in the local Chichewa lan-



guage, *takulandirani* (welcome).

This article references excerpts from official Malawi government and Malawi Tourism websites.


For more information, visit <http://www.malawi.gov.mw>, <https://www.malawitourism.com> and <http://www.visitmalawi.mw>.



Above left: A canoe lies along Kande Beach amid a colorful sunset on Lake Malawi. Above: Tea plantations at the foot of Mount Mulanje GETTY IMAGES


Elephants walk along the Shire River in Malawi's Liwonde National Park. GETTY IMAGES






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