

MALAWI FACTS AND FIGURES

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Malawi Facts and Figures

Malawi has not been a premier African tourist destination, but it is a real jewel for those who do visit. It is known as the Warm Heart of Africa for very good reason. The Malawians are some of the friendliest people that you will ever meet.

The country is about half the size of the United Kingdom and one fifth is covered by Lake Malawi. One of Malawi's great attractions is its diversity of natural landscapes. The Rift Valley floor stretches the length of the country and Lake Malawi occupies most of it, being 364 miles long and 50 miles across at its widest point which makes it the third largest freshwater lake in Africa. The vegetation along the lakeshore is lush and often supports local farming. The weather here is warm all year round. There are highland areas with cool fresh air and clear mountain streams and, as you climb, the deciduous forests give way to heaths, grassland, and evergreen forests.

- Area: 118,480 km² (46,000 miles²) (half the size of the UK)
- Climate: Sub tropical: rainy season, December to May; dry season, May to December
- Lake: 585 km long by 80 km wide (364 miles long by 50 miles wide)
- Population: 15,900,000 (July 2011 estimate), growing at 2.8% per year
 - 0 – 14 years old = 45.1%
 - 15 – 64 years old = 52.2%
 - 65+ years old = 2.7%
- Average life expectancy at birth: 51.7 years
- Infant mortality: 81.04 deaths per 1,000
- HIV/AIDS: 11% of the population (2009 estimate) officially, although probably nearer 33%
- Population below the poverty line: 53% (2004 figures). 80% live in the rural areas; 20% in the towns
- Average annual income: US\$100-US\$200 per year
- Main exports: Tobacco (70%), sugar, and tea

(Source: CIA – The World Factbook: Malawi)



The Seasons

In general, mid-December to mid-April is the 'rainy season'. This period brings long heavy rains, usually for a few hours in the early morning, followed by sunny skies and crisp air. This is the greenest, most beautiful time of year in Malawi, although there can be stretches of several days of seemingly ceaseless rains! The average rainfall in Nkhata Bay District is 1.2m, and this falls during this five-month period.



The rainy season



The windy season



The dry season

Mid-May to the end of July is the 'windy season' at the lake and winter in the mountains' main towns. This is the least appealing time for water sports enthusiasts as the lake is often rough with waves crashing over the boulders. It is an excellent time to travel in the country, however, as the air is cool, the skies are sunny, and there is usually a gentle breeze in the villages. Many photographers feel this is the best time to visit Malawi as the landscape is still green yet the rains have cleared.

The 'hot, dry season' starts at the end of July and continues through until December when the rains begin again. Daily temperatures average 30-32°C (85-90°F), and there is virtually no humidity. Evenings are calm, comfortable, and ideally tropical.

Having said this, things are changing gradually due to 'global climate change', and the weather can sometimes be rather unpredictable.

Transportation

Buses, lorries, minibuses, and 'matolas' (single-cab pick-up trucks) are the main modes of public transport in Malawi. Although there are some railway tracks, trains have not run in the country for many years — unlike many other African countries. Almost no rural Malawians own cars — most walk and use public transport, but some of the lucky ones have saved up to buy a bicycle.

