AFRIQUE UNIE · TRAVEL NOTEBOOK

Malawi in 11 days: a day-by-day itinerary

Nicknamed the warm heart of Africa, Malawi is a manageable, welcoming and still little-visited country. This eleven-day route heads south from the centre, from Lilongwe to Blantyre: the clear waters of Lake Malawi at Cape Maclear, the hippos and elephants of Liwonde, the cool air of the Zomba Plateau and the trails of Mount Mulanje, surrounded by tea plantations.

Day by day

Day 1 · Arrival in Lilongwe (night : Lilongwe)
Lilongwe, the capital, is a sprawling, green city, more administrative than touristic, but pleasant for a first night. If you arrive early, visit the Lilongwe Wildlife Centre, which rescues and cares for wild animals in a patch of preserved forest, then wander through the Old Town, around the market and the stalls of craftspeople selling wood carvings and wire objects. Change money or withdraw cash here: ATMs are scarcer further along the route. Fill up the vehicle if you are driving, and check with your driver how fuel is looking for the following days.

Days 2-4 · Lake Malawi at Cape Maclear (night : Cape Maclear)
Allow four to five hours' drive via Dedza, known for its pottery, then Monkey Bay, to Cape Maclear, a fishing village in the heart of UNESCO-listed Lake Malawi National Park. The lake is home to hundreds of species of brightly coloured cichlid fish, which you can watch with a mask and snorkel around the islands, especially Thumbi West, by kayak or boat. Climb to the viewpoint above the bay, and in the evening watch the fishermen's lights come on across the water. Bilharzia is present in some parts of the lake, especially near reeds and villages: ask locally for advice and talk to your doctor.

Days 5-6 · Boat safaris in Liwonde (night : Liwonde National Park)
Two and a half to three hours' drive takes you to Liwonde National Park, along the Shire River. The park, managed in partnership with a conservation organisation, has seen lions, cheetahs and black rhinos return. The most memorable experience is a boat safari on the river, among hippos, crocodiles and elephants coming down to drink on the banks, with a great variety of birds. Add game drives at sunrise and sunset, and a walk with a ranger. Predator sightings are never guaranteed, but elephants are plentiful.

Day 7 · The Zomba Plateau (night : Zomba)
About an hour's drive from Liwonde, Zomba was the country's colonial capital: its old town has kept administrative buildings and a colourful market. Above it, the Zomba Plateau rises to nearly 2,000 metres, covered in pine and cedar forest, waterfalls and trout streams. Drive or walk up to the Emperor's View and Queen's View, named after royal visits, or to Chingwe's Hole, from where the view stretches far over the Shire plain on a clear day. Sleep on the plateau to enjoy the cool evening, welcome after the heat of Liwonde. Plateau strawberries are sold by the roadside.

Days 8-10 · Mount Mulanje and the tea plantations (night : Mulanje)
About two and a half hours' drive, via Blantyre, brings you to the foot of Mount Mulanje, a granite massif rising abruptly above a sea of tea plantations. From Likhubula, marked trails climb to the Chambe or Lichenya plateaus, where huts let you sleep at altitude; a licensed guide is compulsory, and bring warm clothes. Sapitwa, the highest point at 3,002 metres, takes two to three days and good fitness. If you prefer to stay below, swim at the foot of the Likhubula waterfalls and visit a tea estate, in Mulanje or Thyolo, for a tasting.

Day 11 · Blantyre, then home (night : Flight home)

About an hour and a half's drive takes you back to Blantyre, the commercial capital, with international flights from Chileka airport. If your flight is late in the day, visit St Michael and All Angels Church, built at the end of the nineteenth century by Scottish missionaries and local craftsmen without an architect, and Mandala House, the oldest building in the city, now home to a gallery and café. Blantyre market is the place to buy printed chitenje fabric. Leave a margin for the drive to the airport, about half an hour from the centre.

Getting around

The simplest option is a car with a driver for the whole trip, or transfers arranged by the lodges. The main roads are tarred but narrow, with pedestrians, bicycles and livestock on the road; traffic drives on the left and you should never drive at night. For several years the country has faced severe fuel and foreign currency shortages: in 2026, queues at filling stations were still common. Ideally leave the logistics to a local operator and build some slack into your days.

When to go

The dry season, from May to October, is the best: from May to August temperatures are mild and nights cool at altitude, and in September and October wildlife gathers along the Shire River, although the heat rises sharply. The rainy season, from November to April, makes the country very green, but some tracks become difficult and the Mulanje trails slippery.

Practical information

Malawi

Entry	Depends on your passport: visiterafriqueunie.com/en/visa/malawi/
Yellow fever	Certificate required if arriving from a risk country
Malaria	throughout the country
Currency	Malawian kwacha (MWK)
Languages	English, Chichewa
Plugs	type G · dialling code +265 · UTC+2
Emergencies	police 997 ou 990 · ambulance 998 · fire 999

Departure checklist

Documents

☐ Passport valid for at least six months after your return, with blank pages
☐ Visa or e-visa (printed if required)
☐ International vaccination certificate (yellow fever if required)
☐ Travel insurance certificate and assistance number
☐ Paper and digital copies of your passport and bookings
☐ Tickets, bookings and addresses saved offline
☐ International driving permit if you are hiring a vehicle

Health

☐ Travel consultation done and vaccinations up to date
☐ Malaria tablets if your doctor recommends them
☐ First-aid kit: plasters, antiseptic, anti-diarrhoea tablets, rehydration salts
☐ Mosquito repellent suitable for the tropics
☐ Sunscreen, hat and sunglasses
☐ Personal medication and prescriptions

Money and connectivity

☐ Bank told, Visa or Mastercard (and a backup card)
☐ Cash in euros or dollars, recent notes in good condition
☐ eSIM or local SIM card sorted
☐ Plug adapter for the country
☐ Power bank and cables
☐ Offline maps downloaded
☐ Afrique Unie app installed

In the bag

☐ Light clothes that cover up (sun, mosquitoes, places of worship)
☐ A fleece for evenings, dawn safaris and altitude
☐ Walking shoes and sandals
☐ Head torch
☐ Water bottle (ideally with a filter)
☐ Small daypack and waterproof pouches
☐ Luggage padlock

Before you close the door

☐ Your government's travel advice reread
☐ Trip registered with your consular service (if it offers this)
☐ Itinerary and contacts left with someone close
☐ Online check-in done and baggage allowance checked

Notebook made from visiterafriqueunie.com/en/itineraries/malawi-in-11-days/ · information checked in November 2026 against official sources. Entry, health and safety rules change: check them again before you leave (your country's official advice, the embassy of the country you visit).