

Interesting facts about Malawi

- Generally women take over the positions of village chiefs in Malawian villages (in our legal system they would be mayors). Men are helping them with secretary work as many of chiefs are illiterate.
- Roles of the village chiefs are traditionally passed on. Since 2000 they have been paid by their government, before only through contributions of villagers. They have highest legislative power in most important village matters; from neighbor's disputes, building permissions and permission to get married or divorced.
- Malawian legislative system has 3 levels of chiefs; village chief, chief of a district and chief of an area. Next position is MP-member of parliament.
- Malawi has governmental and private schools, in which standard of teaching and level of expected knowledge is very different (governmental schools are free). Tuitions in private primary schools are insanely high (150-350€/semester x3 = 1050€ for whole academic year!) in comparison with average salary of e.g. primary school teacher, who earns 70€ per month!
- Primary school has 8 grades (they call it standard 1-8), high school has 4 levels (they call it forms), University 4 as well, masters and PhDs 2 each.
- In class of governmental primary school there are 60-100 children per teacher. Standard of 60 children/teacher was advised by Malawian government this year. For comparison there are 25 children/teacher in private primary schools).
- Family has 4-5 children on average, numbers of kids per family are dropping to 2-3, because of such high living costs, payable quality education and health system.
- Official languages are Chichewa and English. In the districts local languages are spoken. In Nkhata Bay district (where ELA's centre is located), language Chitonga is spoken, after Tonga community.
- Most common Malawian last names are Chirwa, Banda, Piri and Manda; 30% of inhabitants have one of these last names.
- Population is around 16 million.
- Lilongwe is Malawian capital city, with population around 4 millions. Its name is also "green city", as big green vegetation (flowers, trees, greens, bushes) covers it throughout whole area.
- January-March is a rainy season, which means half-hour showers multiple times per day; May-July are colder months (some sort of »European« spring, around 25°-28°C); August-December is a dry season (hot, dry weather around 30°-35°C).
- Sunrise is around 5am, sunset at 6pm.
- Since July 2011 (economic crisis) prices of petrol/diesel have grown up to 3€ for 1 liter!
- Malawian currency is Kwacha, 200-220 Mkw=1€. 100 Malawian Tambala is 1Mkw. Tambala means sun, which is also the main symbol on Malawian national flag.

- National flag consists of 3 colors: red (represents blood of Malawian nation that freed itself from English colonial empire), black (color of the skin) and green (green nature/vegetation). In the middle, there is white sun as a sign of hope.
- Malawians are really open, kind, joyful people with pure hearts. They will help you on every step, if asked for assistance. They will want to chat with you and know as much as possible about you, they will always greet you nicely and you can never be bored around them. They are truly proud of the fact that Malawi is the safest African country; it is peaceful, safe to travel, in big cities and on almost all beaches you can walk alone at night and nothing will happen.
- Traditional food is nsima (maize polenta, cooked in water for 30 minutes) which needs to be eaten with hands. You take small piece of nsima from a bigger piece, roll it in your right hand in a shape of a small ball and dip it into tomato sauce. If desired greens, beans, fish/beef/chicken is served beside.
- Other food on daily menu: rice, cassava, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes (made as chips). Beans, soya and bob are the source of proteins. »Green« vegetable is spinach (many types), pumpkin leaves, which they cut in small pieces and cook in salty water (source of folic acid for pregnant women).
- Season for all types of mangoes (which grow abundantly throughout whole Malawi) is November, December and beginning of January. It is also season for pineapples and all sorts of mushrooms. Bananas and papayas are growing throughout the whole year. Price of 1 mango is 5-10 cents/€, papaya/pineapple is 25-30 cents/€ and you can get 3 small bananas for 5 cents/€.
- Milk, eggs and flour are more expensive than in Europe. Milk 1liter=1,5€, dozen of eggs= 3€, flour 1 kg=3 €, bread 1kg=2 €. Distilled water 0,5liter=0,5€. In most villages wells with drinking water are available.
- Everything which is not locally produced is really expensive: e.g. yoghurt (1dcl=1€), chocolate (100g=4€), cooking oil (1 liter=4€), cornflakes (1kg=8€), spaghetti (0,5kg=1,5€), mix biscuits (200g=4€), honey (1liter=8€), fruit jam (1kg=9€), brown sugar (1kg=1,5€), ice-cream (1 scoop=2€), Nutella (400g=5€), juice (1liter=3 €), powdered milk (500g=5€).
- Snacks on the market: sweet/Irish potatoes chips, portion of nsima for 1€. Traditional meal in local restaurant in Mzuzu, which consists of nsima/rice/potatoes with half fish or small piece of chicken/beef is 3€. If you go to any other “foreign” restaurant (Indian, Italian, Chinese) you can’t eat under 6-8€.
- Blantyre (2nd biggest Malawian city) annually hosts a competition in eating biggest portions/amounts of nsima. Winning amounts are huge; up to 3kg per person.
- Most popular drink is extra sweetened Coca Cola, second is Fanta, followed by Sprite. Malawians adore sodas, because they represent some sort of sweets. Daily they drink at least 1 local tea with milk, which contains a lot of sugar (3 big table spoons of sugar in 2 dcl of tea!)
- Men drink locally made banana beer (Chibuku), rum, gin, spirits made of sugar canes. Women rarely drink alcohol.

- Lake Malawi (formerly called Lake Nyasa as still called by the locals) is the source of income for many families. Fishermen catch numerous types of fish using fishing nets, dragged behind locally made wooden canoes or small boats. When full moon rises, everybody goes fishing since it is commonly known that catches are the biggest on those nights. Lake is filled with shining lights on boats and canoes. After this event annual Malawian music festival “Lake of Stars” got its name. It is a festival of Malawian and foreign music talents/groups (“reggae” and “ska” are mainly played).
- Malawians (younger generation) adore songs of Bob Marley, Lucky Dube, Tupac and Shanaia Twain. Most famous local musicians, singing the traditional songs, are Black Missionaries, Lucious Banda and Billy Gauda. Mostly all performers/singers produce and film their own songs, pay radio producers big amounts of money, who then constantly play their songs on the air and help young singers to their fame and quickly earned fortune.
- On average couples get married after 6 months or 1 year of relationship. After the wedding they can move together in joined apartment/house, which both sets of parents need to agree upon (in cities there are no such traditions anymore).
- To rent a house in a bigger village with 3 rooms costs 100€ a month, or 200€ in smaller towns. In capital City Lilongwe rent of a house with 7 rooms costs around 700€.
- Mostly all Malawians are owners of at least 1 phone if not 2. There are 2 phone lines- Airtel and Tnm, which charge 0,5€ for a minute call(!).
- Lake Malawi has constant temperature of 27°C throughout whole year (exception in rainy season). It is divinely turquoise color with sandy beaches.
- Bilharzia (parasites that get into intestines and cause some sort of pneumonia) is present only in the Southern part of the lake in Cape Mclear and nowhere else. This area is also known for hippopotamus and crocodiles present in the night (no night swimming!). There are luckily no reports of human victims, only dogs.
- Lake is filled with amazing, tropical fish of hundreds colors. 80% of all tropical fish are sold in Europe/America for aquariums come from Malawian lake. Snorkeling and diving is incredible!
- Women national wear is »chitenge«, fabric with beautiful printed patterns, which they use as skirts, cloths for tying babies to their backs, as bags to carry local produce and as cloths for helping with stability of big baskets that are carried on their heads. In villages you will never see a woman or a girl wearing trousers, they always wear skirts which need to cover knees. T-shirts need to cover bellies and backs, not having too revealing cleavage, but can be bare-shoulder.
- Men are wearing long trousers, younger also wear shorts, shirts, tuxedos and nicely polished shoes. In towns you will rarely see untidy men and women. Being nicely dressed is called “smart”.
- Malawians are famous for their beautiful hand crafts (wooden masterpieces) and hand painted pictures with animal and every day motives.

- China is a big investor in Malawian development as Malawi is 4th poorest African country. Chinese are investing in irrigation systems, which already help with 2 big sowings per year and help to prevent malnutrition.
- Apart from the Chinese, Indians own all the bigger stores and petrol/diesel stations in times of economic fuel crisis in Malawi. Americans, Brits and Canadians are major “helpers” in humanitarian sense through volunteering programs (Peace Corps, World Vision, VSO and hundreds of NGO’s (non-governmental organization)).
- Generally, girls and boys have short hair because of hygiene, heat and the rule in school system. Women wear wigs and hair extensions nicely braided in their hair in so many ways.
- Bao is a traditional strategic social game with 2 players, wooden board with 32 holes and 64 marbles. The marbles are moved around the board with different rules. One game can last anywhere between 5 minutes and 3 hours.