

# The Beach House

Lake Malawi is one of Africa's unspoiled jewels, still almost unknown to international tourism. Lying at the southern end of Africa's Great Rift Valley, it is 355 miles from north to south and up to 50 miles wide. The third largest lake in Africa, and twelfth in the world, it is home to an estimated 600 species of colourful fish, many still evolving in uniquely small environments around isolated islands.

The northern lakeshore, shelving rapidly to depths of more than 700m, is the most unspoiled part of this pristine lake. The Beach House, which overlooks silver sands with mango trees swooping down to the water's edge, faces south-west and looks down the lake. The sun rises in winter at one end of the beach and sets at the other. In summer, the sunrise over the distant islands of Chizimulu and Likoma is a photographer's dream. Many of the most evocative pictures of Lake Malawi, used in the country's tourism brochures and websites, have been taken from the beach.

The house itself is built on the edge of the dunes and is protected by two beautiful shade trees, a Natal pod mahogany and a silver-green leaved naphini / nyaphini of the Terminalia family.

There are four large bedrooms with twin or double beds, mosquito nets and en-suite bathrooms. The spacious lounge area is furnished in traditional colonial style with many old maps and prints of Nyasaland, as Malawi used to be called, and the lake. A splendid khonde (terrace) and an open conservatory setting with many plants in huge pots offer the very best of outdoor-life in the tropics.

A well-equipped kitchen, with a large refrigerator and a freezer, allows the widest range of self-catering; cooks and house servants are available to help. Barbecue equipment is provided for al fresco dining on the beach or under the trees.

A fruit orchard at the rear of the house provides lemons and mangoes, and pineapples are usually readily available. The local fish — chambo, kampango, ncheni and the whitebait-like usipa — can often be bought at dawn from local fishermen on the adjacent beach.

In the village of Chintheche, just 2km away on the main lakeshore road, there is a branch of the Peoples Supermarket chain at which all kitchen and household essentials can be purchased. Fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs, chicken and often fish are also on sale, seven days a week, at the local market in the middle of the village.

Nightly, except when the moon is full and competes for the attention of the fish, the fishermen cast their nets from dugouts, using on-board flares and beacons and creating a memorable spectacle of timeless beauty.

## Getting there

There is a simple airstrip at Chintheche, which is suitable for small aircraft and private charters. Kamuzu International airport at Lilongwe is 30 minutes away by air or three-and-a-half hours by road through the Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve. Mzuzu, the main town of northern Malawi, is an hour's drive on a lovely scenic route winding up the shoulder of the Great Rift Valley, passing banana and rubber plantations, rice paddies, and tea and coffee estates. The tiny airport there is served by Air Malawi and local charter operators. Guests staying at the Beach House can be met by prior arrangement at either Chintheche airstrip or Mzuzu Airport.

## To see and do

The Beach House appeals most to those seeking a get-away-from-it-all holiday. There are landline telephones and cell phone coverage is good, but there is no satellite television, just a well-stocked library and plenty of games for the family. Dugouts can be hired as a challenge to those with a well-developed sense of balance, and the gently sloping sandy beach is very suitable for launching power boats off trailers. Swimming, of course, is sheer delight – Lake Malawi may seem like an inland sea, but despite the beautiful beaches and the waves, the water is fresh and crystal clear, and there is no sticky saltiness.

Kande Horse offers riding by the hour on the beaches of nearby Kande or in the forests rising up to the Viphya Plateau. There is a wide selection of pedigree horses, many rescued from Zimbabwe's agricultural collapse.

Vizara Rubber Estate is 20km to the north, and there are coffee estates nestling in the folds of the fertile hills above the lake. South of Chintheche are the irrigated sugar fields of Dwangwa.

Nkhata Bay is one of the few lakeshore ports; further north are the beautiful lakeshore villages of Usisya and Ruarwe, often inaccessible except by boat.

Across the lake, the island of Likoma boasts a magnificent cathedral from the heyday of the Universities Mission to Central Africa, established through David Livingstone. The resort of Kaya Mawa lies on a promontory on the south-east shore. Across the Lake, on the undeveloped shore of the Mozambique littoral, Nkwichi Lodge is making a name for itself as a genuine eco-tourism venture, complete with many community initiatives. Both are just over an hour away – in good weather and in a power boat with a big outboards.

Bandawe, home to the second Livingstonia Mission, stands right across the bay below the hill of that name. Its churches and cemetery bear witness to the valiant efforts and innumerable hardships faced by those early missionaries.

Vwaza Gsame Reserve, with its many elephants around Lake Kazuni, makes a lovely excursion inland, while Nyika National Park, on the rolling grasslands of the Nyika Plateau (2500m), is 100km further. The lovely Chelinda Lodge there offers welcome hospitality after a day's game spotting.

#### A Note on Health.

As elsewhere in Africa, malaria is always a risk, especially during the January-April rainy season. It is preventable if you take the prescribed prophylactics and avoid getting bitten – insect repellent sprays, mosquito coils and, of course, the mosquito nets that we provide help to keep the buzzers at bay.

Bilharzia or schistosomiasis is found in several areas of Lake Malawi especially where water is stagnant and vegetation goes right down to the water's edge. The wave action and the sandy beaches at Chintheche mean that bathing is safe there.

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