



Malawi



Area: 118,484 sqkm
Population: 15.6 million (UN, 2010)
Capital: Lilongwe
Major Languages: Chichewa, English,
Religions: Christian, Muslim
Life expectancy: 56 years (men), 57 years (women)
HIV/Aids: 14.2 %
Money: Kwacha (approx 200:1 GBP)
Main exports: tobacco 60%, tea, sugar, cotton, coffee, peanuts, wood products, and apparel.

Economy

- Malawi's economy is based on agriculture, employing nearly 90 per cent of the workforce.
- Malawi ranks among the world's least developed countries. The economy is predominantly agricultural, accounting for nearly 40% of GDP and 88% of export revenues in 2001. The economy depends on substantial inflows of economic assistance from outside donor agencies and banks.
- Malawi's current account balance is \$-55.5 million (2004), external debt is £3.129 billion (2004), economic aid is \$540 million (1999).
- 55 per cent of the population is below the poverty line – living off less than \$1 per day.

Landscapes



- Malawi is one of the smallest African countries being a little over 45,000 m², of which 20 per cent is occupied by Lake Malawi- Africa's third biggest freshwater lake.
- Much of the country lies within the Great Rift Valley of eastern Africa, with Tanzania to the north, Zambia to the west and Mozambique to the east and south.
- Malawi is a land of many contrasts; the highest peak on Mount Mulanje touches 10,000ft compared to the lush Lower Shire Valley which sits at 500ft, combining to help make the landscape one of the most varied in Africa. Temperatures range from 21-30°C in the lowlands to 12-20°C in the highlands.
- Lake Malawi itself is a great inland sea, some 360 miles from north to south and up to 50miles across. It is home to the mbuna/cichlid, colourful tropical fish which occur in abundance and can easily be seen by snorkeling in the lake.

Religion and society

- Most people are Christian after missionaries founded the first Protestant church in the 19th century. There are also some Catholics and significant Muslim populations in the north and along the lakeshore, originating from the Arab slave traders who once operated in these areas.

The people



- It is one of the ten poorest countries in the world: more than a third of the population are illiterate and life expectancy is around 40 years, with a high rate of infant mortality. With the increased incidence of HIV/AIDS, it is estimated that over half a million children are orphans as a result. Many are cared for by relatives who are already under economic hardships.
- With a population of nearly 14 million, Malawi is one of the more densely populated countries of this part of Africa and its growing fast at a rate of 3.5% per year, compared to the UK's growth rate of 0.3%!
- Most of the population is rural (approx.90%) living largely in traditional villages.
- The largest town is the conurbation of Blantyre-Limbe in the south, followed by the capital Lilongwe in the central region.

- Many of today's Malawians are descendents of the Bantu people who moved into Malawi from central Africa before the 1500's. Today there is a mixture of cultures living in Malawi including many different local tribes, with the Chewa in the central and southern parts, Yao in the south and the Tumbuka in the north, as well as Asians and Europeans.

History of Malawi

- The first European settlers were the Portuguese who set up small trade routes with local tribes in the 16th century. Then in 1859, the famous Dr Livingstone supposedly discovered Lake Malawi and explored the surrounding areas. He returned to England with reports of the 'Dark Continent' and the abysmal conditions of the slave trade. This saw the influx of missionaries into east Africa in an attempt to 'civilise' the natives and spread Christianity. In 1889 much of southern and western Malawi was proclaimed a British protectorate and the British took on an ongoing battle with the Yao and Ngoni tribes to stop slave trading with the Arabs on the East Coast. By the end of the 19th century 6000 local people were leaving Malawi due to a 'hut tax' placed on people living on plantations owned by European settlers.
- Finally, in 1964, the nation of Malawi became independent and the Nyasaland African Congress took power, under leadership of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Banda then declared himself 'President for life', periodically banned foreign press and waging vendettas against any groups he regarded as a threat. During Banda's rule reportedly 250,000 were murdered for opposing him.
- After three decades of one-party rule under President Banda the country held multiparty elections in 1994, under a provisional constitution, which came into full effect the following year.
- President Bakili Muluzi came to power in the 1994 elections and was re-elected to office in 1999. The political prisons were close, freedom of speech and free press were permitted and free primary education was introduced. The unofficial night curfew was lifted and the dress code that all women were not allowed to wear trousers and men were not allowed to wear long hair was lifted.
- However, Muluzi's attempts to amend the constitution to allow for a third term have been unsuccessful and current President Bingu wa Mutharika came to power in the 2004 elections. However, increasing corruption, population growth, increasing pressure on agricultural lands, and HIV/AIDS pose major problems for the country.

