

Welcome Pack



This pack will tell you everything you need to know about volunteering with Phunzira. Due to ongoing economic instability in Malawi, coupled with regular devaluation of the Malawian currency, all prices quoted in this pack may vary considerably. You can pay airport taxis and at lodges in dollars, all other prices quoted are payable in Malawi Kwacha unless specified. Dollar bills **must** be series 2013 or newer and denominations of either \$50 or \$100. You will get a much better exchange with larger notes. \$20 and below will be very hard to exchange. Please note, that while dollars are accepted at Zulunkhuni River Lodge, due to its remote location the rate will not be preferable and so you are advised to bring Kwacha to pay at the lodge.

Please remember to print off all your forms, which can be found on our website, before coming to join us in Malawi. For more information, please contact Rosa (rosa@phunzira.org) or Philippa (philippa@phunzira.org).

We look forward to meeting you in Malawi soon!

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Malawi: Ten Facts

Capital:	Lilongwe
Population:	Approx. 22.6 million (increased from 20.4million in 2022)
Currency:	Malawi Kwacha (MK or MWK)
International Dialling Code:	+265
Main Languages:	English (official), Chichewa (national), Chitumbuka (north)
Staple Foods:	Nsima (pounded maize), Kondowole (pounded cassava), Rice
Cities:	Lilongwe (capital), Blantyre, Zomba, Mzuzu, Karonga
Dominant Religions:	Protestant (34%), Catholic (17%), Muslim (14%)
Average Birth Rate per Woman:	3.9 children
Lake Malawi:	Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site

Visa Requirements

A valid passport with at least six months to expiry date (from intended exit date) is required to enter Malawi. If your passport is likely to expire you should get a new one before arriving. There are no Volunteer Visas in Malawi, so all volunteers should apply for Tourist Visas and give “tourism/travel” as the reason for entry.

Tourist visas, which are valid for 30 days, must be arranged in advance through the eVisa portal for most nationalities: <https://evisa.gov.mw>. You will need a recent passport photo, a scan of your passport, as well as a signed covering letter from your host from the place you are staying the first night in Malawi. This letter can be used for both the “host covering letter” and “accommodation covering letter” on your application. The visa currently costs \$50 + a processing fee, payable online at the time of application. You will need to print out the visa confirmation and bring the paper copy with you when you travel to Malawi. Some nationalities do not have to pay for a visa, this is listed on the eVISA website, or please check with your nearest Malawian embassy for more information.

Volunteers staying more than 30 days need to extend their visa for up to a further sixty days (prior to the initial 30-day visa expiring). This is free of charge and can be done either in Nkhata Bay or Mzuzu Immigration offices.

Any volunteers staying for over three months should then expect to apply for a Temporary Resident Permit (TRP) in advance of their 90 days expiring, which is now done online. This costs \$100 payable in \$, or MK at the current bank rate, at the immigration office in Mzuzu or Lilongwe.

For more detailed information on visas please visit: www.malawihighcommission.co.uk and click on the consular and immigration services link.

Flight Options

There are no direct flights from Europe, the US, Australia etc. to Malawi. The main airlines that fly regularly to Lilongwe (the Capital) are Ethiopian Airlines, Kenya Airways and South African Airways. The easiest way to fly is with one stopover but adding more stopovers usually decreases the cost of your flight. In general, Ethiopian Airlines is viewed as the cheaper option (though at peak times of the year there is less of a difference in price). Flights normally cost between \$500 and \$1,000 (return) depending on the time of year, though this can fluctuate heavily.

Entry Into Malawi

If you are flying in from Europe with one stopover, you will arrive in Lilongwe approximately 15 hours after original departure. It is at this point that you will present your eVisa confirmation and receive your first 30 days Tourist Visa stamp in your passport.

In general, Malawi is considered to be a safe country where tourists are not at great risk but in Lilongwe petty crimes and robberies can be frequent so visitors should make sure to watch their bags and carry only small amounts of cash when out and about.

All volunteers are advised to stay in Lilongwe for at least one night once they arrive in the country. There are many places to stay in the Capital, from tourist lodges to plush hotels. The staff at any lodges will be able to provide advice on bus routes and timetables for getting to the north. A taxi to any lodge from the airport should cost \$30-35 – taxis are all unmarked and easy to find at the airport upon arrival.

Money in Malawi

Malawi is a cash society, and while it is possible to withdraw using some bank cards in bigger towns and cities, and occasionally to pay with card in certain bigger shops, the priority should be to have enough cash for multiple weeks stay at a time. Due to the instability of the currency, there are multiple exchange rates when changing cash/withdrawing money and multiple ways to do so.

To withdraw from a cash point you will need either VISA (most commonly accepted) or MASTERCARD (only occasionally accepted). There are plenty of places to withdraw money in Lilongwe and Mzuzu (use either Standard Bank or NBS) and even Nkhata Bay. Each individual withdrawal cannot exceed MK400,000 (as long as the machine has MK5,000 notes) and most international banks set their own daily withdrawal limit. Exchanging cash and withdrawing cash from a cash machine will give the bank rate of exchange. This tends to be the lowest rate available (you get the least amount of Kwacha for your Pound/Dollar).

Digital transfer services provide a varied but improved rate of exchange. TalkRemit will transfer from your bank to an Airtel Money Wallet, and cash can then be withdrawn at any airtel money agent. Mukuru will transfer from your bank to a cash withdrawal, which can be done at any number of Mukuru traders in most larger towns and cities. There is a Victoria Forex and bank branches when you leave the arrivals hall prior to leaving the airport building at Lilongwe Airport where you can withdraw your first transfer (including by Mukuru) as soon as you arrive. At present Mukuru offers the best rate of exchange so this is the service we would recommend; however, this can change overnight. NB – You must set up both TalkRemit and Mukuru in your home country BEFORE you travel to Malawi. For Mukuru, a second layer of identity verification will allow up to GBP4,000 transfers per month rather than the base allowance of GBP400, which most volunteers will find is not enough for their needs while travelling. As an example, current bank rate is MWK2,400 to £1; Mukuru is MWK4,500 to £1. Please contact us directly for more information about exchanging cash. In general, where available we would recommend services such as mukuru over cash exchange.

Travel to Ruarwe

The first leg is to get from Lilongwe (Central Region) to Nkhata Bay (Northern Region). While there are buses that travel north along the lakeshore, going from Lilongwe to Nkhata Bay via Salima, costing around \$7-\$10 these are not currently recommended due to the poor condition of that road. Alternatively, you can travel from Lilongwe to Mzuzu, located 50km west of Nkhata Bay and one of the five main cities in Malawi. There are numerous buses from the main bus station in Lilongwe, both large and small, that leave for Mzuzu throughout the morning. The journey costs approximately \$7-\$15 and takes between 8 - 13 hours, however, these are often delayed and poorly maintained. There are more comfortable, but slightly more expensive buses (around \$18 one way, and taking 5-6 hours) from the Grand Central Business Park in the city leaving at either 7am or midday. These are the Kwezy Bus (which goes all the way to the Nkhata Bay coach stop outside of the town), and the SoSoSo Bus (going to Mzuzu). Any lodge in Lilongwe can assist with purchasing the required ticket. You can also contact Kwezy directly via whatsapp and pay via Airtel Money; Kwezy +265886780355. From Mzuzu, you can travel to Nkhata Bay by share taxi or mini bus (if arriving before sunset), which takes approximately one hour and costs roughly \$3, or by private taxi (after sunset), which costs approximately \$20. We would recommend the direct Kwezy bus (approximately 1300-1930) plus a local taxi ride.

There is also the option of a private taxi from Lilongwe directly to Nkhata Bay. These cost upwards of \$100 for the journey from Lilongwe to Nkhata Bay. Please contact either Rosa or Philippa for contact numbers if this is an option you would like to explore.

We recommend volunteers going to Nkhata Bay to stay at Butterfly Space, a tourist lodge run by three English ladies, Josie, Alice and Holly. For more information on the accommodation offered at the lodge, visit www.butterfly-space.com. Please book with Butterfly Space in advance. You'll need a taxi to the ferry from here.

Alternatively, [Soul Rebel lodge](#), is in the bay itself where the ferry departs, so the nightwatchman can wake you when the ferry arrives in the early hours - it is usually many hours late. It is in port for 2 hours, so you have time to walk down and board after the crowds have disembarked.

To get to Ruarwe, volunteers are advised to travel on the weekly ferry, which is scheduled to leave Nkhata Bay every Sunday at 5am. This will cost approximately \$5 – \$10 (depending on the class of travel you choose). The lodge representative in Nkhata Bay, Blessings (+265 999071914 – reachable on phone call and WhatsApp), is able to assist you with booking a cabin (approx \$20 for two) if you would like to rest and have an ensuite - ask for the Owner's cabin. The journey takes between 5 and 7 hours, with beautiful views along the way. Upon arrival in Ruarwe (second stop from Nkhata Bay), take the service boat from the ferry to the beach, where Lodge staff will meet you.

There are also local boats, which travel to Ruarwe from Nkhata Bay every Wednesday and Friday. They leave at approximately 7.30am and cost \$5. The journey is typically 10 – 14 hours as it tends to stop in many villages along the way, but it will drop you directly at Zulunxhuni River Lodge in Ruarwe and the views are spectacular!

Accommodation

All of our volunteers reside at Zulunxhuni River Lodge in Ruarwe. Short-term volunteers pay standard lodge prices for accommodation. Those staying for 3 months or more pay a subsidised rate of \$8 per night for a dorm bed. Please contact the lodge directly by email to book your accommodation for the duration of your stay (zulunxhuni@yahoo.co.uk) and visit their website for more information on accommodation available (<http://www.zulunxhuni.com>). Zulunxhuni River Lodge is fully functioning and set in a beautiful location along the lakeshore with waterfalls backing onto it. Please be aware that it operates predominantly as a business and must attend to guests' needs as a priority; volunteers on a subsidised rate should, therefore, expect to be sleeping in the dormitory and may have to move around during their stay. We are extremely grateful to the owners for their generosity and we ask all volunteers to respect the lodge and treat it well.

Mosquito nets are provided on every bed but we recommend volunteers to also bring their own if desired or for onward travel. A laundry service is available at the lodge for a small fee or there are many areas to wash your own clothes.

There is one shower and toilet at the lodge and volunteers can expect hot showers in general in the evenings. Bear in mind, however, that it is very hot during the summer months so after a sweaty day at work a cold shower is often all that is desired!

There is no electricity at the lodge so after dark solar lights and torches are required. The staff at Zulunkhuni River Lodge are very friendly and helpful (so rest assured there will always be someone around to assist with any problems!) and there is extremely good security both day and night. If you are staying for over a month then the lodge also offers food and accommodation packages for Phunzira volunteers. If you are interested in a monthly package deal then please contact the lodge directly.

Eating

Ruarwe is a very remote and rural village. Volunteers need to be aware that there is very little available to buy from anywhere within walking distance. Fresh food is seasonal and variable in availability. One of Phunzira's priorities is to ensure volunteers eat well and stay healthy, but this does take some forward planning. Please note that free, safe drinking water is available at the lodge and education centre.

Volunteers will be asked to select a catered or self-catered option, which they can choose on a weekly basis.

Catered Option

This option will mean eating food cooked by Zulunkhuni River Lodge (from their standard menu) at the same price as regular guests and payable to the lodge at the end each week. Food at the lodge is vegetarian, varied and delicious, and is freshly prepared to order by their local chefs.

Breakfast: The kitchen opens at 7am and the lodge offers an extensive menu ranging from eggs on toast to a full English breakfast, pancakes, French toast and rice pudding. Prices range from \$3 - \$7.

Lunch: All volunteers are expected to eat lunch provided at their respective institutions on weekdays. If you are going for the catered option, you will still have to pay \$20 each week for lunch (this is payable to Phunzira's volunteer coordinator or Frank or Shidah at Nyumba Ya Masambiro). For more details please see later. At weekends lunch can be ordered from the menu with prices ranging from \$3 - \$7.

Dinner: There is a set meal every night at the lodge and it is usually eaten together with any other guests/catered volunteers staying there. The menu is varied but usually vegetarian with the occasional exception of chicken, fish or goat sourced locally. Meals include spaghetti bolognese, veggie burgers, egg curry, Spanish omelette, chilli sin carne and handmade tortellini! If you have special requirements the staff will always do their best to accommodate you. Dinner costs approx. \$7 for a main meal and \$3 for dessert.

Self-Catered Option

There is a basic, covered kitchen area at the lodge with two mud stoves that use firewood for cooking. Firewood must be purchased by volunteers at a price of approximately MK5000 per bundle. Cooking utensils and crockery/cutlery will be provided by the lodge. Please remember this is rural living and as previously mentioned purchasing food is not the easiest task, nor cooking it! However, it is part of the experience of living in a remote village and we believe that cooking together as group of volunteers in this simple way can be a very enjoyable experience.

All food, condiments, spices, oil etc must be bought in Nkhata Bay or Mzuzu before arrival in Ruarwe. There are two small supermarkets - SJB Superette (previously People's and still called that sometimes) and MS Investments (previously called Right Choice) in Nkhata Bay as well as some larger supermarkets (Shopwise, Sana and Chipiku Plus) in Mzuzu. You can also find many local shops as well as vegetable markets in both Mzuzu and Nkhata Bay. Vegetables widely available include tomatoes, onions, carrots, aubergines, green beans, green peppers and white cabbage, though there can be

seasonal fluctuations in availability. You should budget for these items costing approximately MK40,000 – MK50,000 per week.

Some perishable foods can be bought in Ruarwe and it will be up to volunteers to cover the cost either individually or as a group contributing to a 'pot'. You should budget for these extra items costing approximately MK10,000 per week. Perishables available locally include:

- A small range of fruits and vegetables e.g. tomatoes, onions, leafy greens, bananas
- Eggs
- Bread rolls
- Fish (caught by local fisherman)
- Chicken (locally sourced from the village)

A typical day in Ruarwe if you are self-catered will be as follows:

Breakfast: Bread rolls are available in Ruarwe, but if you would like to have extras like cereal, oat porridge, peanut butter, honey, etc. then these should be purchased in Mzuzu or Nkhata Bay before travelling to Ruarwe. If you are staying for over a month then you should buy enough for 3 weeks.

Lunch: Catered and self-catered volunteers will all have lunch at their respective institutions on weekdays (cost \$20 per week). This is a great experience that allows everyone to get to know each other better, and learning about Ruarwe's culture and people is paramount to our ethos as a charity. Lunch will be cooked by staff and will consist of local Malawian cuisine such as rice or nsima (dried and pounded maize), cooked with beans, eggs, vegetables or usipa (fish).

Dinner: As basic or creative as you wish using the ingredients you brought along with you, such as pasta, potatoes, herbs, spices, vegetables, tinned foods etc.

It is possible for a shopping list of basic items available in Nkhata Bay to be sent down for the lodge representative (Blessings) to buy and send up with the next boat. Volunteers must send all the money needed for the shopping items in advance together with the shopping list. There is a small additional fee for each shopping list sent. This is an additional service and should not be relied on as the main source of food.

Summary of Costs

Please note that we do not charge anything for people wishing to volunteer with Phunzira. Volunteers are, however, expected to cover all their living costs. When creating your own budget, consider the following costs:

Visa: See above.

Travel to Ruarwe: See above.

Accommodation: chalet \$25-\$35/night, dormitory \$10/night, or camping \$7/night; with a subsidised rate of \$8/night for volunteers staying for 3 months or over.

Food: Self-catered option: \$20 per week for lunch (+ approx. MK50,000 per week for perishables, extras and firewood).

Food: Catered option: all costs are payable to Zulunkhuni Lodge + \$20 per week payable at Nyumba ya Masambiro for lunch.

Travel outside Ruarwe.

Personal spending money: e.g. Drinks at the lodge, phone credit, souvenirs etc.

In Ruarwe, accommodation, food, drinks etc bills are payable at the lodge weekly in cash. Malawi is a cash society so very few places accept card and this is not an option in Ruarwe.

Communication

There is 4G phone reception in Ruarwe, including at the lodge and the community centre NYM. This can, however, be very temperamental. There are two network providers in Malawi – Airtel and TNM – but only Airtel works in the village. There is an Airtel office at the airport allowing you to buy a sim card there and set up a data package and the MyAirtel App immediately. The staff at the office are very knowledgeable and able to assist with any queries. We recommend you do download the app immediately as it is very useful for sending money and making payments.

Travelling Malawi

Since Ruarwe is a very remote location, volunteers may wish to take breaks in order to travel around Malawi. To allow for this, long-term volunteers should aim to work in Ruarwe for a 3-week stretch and then take a 1-week break. There are some beautiful areas around Ruarwe and Khondowe for camping, and visitors to Ruarwe often embark on a 5 – 8 hr walk south (with plenty of good swimming and snorkelling spots) to Usisya, where Temwa carries out much of their community work (Temwa is the acting NGO for the district in which Phunzira's community work is carried out). There is accommodation in Usisya at [Usisya Beach Eco Lodge](#) run by Dani and Erco.

Every Sunday the ferry passes Ruarwe on its journey north towards Tcharo, Molowe and Chilumba, and then heads back down south, passing Ruarwe each Monday morning on its way back towards Nkhata Bay. Ruarwe is one stop north of Usisya and two stops north of Nkhata Bay, a place many volunteers may wish to visit regularly due to its high level of tourism and lively atmosphere. Lake Malawi contains over 90% of all the fresh water fish species on the planet, and Nkhata Bay has a very good reputation with divers (see www.aquaafrica.co.uk).

Volunteers should consult Rosa (rosa@phunzira.org) if they wish to travel Malawi more extensively during their stay. There are some beautiful places to explore, including Mount Mulanje and the Zomba Plateau in the south, Mushroom Farm, Vwaza Marsh and Nyika Reserve in the north, and both Chizumulu and Likoma, two beautiful islands that lie in Lake Malawi not far off the coast of Mozambique.

Volunteers planning to arrive in September/October should note that Malawi has a yearly festival called the Lake of Stars. It has hosted acts such as Andy Cato (Groove Armada), DJ Yoda and Annie Mac, as well as some of Malawi's biggest stars (Lucius Banda, Joseph Tembo and the Black Missionaries). For more information visit their website: www.lakeofstars.org.

Travelling Africa

Volunteers who wish to travel through other parts of Africa before or after their trip to Malawi must consult a travel clinic in order to check whether they need to take extra precautions. You can get to Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia fairly easily by road, and Mozambique can also be arrived at by boat.

Volunteers should check visa restrictions for these countries (visas may need to be obtained beforehand and the cost may vary depending on the country you are going to and the country you are from).

Cultural Awareness

Ruarwe is a very remote and local village and most adults do not have a very good command of the English language. Volunteers staying for longer than a period of 2 – 3 weeks should consider learning essential words and phrases in Chitumbuka when they arrive in order to communicate better with the surrounding community.

Female volunteers should be aware that in the towns and villages it is respectful to have your knees covered with loose clothing (and in some cases, your shoulders). Some practices in Malawi are very different from what volunteers may be used to at home. Visitors to the centre do not have to agree with all the customs around them but should act respectfully towards them and endeavour to understand the complex cultural history that has often shaped them.

Medical Matters

The main potential problem affecting volunteers is malaria. We insist on all our volunteers organising malaria prophylaxis prior to travel. Make sure you are taking your anti-malarial tablets each day (or week, if you are taking Larium), and continue to take them for the recommended time after you get home. You should always use a mosquito net. Make sure to apply mosquito repellent (consider 25% – 50% DEET), and try to cover yourself up at night. If you start feeling any symptoms of malaria then immediately notify the Volunteer or Project Coordinator.

HIV/AIDS is a problem all over Malawi and many volunteers arrive unaware of the risks involved in entering into relationships. All volunteers in such a situation, whether they consider themselves to be in long-term or short-term relationships, should make sure they use condoms. There are confidential clinics around Nkhata Bay that offer free HIV/AIDS tests with same-day results.

We also insist that all our volunteers purchase comprehensive travel/health insurance prior to travel and you will need to provide us with details of your insurance policy when you arrive along with emergency contact details and a signed code of conduct (forms available online). If a volunteer should fall sick there is a private doctor and public hospital in Nkhata Bay (and both a private and a public hospital in Mzuzu). If a volunteer should suffer a serious condition in Ruarwe there will always be someone available to assist them with getting to appropriate health services.

Important: Make sure you have read Phunzira's Medical Pack, which contains more detailed information about medical matters and emergencies.

Thank you for reading this Welcome Pack. We look forward to seeing you in Malawi soon!

