

African TREASURE

Running a lodge in Africa is always a responsibility. Even more so when you are the only property on a remote island reached only by chartered light plane or a weekly tramp steamer. Matt Vlemmiks finds a lodge on Lake Malawi that is certainly doing its share.



Get involved

Kaya Mawa's community projects are co-ordinated by Suzie Saunders who can be contacted for updates or with any questions at info@kayamawa.com. As well as direct financial donations, people can contribute in numerous ways to the local community. The Nkhwaza and Mbungo school libraries are severely understocked, so any unwanted books would be gratefully received. Stationery and old clothes are also extremely valuable contributions. To contribute, please contact Suzie Saunders directly quoting Audley.

Likoma Island is the jewel of Lake Malawi, close to the mainland of Mozambique but officially in Malawian territory. The island is relatively well populated and steeped in the history of David Livingstone and the missionary period, explaining the incongruous presence of St Peter's Cathedral, which feels like it's virtually as large as the island itself. Likoma boasts arguably Malawi's most luxurious and characterful lodge, Kaya Mawa, which is also making a significant name for itself in the field of responsible travel.

Kaya Mawa was started many years ago by a couple of travellers who were given the land by a village chief. What they have built is a quirky lodge that – if on the Seychelles or Mauritius – would be a cult beach resort. It has sandy beaches, warm clear waters thronged with multicoloured tropical fish and you don't need to shower after a snorkel – there's no salt!

The owners haven't forgotten the chief who helped them at the start. One of their biggest projects is Nkhwazi Primary School, constructed by the lodge's building team with an impressive science laboratory, jointly financed by the lodge. Guests can visit and meet the pupils, many of whom are the children of Kaya Mawa's staff. There is also the Island Child Programme, run by the lodge to encourage lodge guests to sponsor a child through one year of their education. The major, long-term goal here is to provide sponsorship for every child at Nkhwazi School, with money also going towards buying books for the community library.

The lodge also assists in administrating and managing three other projects largely funded by a regular guest. The Mbungo Village Orphan Programme was established to look after the 60 orphans in the village by providing each one with a guardian. While this initiative strives to be self sufficient, the scheme does put tremendous financial strain on already poor families. The committee of the programme donate money each month to provide food, soap and other necessities, so any donations are gratefully received.



Fishing boats on Likoma Island

Two other projects grew from this, when local villagers recognised that these orphans would require an education and began a rudimentary nursery in a derelict mud hut. This quickly proved too small to satisfy demand, so the volunteers successfully sought funding to build their own primary school, Mbungo, with further funding for a playground and daily food programme also in the pipeline. Unfortunately there is a very scarce supply of books and stationery, but funds raised so far have ensured that each child has their own uniform.

Kaya Mawa has also been instrumental in helping to provide and maintain the necessary infrastructure to help wider communities on Likoma. They recently constructed a water tank close to the lodge to supply running water to two local villages through taps sited along the road. The aim is to make the villagers self sufficient, promote agricultural growth and support a tree planting scheme that was launched in January. Alongside this, they support a local bakery in Nkhwazi and Katundu Textiles and Crafts, which provides a good option for finding mementoes of your trip.

For many visitors to Kaya Mawa, one of the highlight's of their trip is a surprise visit from the local choir and the Malipenga and Chioda Dancing Teams. They often perform along the island's beaches as the sun is setting, a magical way to begin the evening. The Malipenga (male) and Chioda (female) dancing teams are a central part of Malawi culture, with their dances telling the stories of days past. They take part in competitions on Likoma and the neighbouring island of Chizimulu, with the lodge helping to sponsor uniforms, provide transport and generally support the continuation of these cultural gatherings.

Likoma faces all of Africa's problems and then a few more. In this remote setting, it's the trickle of guests at Kaya Mawa who bring the many benefits that we all take for granted. Likoma is a wonderful place to relax and enjoy, but visitors can also make a difference for all of the island's inhabitants.

Matt Vlemmiks
Malawi Specialist



Kaya Mawa



Local women sewing



The Cathedral on Likoma Island



Likoma Island School



One of the Likoma Island tailors

FACT FILE

A 12 night visit to Malawi including five nights at Kaya Mawa and return flights costs from £3,200 per person. For details please contact Matt, Cate or James on 01993 838 540.



Kaya Mawa