

Kayak the deserted islands of Lake Malawi



Highlights

Paddle in hand, crystal blue waters, white sand beaches, beautiful sunsets. Need we say more? A romantic holiday exploring Lake Malawi's unspoiled and deserted islands by kayak.

Lake Malawi is more like an inland sea than a lake, and the myriad islands evoke deserted tropical islands in a way Robinson Crusoe would have been proud of. Mumbo Island is a practically deserted island and has never been inhabited (excepting the tiny wilderness camp you'll be staying at) so the wildlife and vegetation are pristine. The pristine waters around are renowned for some of the best fresh water snorkelling and diving in the world. African fish eagles are abundant as are teeming populations of cichlid fish species - small brightly coloured fish. Domwe Island is even more peaceful, with only three tents on the island, connected by an occasional land bridge to the mainland, it also plays host to a variety of small mammal species.

You will spend a week exploring the unspoiled and pristine islands of Lake Malawi. You will begin your adventure, after picking up some basic supplies, by paddling to Domwe Island. This idyllic island is totally unpopulated, with basic rustic accommodation. You won't want to leave, but there's even more to come...

After spending a couple of days exploring the 11km perimeter of the island, it's time to head off to the deserted tropical island of Mumbo. Once you have completed the 8km paddle, you will be ready for some serious chilling out. The accommodation here is very private and is in furnished tents. Only 14 guests can stay at one time, so we are talking seriously peaceful. Your only stress is going to be how to spend the next few days; should you be doing some more kayaking a bit of diving or snorkelling, or just chilling in a hammock.

Is it for me?

Tranquility is the name of the game here and whilst families are welcome, it is definitely chill out in a hammock territory, rather than hordes of children playing Marco Polo at top volume. You don't need to be particularly fit for the kayaking (and if you are nervous about that bit you can cheat and catch a lift on a boat. Ok, we know this is a kayaking trip, but you can still kayak when you get there! If you are the active type who doesn't fancy chilling in a hammock, they have all of the scuba diving equipment on site, so you can dive and snorkel to your heart's content.

Accommodation

The itinerary includes one night at Gecko Lounge, three nights at Domwe Island and three nights at Mumbo Island.

Gecko Lounge (self catering) is located right on the sandy shores of Cape Maclear offering superb sunsets viewed from the comfort of the lakeside bar veranda. Accommodation is in fully-furnished chalets complete with kitchenette. There is a bar and restaurant on the premises.

Domwe Island (self catering) has three fully furnished tents and two tent sites. With just two full time staff members here, the emphasis is on tranquility and being at one with your surroundings. You will be fully self-catered, so plenty of time and privacy to relax and unwind at your own pace and stare at the beautiful night sky.

Prices from

914 GBP (7 nights) per person

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Mumbo Island is a Wilderness Safaris lodge offering furnished tented accommodation for up to 14 guests. Accommodation at the intimate Mumbo Island Camp comprises tastefully furnished, comfortable tents with hot bucket showers and 'eco-loos'. Mumbo Island Camp sits on rocks high above the water. Each tent is tucked into the bush and comes fully furnished with its own shaded view-deck and hammock. Mumbo Island Camp adheres to strict principles of eco-architecture, so the dining area, bar and water sport gazebo, are all hand built from timber, thatch and canvas. Locally sourced food is catered on the island, so you don't need to worry about cooking. Your time at Mumbo Island is inclusive of all meals, activities and equipment (except SCUBA), as well as bottomless cups of tea, coffee and cool drinks.

Itinerary

Day 1: Transfer from Lilongwe airport, then food-shopping stop, then scenic road transfer to Cape Maclear. Overnight in a self-catering chalet at Gecko Lounge.

Day 2: Short stroll along the beach to reception. After a familiarisation and safety briefing on the beach, kayak (or boat ride) out to Domwe Island. Overnight in Domwe Island Camp.

Days 3 and 4: Days at leisure. Relax or explore at will, making use of sea kayaks, snorkelling gear and shady hammocks. Overnight in Domwe Island Camp.

Day 5: Kayak (or boat ride) the 8km to Mumbo Island. Overnight Mumbo Island.

Days 6 and 7: Days at leisure. Relax or explore at will, making use of sea kayaks, snorkelling gear and shady hammocks. Overnight Mumbo Island.

Day 8: Kayak (or boat ride) back to the mainland, followed by the road transfer to Lilongwe airport.

Details

Getting there

Lilongwe's Kamuzu International Airport serves regular flights to International Airports in Johannesburg, Harare and Nairobi.

Price includes

Price is ex Liwonde, excluding all international flights, airport taxes, visa fees, travel insurance and drinks. All meals are catered for on Mumbo Island, but you will need to bring your own food for your stay on Domwe island.

When is best

You can come here all year round, although the wet season in Malawi is from January to March

Comfort level

Reasonably comfortable (Inns, B&Bs, luxury camping etc.)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed

Travellers should bring

flip flops

Reviews (1)

Reviews of this experience

“ There's plenty to see. Effectively a 364-mile (585km) long aquarium, Lake Malawi contains more fish species than Europe and America combined, many of which have evolved in Darwinian fashion according to local conditions around the specific groups of rocks they inhabit.

But you don't have to be a fish fanatic to appreciate the beauty of this place. Within a couple of hours of the minibus-with-earrings experience, the bows of my kayak were biting into the sand of what could have been an exclusive private island in the Seychelles, albeit with limpid fresh water and associated bird life.

My arrival was greeted from the trees by sea eagles that looked like demon headmasters. On a rock around the corner, a group of whitebreasted cormorants lined up to face the evening sun, their beaks open and wings wide, and wherever I walked on the island I seemed to be preceded by the same rainbow skink with a jauntily skew whiff blue tail.

Although the island of Mumbo is uninhabited, this was no hardship experience. A walkway of planks led out to an offshore islet which was home to a luxury tented camp in true upmarket safari style, with fresh Malawi coffee and home-made cinnamon biscuits waiting on the table.

Adamson, who introduced himself as an "island man", chided me gently for having pulled up my own kayak - he would do that - and added that ice had just arrived from the mainland to "chill the greens" - green- labelled bottles of Carlsberg.

Mumbo is one of two islands in the Lake Malawi National Park with camps run by Kayak Africa, a company set up by a group of thirtysomethings from South Africa who've managed to blend the ingenuity of man with the creativity of nature.

The tents are on wooden platforms overlooking the water; you can lie in your hammock in the moonlight, listening to wavelets beneath you.

Kayak Africa's concept is for an all-inclusive island exile, with your own canoe, snorkel equipment and dive gear, and if you don't have a PADI certificate (as I didn't), this is one of the cheapest places in the world to learn to dive.

You don't need to dive, though, to swim with the fish. The majority are cichlids, striped yellow or blue, and they are so unfazed by snorkellers that you could almost reach out and touch them. Many species have developed curious personal habits, which include playing dead, holding their offspring in their mouths, and reproducing in a way which would have Sir David Attenborough struggling for a non-salacious euphemism.

(The Times, London, 15 Feb 2003) ”

Times reviewing Kayak the deserted islands of Lake Malawi