



# PAKACHERE

## BACKPACKERS

Hello, thank you for downloading my personal travel guide for Malawi.  
Zikomo (thank you)!

I hope you will find a lot of valuable information when planning your trip to  
the place I call home and love dearly.

If you come to Zomba in Southern Malawi, we are happy to share more  
information with you in person.

Enjoy preparing for your trip and I hope you will enjoy the country as much as  
I do.

Takulandirani You are welcome!  
Kind regards from the Warm Heart of Africa,

Annelies ☺

[www.pakachere.com](http://www.pakachere.com), Zomba Malawi

More info can be found on our [activities page](#)



# PAKACHERE

## Tourist information

We are happy to give recommendations and book the next lodge for you! *Information in this guide is subjective, 100% biased as it is based on our own experiences. We only recommend places that we know and like; we do not get any commission or other benefits from recommending certain places.*

Malawi is known as Africa for Beginners and the Warm Heart of Africa. We think it is one of the nicest countries in the world with friendly people, hardly any crime, no terror threat, and a diverse environment with stunning landscapes. Malawi has beaches, mountains, wildlife, and welcoming people who might be poor but happy and willing to share what little they have and they always have time for a little chat. Everybody greets each other (*Muli bwanji? Ndiri bwino! – How are you? I am fine!*), people are extremely helpful and only rarely do they try to rip you off. There is much to see and to do, and travelling around the country is fairly easy. Also for women alone. The only places where you have to be a bit careful at night is in the big cities Lilongwe and Blantyre, and in Zomba we recommend not to walk on the golf course in the dark.

Zomba is a lovely city at the foot of the massive Zomba Plateau. It used to be the capital, so the town has everything a traveller needs; banks with ATMs/cashpoints, an immigration office to extend your visa, a post office, supermarkets, 2<sup>nd</sup> hand clothes shops and one of the biggest markets in Malawi. From Zomba you travel to Mount Mulanje in just over an hour, Liwonde national park is 1 hour drive away and the great beaches with thousands of colourful fish (chiclids) in the water and stunning sunsets in Cape Maclear is a 3-hours drive. Only 1,5 hours from Blantyre's Chileka Airport, Zomba is a great place for your first or final nights in the country.

Pakachere can organise a transfer from the airport to our lodge. We will pick you up from Blantyre's Chileka Airport and drive you to Zomba. If you book our landing package, we will welcome you at 'Paka' with a nice Malawi coffee or tea, or cold drink; a beer (a 'green'), soft drink or the famous Malawi Gin & Tonic (MGT), and give you all information about the town and the country that you require. If you want, we can explain about dos and don'ts, money and ATMs, (public) transport, visa extensions, communication (we'll have a local SIM card for you) and share details of our personal favourite places in the country. You can add a trip to the plateau or a walk around town if you want.



Takulandirani; you are most welcome!

# PAKACHERE

## Packages

Pakachere can help organising your holiday in Malawi for you. We can offer a low budget backpackers' trip to Blantyre, Cape Maclear, Senga Bay, Lilongwe, Nkhata Bay and Livingstonia; a safari trip to Liwonde, Nkhotakota, Nyika and/or Vwaza, and Kasungu; stay at lodges with Dutch speaking owners/managers; a trip to lodges with culinary treats and brilliant food; and much more!

## Guidebooks

The Bradt guide is the best guidebook for Malawi. Lonely Planet (LP) has some chapters on Malawi; you can buy LP downloads of separate chapters online (PDF) for €3,50 per chapter.

## Visa & Yellow fever

At the airport they might ask you to show your yellow book with your vaccinations. Yellow fever is mandatory if you come from countries that have yellow fever; which are all our neighbouring countries. There is no yellow fever in Malawi. We recommend to get the stamp anyway and nowadays it is valid for life! Nowadays you need to have a PCR test that is less than 72 hours old. We recommend to make an account on [trustedtravel.panabios.org](https://trustedtravel.panabios.org), upload your test results and get your QR code.

**VISA:** You will need a visa for Malawi if your country also requires a visa for Malawians to enter your home country. E-visa is \$50. Please apply at least 10 days in advance on the internet. You will need an invitation letter and booking confirmation. You can stay 90 days (but **get a stamp every 30 days!**) and apply for your [e-visa online via this link](#). Your passport needs to be valid for at least 6 months after your return date. You are not allowed to work on a tourist visa, not even as a volunteer, so make sure you fill in you come on holiday. Under 'Reasons in full for proposed visit' always write that you come for holidays. As place to stay you can fill in Pakachere Backpackers, PO Box 1389 (off Kufa Road) in Zomba. You can write down that you have a bankcard and credit card to 'Means at applicant's disposal'. Pakachere writes invitation letters and booking confirmations if you book with us and pay a deposit.

Your visa is valid for 90 days but needs to be extended after 30 days. That is an easy



process and is free. After 90 days you either leave the country to renew your tourist visa or you buy a Temporary Resident Permit (TRP) for \$100. The TRP is valid for 6 months

With the TRP you **cannot** re-enter the country; as soon as you leave Malawi, your TRP is not valid anymore.

Don't overstay your visa; it is easy and quick to extend (in Blantyre, Lilongwe, Monkey Bay, Mzuzu, Nkhata Bay or Zomba) and you will get in trouble if you want to exit the country after your visa has expired. You pay \$25 per day if you overstay. Don't forget to get the stamp every 30 days!

# PAKACHERE

## **Malaria and bilharzia**

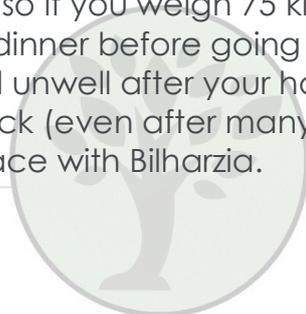
Don't be scared but be prepared! Malawi is a very safe place, but we do have mosquitos that carry the malaria virus and in the lake there are Bilharzia parasites. It is something the people living in Malawi are used to and it is not something to panic about, but it is good to be cautious. If you are on holiday in an area with malaria for less than 2 months, it is best to take a prophylaxis like Lariam, Malerone or Doxycycline.

We recommend you spray with at least 40% deet every evening around 5-6PM (we use Peaceful sleep, for sale for 6,000 MWK in big supermarkets and most pharmacies) and to sleep under a net (most lodges provide nets, but they might have some holes). If you feel flu-ish (pain in your side & lower back, headache, fever and/or other flu-like symptoms), please visit a clinic for a malaria test. The incubation time is 10 to 14 days, so you cannot get malaria within the first week of arrival.

The clinics are generally safe and have a lot of knowledge about malaria. They will draw a drop of blood from your fingertip and within a couple of minutes you have the results. If you test positive for malaria, you will get medication for 3 days. We always take some multivitamin pills, drink at least 1 litre of water with ORS per day, sleep a lot and keep checking our temperature. After 3 days you might be left with a bad headache and it is best not to drink alcohol for 14 days. If you test negative but the symptoms remain, please test again after a day.

When in doubt, it is better to take the malaria medication than to walk around with malaria. Please do not wait until you are home, because doctors here know what they are doing! The quicker you are treated, the better! You can buy self-tests (same as they use in the clinics) and medication (Lonart) at all pharmacies for a couple of dollars. We always carry our test and Lonart with us! Malaria should be treated as quickly as possible; we had it a couple of times and it is nothing to be scared about, as long as you take medication as soon as (you think) you have it.

Lake Malawi has Bilharzia due to over-fishing. They are small parasites that can be found in areas with (a lot of) green weeds and snails in the water. Most people who live in Malawi and swim in the lake regularly, take Bilharzia medication 3 or 4 times per year as precaution. For a holiday, you should take your medication 8 weeks after your last swim in the lake. The pills are cheap and for sale in most pharmacies. Make sure you buy the medication in Malawi before flying home. You buy 1 pill for every 15kg of your body weight (so if you weigh 75 kilo, you need 5 pills). You take all pills at once, preferably after dinner before going to bed. If you have blood in your urine, a skin rash and/or feel unwell after your holiday, ask your doctor to test you for Bilharzia. When you get sick (even after many years), please always inform your doctor that you visited a place with Bilharzia.



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### Other illnesses

A lot of people feel a bit sick when they just arrived. Very often it is because they do not drink enough water. If you have a headache and feel unwell within a few days after your arrival, make sure you drink enough and try some ORS (salt & sugar solution). Diarrhoea is also possible, because you have to get used to new food and bacteria in this country. Again, drinking a lot of water and taking ORS (if you don't have that, try Coca Cola with salt) might help you feeling better. It should be gone after a couple of days. Take medication (loperamide or charcoal based pills) only after 2 or 3 days.



### **Our advice? Don't get scared but be prepared.**

#### Malaria

Spray with deet at dusk  
Sleep under a net  
Carry a self-test and Lonart, just in case  
See a doctor if you feel flu-ish!  
Don't wait if you feel sick with fever.  
Incubation 10-14 days

#### Bilharzia

Buy your pills (1 per 15kg) in Malawi  
Take them all at once  
8 weeks after your last swim: not sooner because they might lay eggs.  
If you have blood in urine and/or a rash, tell your doctor about Bilharzia

### **Need a doctor or a nurse?**



Zomba has a Central Hospital where you can be helped quickly in the private section. Open 24 hours. This is one of the 3 places in the country where you can get an official PCR test for travelling (\$100). 01 526 266/ 01 525 195 (for COVID-19 tests Mike: 0995 250404)

Also open 24 hours is the MASM clinic. They tend to give a quick and often faulty diagnosis and lots of medicines. 0111 950821 / 0884 279946 / 01 527 186

Just outside of Zomba, you find St. Luke's in Malosa

Good doctors can be found behind the Petroda filling station in Zomba Town, or at the university clinic near the university. Open during office hours including Saturday mornings. Dr Joshua 0888 107 868/ 0888 720 672 (recommended)

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## Transport

There are many ways to get around. You can hike, hitchhike, take a minibus, executive coach or private taxis. If someone offers you a lift, it is customary to share the costs for petrol. When you hitchhike, you are expected to pay; usually the same price as a minibus.

Minibuses can be fun, but sometimes they are overloaded or the driver drives too fast. Check that your driver hasn't been drinking. Progress can be slow on the minibus; first you have to wait until the minibus is full, then you might stop many times, and if you are unlucky, you might have to change a couple of times. Good thing about the minibus is that everybody is very helpful, you will meet local people, you will always get where you need to be, it is cheap, and it is a local experience. Tourists are rarely overcharged (just ask your fellow travellers how much it is) and expect people wanting to have a chat with you. Along the way you will be able to buy cold drinks, bottled water, crisps, biscuits, lollipops, boiled eggs and sometimes fruit.

There are some big 'AXA' buses (and other, much better companies like Kwezy and Sososo) that have big buses direct from Blantyre via Lilongwe to Mzuzu. With Kwezy and Sososo you can book in advance through WhatsApp, but they do want you to pay up front to secure your booking. Our staff at Pakachere can help with this.

Sososo 0888 711714 / 0994 193745

Kwezy 0886 780355 / 0886 780356

There is also have a slower Lakeshore bus from Zomba via Salima and Nkhata Bay.

There are direct buses between Zomba and Lilongwe; the SMART is one of them. These are a little more luxurious and faster than normal minibuses. Pakachere's staff can give you more details.



SMART buses 0999 430731 / 0888 602048

If you drive your own vehicle or rental car, just observe the speed limits and greet the people at the roadblocks in a friendly manner. There are speed cameras in the country and they check, especially in villages. Speed limits are 80km/hr and 50km/hr in villages. We recommend you stick to the speed limits, not (just) because of the fines, but because of roaming goats, running children, cyclists and chickens on the road.

Make sure that the insurance and COF of your (rental) car and your driver's licence is valid. You can drive 3 months on a European licence in Malawi. You should have water to clean the windows, a spare tyre and 2 triangles in the car. When you drive in someone else's car, you should carry a letter in which the owner states that you are allowed to drive in their car. In a rental car you should have the correct papers. We also have a fluorescent vest for our safety, but that is not mandatory. We recommend carrying your passport or a copy & pictures on your phone of your passport and visa.

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Don't let them bully you in paying for anything on the roadside or paying bribes; we never had any trouble and they never asked for anything except for a Fanta which we politely declined, but we heard other people were less lucky.

At petrol stations you have to pay cash in kwachas. At the moment of writing, petrol is approx. 2,000 per litre; prices are the same everywhere. Don't wait until your tank is almost empty, because only big towns have fuel stations and sometimes they have no petrol. This hardly ever happens though, but better be safe than sorry. You can buy petrol from local people on the side of the road at places where you see a (mostly yellow) jerrycan next to the road. This might be a bit dirty, so best to avoid that. It is nice to know that you will never get stuck though, as there are always people who are happy to help.

Most petrol stations have a (reasonably clean) toilet (but take your own toilet tissue and perhaps a hand sanitiser. You can buy coke (if in a glass bottle, they would like the bottle back...), water, crisps, samosas and cakes at most petrol stations.



If you break down, don't worry. Within minutes people will stop to help you!

It can be cheaper to get a driver to take you places than it is to rent a car. At Pakachere we always work with Austin, who is very reliable and affordable for longer trips (Lilongwe airport to Zomba, Mk 120,000 or Blantyre Airport to Zomba Mk 40,000). Within Lilongwe we always call Stanley and in Nkhata Bay, Nobba is our preferred driver. See below for numbers of reliable taxi drivers.

We heard stories that people had to pay at every roadblock, and we suspect their taxi driver was involved in a scam. One taxi driver even drove without a COF (Certificate of Fitness, in Dutch APK and in UK it's called MOT) and made his passengers pay for the papers. If you want to travel with a taxi driver for multiple or long journeys, just check his 2 stickers on the window: insurance and COF. Ask if price of petrol is included. They will always find their own place to sleep, so you don't have to organise that but they might ask for 15,000-20,000 per night. It is nice to buy them a drink or snack along the way, but try to avoid being tempted to sponsor education for their children or other (financial) requests. Don't worry though, the majority of taxi drivers are great; friendly, honest, reliable and safe!

We know reliable taxi drivers in many places. The best option is to ask at the bar/reception of your lodge or other travellers.

Lilongwe, Stanley +265 (0)99 920 6713 or Rasheed +265(0)99 950 8573

Nkhata Bay, Nobba +265 (0)99 526 0191

Zomba, Austin +265 (0)88 440 2166 / 0999 347469

To/from Ntchisi Forest Lodge, Noel +265 (0)99 423 2771

Truck to drive up to Livingstonia, Stanley +265 (0)88 153 9495

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## The Ilala



We love the Ilala, or as the Malawians call it, the 'sitima' (steamer). Every week it departs Monkey Bay on Friday morning to make its way up north passed Likoma and Chizimulu Islands, Nkhata Bay, Usisya, and Ruarwe to Chilumba. On Monday it comes back south and is back in Monkey Bay on Wednesday. You can travel in a cabin with bed & electricity, 1<sup>st</sup> class (upper deck), 2<sup>nd</sup> class (benches with tables) or 3<sup>rd</sup> class (economy). Food and drinks on board are affordable and simple but nice. Again, we

recommend to bring toilet tissue, even when you book the luxury 'Owner's Cabin' with your private bathroom.

### [The timetable can be found online.](#)

Always inform locally about the estimated arrival time. For Ruarwe you can call or text Blessings – (see below). We can also inform you about the prices for a cabin and 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> class tickets. For a cabin we recommend to book in advance; other tickets you buy on board (near 2<sup>nd</sup> class at the front of the ship on the level you get on). Call or mail Mary Zulu on +265 (0)1 587 411 [mary.zulu@msc.mw](mailto:mary.zulu@msc.mw)



If you want a special trip to places rarely visited by tourists by Ilala or local boats, why not get off at Usisya to visit Danie's Beach Lodge or visit Zulunkhuni River Lodge in Ruarwe. Two truly magical unspoiled places to relax, swim or snorkel and hike. You can hike from Ruarwe to Usisya in 6 hours. You can also use the Ilala to go to Mushroom Farm in Livingstonia, one of the nicest lodges in the north. You get off at Mlowe where you take a taxi to the Livingstonia turn-off from where you will go up on foot or by local truck.

There are also local boats from Nkhata Bay to Likoma Island (eastbound on Thursday), and to Usisya (daily) and Ruarwe (twice per week). In 2023 we are expecting a fast boat to go from Nkhata Bay to Likoma; that will change things. We expect it to be fast but pricy.

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Bookings:  
Ilala, Mary: +265 1 587 411  
Usisya Beach Lodge: Danie +265(0)995636585  
Zulunkhuni River Lodge in Ruarwe: Blessings +265(0)999 071914  
Mushroom Farm (backpacker vibe with great vegetarian food: +265(0)880173784 /  
0999 589260

## Money

Please be aware that there are not many places where you can pay with credit card. Most places only accept cash (kwachas or US\$ dollars). Almost all hotels and lodges accept American dollars (crisp notes \$10 and up, printed after 2019 – don't ask why). At petrol stations you have to pay cash (Malawian kwachas).

### ATM/PIN/Cash Points

There are touristy places without working ATMs, for example Cape Maclear and Nkhata Bay do **not** have a cash point that works with Maestro. Best bet to get money are National Bank (NB) or Standard Bank. Before you travel to Cape Maclear or Nkhata Bay, make sure you have enough cash. Zomba has all major banks and the cash points of NB and Standard are only 5 minutes walk from Pakachere. At NB in Zomba you can get 4 x K 120,000 per transaction and at Standard Bank K 80,000 (with extra charge). In March 2022 we expect the introduction of Mk5,000 notes.



Cash points from National Bank and Standard Bank are in Blantyre, Lilongwe, Mangochi, Mzuzu, Salima, Liwonde, Nkhotakota, and Zomba.

Most small lodges only accept cash. Credit card payments are expensive; the lodge pays +5% to the bank – something that a lot of lodges cannot afford while recovering from a pandemic. We also pay our employees and our vegetables at the market with cash, so we need the kwachas to pay bills, food and staff.

## Weather

There is one rainy season in Malawi. It is not too bad, as the sun will still shine and usually it doesn't rain all day. Both wet and dry season are nice, but we think the best time to visit Malawi is between May and October. Rain can start in November, when it is very hot. December is also hot and should be wet. The country turns from a dry brown yellow-ish land almost overnight into a lush green place.

### Winter

In May the country is still green and it might rain every now and then. In July it will be a bit chilly at night (10 degrees or less); in Lilongwe, Zomba and Mzuzu you will need warm clothes (a hoodie, socks and shoes). On the lake you might need a hoodie in the evening but a long-sleeved t-shirt might be enough.

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Summer

It warms up again in August (still a shirt with long sleeves needed sometimes in the evenings) and September is lovely. It gets hotter in October until it gets really hot in November and December, and the rain starts again.

December till April is wet, but mostly sunny during the day.

### Safety

Malawi is one the safest countries. You do not have to be scared but it is always good to be careful. Your bag is worth more than a year's salary for most.

When your car breaks down on the side of the road, you do not need to worry. People will come to help and not to steal your things.

At big festivals like Tumaini, Sandfest and Lake of Stars, sometimes phones get stolen. They might cut open your backpack/daybag to get your phone.

In the big cities Lilongwe and Blantyre, the bus stations can feel a bit dodgy. A bus stations most people try to be helpful and want genuinely want to help to get on the right bus, so do not treat everybody like a crook but politely decline if you do not want them to carry your bag.

In Zomba we recommend not to walk on the golf course in the dark if you are just 1 or 2 people.

Robberies are rarely with violence; it is more that some sees an opportunity and takes it. There is no reason to be afraid because the crime rates are extremely low. Malawi is nice and safe to travel!

Just in case.. Zomba police 0993 579528 / 0887 393664 (24hrs per day)



Every year, the 1<sup>st</sup> weekend of May is [Zomba City Festival](#)  
A small and safe festival for everyone

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## Electricity



Plugs are British-style 3 square pins and 220-240V.

You will find lodges that do not have electricity, like Zulunkhuni River Lodge in Ruarwe and Usisya Beach Lodge. Other places like Ntchisi Forest Lodge run entirely on solar power. In reality you probably have to deal with power cuts.

ESCOM's load shedding is a fact of life in Malawi; now you have power, now you don't... Electricity comes from a dam, so when the water is low, so is power. Expect restrictions on charging equipment in certain places, and take your chance to charge your things when there is power, because it might be gone the next day. Sometimes a power cut lasts a couple of hours, often up to 8 hours and if you are unlucky, 1 or more days.

## Reservations

In Malawi a lot of things are based on trust, including the booking systems at most lodges. You mail, call or send a WhatsApp, you receive a confirmation and the day of your arrival the lodge will prepare your room and make sure there is food & drinks. Some lodges put in a lot of effort to welcome guests, other have only a couple of rooms, so please be aware that when you book, we trust you come.

As a lodge owner, we politely ask you not to book via sites like Booking.com, Expedia or Hostelworld. If you book via these websites; we have to pay 15% to them. You can rely on the lodge owners that we deal with your reservation in a professional manner. If you confirm a booking with us, we expect you! It is also appreciated if you let us know your estimated arrival time and give us a contact number.

## Cancelations

Please always contact a lodge if you cannot make it; it happens sometimes that you like the place you are at so much that you don't want to leave for the next place yet, that your plans change, that someone offers you a lift or a place to stay, or that you choose another lodge because you heard good stories about that one. **It doesn't matter, but please cancel your booking!** We put a lot of effort in making you feel welcome, and it is a shame if we have to turn down requests or send away potential guests because we think we are fully booked. It would really help us a lot if you keep us updated and to inform us if you cannot make it. *Zikomo! Thank you!*



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## Telephone & Wifi

Easiest is to buy a SIM card when you are in Malawi for 300 – 1,000 MWK. You have to register your phone at an Airtel or TNM shop; bring your ID and it is done in a couple of minutes.

Internet on your phone via 4G (and some places 3G) is not expensive, so you can use WhatsApp; the favourite way for Malawians to communicate and many lodges will accept reservations via WhatsApp. A lot of people use Airtel (09---); the other provider is TNM (08---) – it is expensive to call from an 09-number to an 08-number. The country code for Malawi is 265, so to call Pakachere from abroad or send a WhatsApp you use is +26588 or +26599

Airtel: upload credit \*136\*pincodefromvoucher#, to check your balance \*137#  
To buy an internet bundle (Panet volume for internet; Panet social bundles if you want to buy special Facebook or WhatsApp bundles) \*301# then follow the menu.  
To check your active bundles \*304#

TNM: upload credit \*111\*pincodefromvoucher#. To buy an internet voucher dial \*202#.

Wifi is available at many places, usually you have to buy a scratch card from Airtel, Globe or INQ (INQ very often gives free access to Facebook up to 50Mb per day) or pay a small fee to use the wifi. At Mabuya Camp in Lilongwe you choose the amount of Mbs you want and they will give you a code. Some places like Pakachere in Zomba and Mayoka Village in Nkhata Bay offer free wifi. Sometimes restricted, like at Pakachere you get free internet with a password after 6PM and in weekends.

## Water

It is important that you drink a lot of water when you are in Malawi. In some places it is not safe to drink the water. It is fine in Zomba and Nkhata Bay, and some people drink from the tap in Lilongwe and Mzuzu. Especially if you just arrived, we recommend drinking water that has been filtered, treated with Waterguard (for sale in most supermarkets and pharmacies) or buy bottled water.

Malawi has problems with water; especially in the dry season there is a big shortage and the Waterboard regularly switches off the water supply, meaning there is no water from the tap and toilets can't be flushed. Most lodges will provide buckets of water if that happens. Please try not to waste water. By the way, you can flush toilet tissue in Malawi – no need to throw toilet tissue in the bin. Of course, like anywhere else – do not flush anything but toilet tissue!

## Dress code

In most tourist places and lodges, you can wear as much or as little as you want. When you go into town or visit rural areas, we recommend for women to dress conservatively and to cover your knees and shoulders. It is up to you what you want to wear obviously, but the local people will appreciate your efforts.

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## Backpacking

When we are in Lilongwe, we stay at Mabuya Camp/Thumbi View in area 3. It is a nice lodge with similar prices to Pakachere, a lively bar, nice food, lovely staff, and Mabuya is not far from the centre of town.

In Senga Bay (near Salima) you can stay at Sam's in Cool Runnings. Sam is an amazing lady who does a lot of work in the community. Cool Runnings is a nice place to stay on the beach if you want to stay close to Lilongwe.

In Cape Maclear there are many nice places to stay. Mgoza Lodge has beautiful rooms, the food is very good and drinks are cheap. They have great low budget hut (ensuite huts or A-frames). Thumbi View is also very nice to stay; Noleen and Chris are lovely hosts. Warm Heart has beautiful chalets and hostess Kay is one of the best guides in the country. For a nice 3-course meal with ice cream, we recommend Cape Mac Lodge. Hiccups is a good place for a drink and to meet the locals. More and more Malawians open restaurants in Cape Maclear; good food and a nice atmosphere can be found at Thomasses, Mhungo, Makata's and Banapaya.

Do you want a taste of local life? In Cape Maclear you can stay and eat with a local family. It started in 2017 and all households selected have good mattresses, sheets, mosquito nets, at least one family member who speaks English and sanitary facilities of sufficient standard. The project is run by local people and the money you pay goes 100% to the family where you stay. You can book online on the Cape Maclear website or AirBnB; for questions you can ask Alan at Mgoza Lodge.

We love the North and we like to spend time at Butterfly Space. In Nkhata Bay you can stay at Mayoka Village which has a great vibe and nice rooms. Butterfly next door has recently been upgraded and is amazing. The community outreach programme of Butterfly is very good, and we usually stay at Butterfly to support their work and like the vibe there. The bar is good spot for sundowners and they have fantastic cocktails, a pool table and the food is tasty.

Mushroom Farm in the north in Livingstonia is a lovely lodge on top of a mountain with stunning views and great food. Mushroom Farm is a true eco-lodge with permaculture. It has a real backpacker's feel, their food is amazing (all vegetarian) and from their own gardens.

Even more remote are Zulunghuni River Lodge in Ruarwe and Usisya Beach Lodge, just north of Nkhata Bay. You get there by boat (llala or local boat) or you drive to Usisya and walk to Ruarwe (6 hours).

Foodies can go to Kachere Kastle south of Nkhata Bay or Zomba Forest Lodge. A bit more costly than a backpackers, but it is worth it because the food is amazing! Kachere Kastle is a special place; a castle on the beach of Lake Malawi with a swim-up bar and a squash court in one of the towers. If you are on a budget: you can pitch a tent.

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To go from Zomba to Nkhata is a long journey. Why not stop in Salima (Kuti Wildlife Reserve) or Rafiki Safari Camp (Nkhotakota)? If you pass Balaka, we highly recommend The Arthouse with its beautiful gardens and amazing Italian food closed on Tuesdays; open 11Am till 3PM). Liwonde is on the way from Balaka and the lake to Zomba, and a great stop for a boat safari.

For fantastic food in Zomba, we recommend Zomba Forest Lodge but you have to make a reservation 2 days in advance and places are limited! Casa Rosa (closed on Mondays and over Christmas) is nice if you like Italian dishes and The Heritage Centre is great for coffee and lunch. Pakachere does a nice steak with pepper sauce as well as vegan dishes, fresh fruit juices (when in season), pizza and cheap local dishes. For a more local vibe, try the market. Villa Kupa and Dominos are open till late and serve nice food.

Please ask Jonathan, Patrick or Olivia to book any of these lodges for you. If you have a booking but your plans change or you cannot make it, please let us know so we can cancel (for free, so at no extra cost). On [Pakachere.com/activities](http://Pakachere.com/activities) you find more recommendations.

Paka: Jonathan +265(0)994 685 934 Patrick +265 (0)882 858 089

## Volunteering

There are many places to volunteer in Malawi. Some via organisations in Europe or the USA, but you can also try to find something while you are here. Butterfly Space in Nkhata Bay has a fantastic volunteer programme where you work either at the lodge, in permaculture or at the school built by one of the owners of Butterfly. They want you to stay at least 1 month and you pay \$500 for your accommodation and a daily food allowance. In Ruarwe Punzhira welcomes volunteers who want to work at the locally run community centre and nurses who want to work at the local clinic.

### Contacts for volunteering

Butterfly Space, Nkhata Bay 0999 156335 <https://butterflyspacemalawi.com/>  
Punzhira, Zulunxhuni River Lodge, Ruarwe (Philippa for nurses or Rosa for the community centre) [philippa@phunzira.org](mailto:philippa@phunzira.org)  
or [rosa@phunzira.org](mailto:rosa@phunzira.org)

For Dutch volunteers who want the full volunteer package and 24 hours care, we recommend DoingGood! Marieke is the best host you can imagine; friendly and helpful. You can contact her on [malawi@doinggood.nl](mailto:malawi@doinggood.nl)



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### **Souvenirs**

Buying souvenirs is good for the local economy and great for gifts and memories of Malawi. Be careful not to buy hardwood – it is against the law. Officially you have to pay to take wood out of the country and you need a certificate.

Prices for souvenirs vary; in touristy places like Cape Maclear prices are higher. Prices in remote places can go up because it is difficult to get the supplies or for transport costs. It is good to haggle! The price is good when both you and the seller are happy. Popular items are clothing or aprons made from chitenje (fabric) (could cost anything between 3,000 and 15,000 MWK, depending on material and design), wooden key rings or bottle openers with animals or your name engraved (price 2,000-3,000 MWK), and other woodwork. Most wood is melina made dark with shoe polish. Just ask, to avoid buying forbidden wood; better to buy wood with shoe polish than endangered wood.

Mua Mission is the best place to buy woodwork. And well worth a visit the museum is interesting and the shop has beautiful artwork, all made on site and reasonably priced. All items have price tags, so no need to haggle and you will get a good deal. Spend at least 1 day at Mua and explore the museum, gallery and shop.

Another great place to buy souvenirs is Dedza Pottery, also a nice place to stop for lunch. You can buy plates, mugs and all kind of pottery made in Dedza. They ship things to Europe and the States, and you can have things customised with your name. This will take a while (weeks, sometimes months), but it is affordable and very nice.

What we take home from Malawi is Namikango coffee, Chombe tea, Mzuzu honey, hot sauce (Nali or Marie) and Malawi Gin. At Zulunxhuni River Lodge in Ruarwe you can buy coffee straight from the mountain, roasted and grinded on the same day on site. No chemical processes and fresh as can be!

In Cape Maclear you can make your own beads & jewelry from recycled materials. At the Recycling Centre they sell nice bath mats made from 3d hand clothes (from rags), jewelry and all kinds of other things made from recycled materials like bottle caps and empty coke or tonic cans. Look out for the massive Xmas Coca Cola

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truck! More information about workshops beads & jewelry and paper making can be found at Mgoza Lodge.

### **Conservation**

Malawi has national parks and almost 70 forest reserves, like Mount Mulanje, Zomba Plateau, Dzalanyama near Lilongwe, Luwawa on the Viphya Plateau, Ntchisi in central Malawi, and Chintheche on the northern shore, not far from Kachere Kastle and Kande.

One of the main problems Malawi is facing is deforestation. People cut trees for wood to cook their nsima (the staple food, maize porridge) every day and use wood for building. With a growing population, more trees need to be cut to feed the people. The combination of overpopulation and deforestation does the country no good. The lack of trees affects the rain, resulting in draught and flooding. Pakachere supports the work of Zomba Forest Lodge to protect the trees on Zomba Plateau. We stimulate the use of sustainable cooking methods, like using briquettes made of paper, leaves and other waste, and using alternative cook stoves like the change-changu moto.

### **Responsible tourism**

An ever-increasing growing human population puts great demands on Malawi's natural resources. It is generally agreed that these resources need to be conserved.

- Save precious natural resources. Try not to waste water, switch off lights and fans when you go out;
- Avoid buying souvenirs made from local wildlife or hardwood;
- Don't give money, sweets, balls, pens etc. to children. It encourages begging and demeans the child. A donation to a recognised project is more constructive. We are happy to help you distributing any items you want to leave behind in a sustainable and honest way;
- Respect local etiquette; try to be patient, friendly and sensitive. In Malawi tight fitting wear, shorts or skirts above the knee for women are insensitive to local feelings. Public displays of affection are seen as culturally inappropriate.

You are of course free to give, wear and do what you want; the guidelines above are especially for travellers who wish to minimise negative impact.

### **Tipping**

Malawi is a poor country and most people do not earn a lot of money. Tipping is not mandatory and not always expected; you give a tip when you are satisfied with the service. The official minimum wage is 50,000 MWK per month; that is approx than 2,000 kwacha per day (as much as beer and less than 2 euros). People working in hospitality can earn anything between 20,000 and 350,000, but on average between 50,000 and 90,000 kwacha per month. Please keep this in mind when tipping or giving money for a performance; usually a tip between 500 and 1,000 kwacha for 1 person is enough, depending where you stay and whom you are dealing with of course. If a lodge has a tip box, we recommend at least K5,000 because it will be shared amongst (night) guards, gardeners, housekeeping, chefs, reception and waiters.

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Our kind request to you is to please not give money to children or people who are asking you for money without offering a service or product. We think it is better to buy a service or product and to avoid giving hand-outs. If you want to tip at a hotel or restaurant, it is best to ask if there is a tip box so the money can be shared amongst all staff; also the staff members who work hard behind the scenes and you don't get to meet.

At Pakachere we would appreciate it if you do not give sweets, drinks, money or clothes to people on or near our premises nor to any of our individual staff members. If you want to donate money or goods, we recommend donating to a registered charity, church or school, or ask at the bar/reception of your hotel if they can help you distributing your donation.

We don't want to tell you what and what not to do: all gifts and donations are most welcome, and of course you are free to do and give what you want! We just try to avoid children turning into beggars or people thinking that all foreigners give away things for free. It creates expectations, greediness, jealousy and a craving for more, and in our opinion that is not the best way to create a society with independent people who work to earn a living. People in Malawi are known as the friendliest people in the world and it would be nice if we can keep that reputation.

### **Safaris**

We have yet to explore some areas, but we visited Liwonde, Nkhotakhota, Majete, Kasungu and Vwaza. On our wish list are Luwawa and Nyika. **Liwonde is close to Zomba** (only 1 hour drive) and you can stay in budget accommodation just outside the park or expensive but gorgeous accommodation in the park. If you don't have a lot of time, you can do a 2-hour boat trip in Liwonde (\$30 per person + \$30 per person park fees) along the way from Zomba to Cape Maclear. You are guaranteed to see hippos and lots of beautiful birds, and possibly crocodiles, elephants, and antelope, and maybe even (very rarely) a cheetah, lions or rhino. The boat leaves at 10AM and 2PM, and we recommend you book in advance. If you have time to stay overnight, Mvuu Camp is expensive but amazing. For a smaller budget you can stay at Liwonde Safari Camp, Bushman Baobab or Kutchire Lodge. Our staff at Pakachere can organise your boat trip, accommodation and transfer for you. All 3 budget camps are great; they all have their own charm. Our staff can help you decide.

Kutchire (the cheapest) 0999 090516  
Liwonde Safari Camp (the best) 0995 225578  
Bushman's Baobab (the oldest) 0998 367000

We really enjoyed Vwaza. It is very basic; just 5 huts with 2 beds and a bathroom, a kitchen where the local staff can prepare your food (that you bring), and a summer hut to stare over the lake with lots of hippos and if you are lucky also crocodiles, birds, elephants, warthogs, antelope and monkeys. There is no bar, no restaurant and there are tsetse flies. You bring your own food - including cooking oil, salt, spices & herbs – and just enjoy the peace & quiet, and the elephants. We sat in the

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summer hut all day with our Malawi Gin & Tonic, packed lunch and a bag of crisps and enjoyed looking at the hippos, birds, crocodiles, elephants and other wildlife. You can self-drive or get a taxi, it is approx. 1,5-2hrs north of Mzuzu. After Rumphu just follow the signs along the dust road to Vwaza National park.

The most beautiful safari park is in Zambia, South Luangwa. Kiboko Safaris do a great all-inclusive tour. We can contact Kiboko for you if you are interested.

We have a couple of independent Malawian tour operators for Malawi that we recommend

- Kay from Warm Heart (based in Cape Maclear); she does great kayaking & hiking trips, and is a yoga teacher for some stretching exercises along the way. Kay +265999913972
- Davie from Nkhata Bay Safaris +265999265064
- Johnnie from Misuku Expeditions +265999629810



### **Diving**

If you want to explore the waters around Cape Maclear, you can contact Chris or Noleen at Thumbi View. [info@thumbiviewlodge.com](mailto:info@thumbiviewlodge.com)

In Nkhata Bay, Aqua Africa offers great diving trips. [divamalawi@gmail.com](mailto:divamalawi@gmail.com)

Of course, we are happy to connect you, or book your diving adventure and accommodation for you! Malawi is an easy country to travel and you do not need a travel agent but feel free to use them if it makes you feel more comfortable, if you want someone with local experience & stories or if you don't feel like driving yourself.

### **Mountains**

Hiking on Zomba plateau or Mulanje Mountains is highly recommended! Local guide Isaac runs his own business and the feedback we get from customers is always very good. He can offer trips on the plateau from a couple of hours to a couple of days in various grades of difficulty. He can take you to Lake Chilwa, Mulanje, Ntonya and Chikala/Malape pillars.

Isaac 0999 015560

Zomba plateau trip

One thing you can't miss when in Zomba, is walking on the plateau! Together with our experienced guide, you will discover the 2085m high mountain. Our guide can tell you a lot about the flora & fauna, and knows all the nice hidden spots.

We offer 4 different trips:

*Trip 1 Waterfalls (1,5-3 hrs)*

*Trip 2 Queen's & Emperor's view & waterfalls (2,5-4 hrs)*

*Trip 3 Highest peak & Chingwe's hall & Waterfalls & potato path (5-6 hrs)*

*Trip 4 Highest peak & Chingwe's hall & Potato village (potato path) & Waterfalls (6-8 hrs)*

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## Mount Mulanje



Mulanje is beautiful. You can hike for a day or stay up the mountain for many days and walk from hut to hut. There are nice treks for 1 day, 2 days (Fort Lister), 3 days (including the highest peak) or 5 days (along the ridge).

Before you go up you have to hire a guide and if you carry a lot of stuff, you can also hire a porter. At the forestry office you register and pay, and you will get assigned a guide. They work with a rotating system, so all guides get a fair chance to get work. You are not allowed to go up without a guide! Prices are indicated on the form at the forestry. Make sure you agree on the price before you start and maybe even write it down in case your guide demands more money

afterwards (this rarely happens, but of course this can happen).

A porter might be handy because you have to carry all your food (including pots and pans, plates and cutlery, oil, salt, spices and herbs), sleeping bag and warm clothes up the mountain.

There is a watchman at every hut who will get water for you (you can drink water straight from the streams on the mountain) and light a fire for cooking and to stay warm. It does get cold on the mountain, even in the hot season.

To stay we either recommend Likhubula Hiker's Nest or Africa Wild Truck. Africa Wild Truck is very close to the Mozambican border with beautiful views and tea fields for an easy walk, and amazing food! Closer to Zomba is Fort Lister; 1 hour drive, then 3.5 hours up and a night at a hut to hike down the next day.

Nyika, Livingstonia and Ntchisi

In the north you find Nyika; we heard nothing but good stories, but have not had the chance to visit yet. We were told it can be expensive and that the road to get there can be bad. You do need a four-wheel-drive. Next to Nyika is Livingstonia with the beautiful lodge Mushroom Farm (affordable for all budgets). In central Malawi, between Nkhotakota and Lilongwe is Ntchisi Mountain with Ntchisi Forest Lodge (under new management; it is now more affordable and they farm coffee – very good coffee!).

Zomba plateau guide Isaac, tel. +265 (0)88 285 8089 or +265 (0)99 468 5934



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## Music

Zomba City festival is an annual festival around the 1<sup>st</sup> of May in Zomba town. The festival has something for everyone and take place at various locations. There are up to 7 venues where you can find Family Fun with activities for children, live music at Pakachere, yoga and hikes on Zomba Mountain, art in the park in the Botanic Gardens and much more. Check [www.visitzomba.com/festival](http://www.visitzomba.com/festival) for more information.

Lake of Stars, the renowned international festival at a location on the shores of Lake Malawi. A fantastic 3-day festival, organised according to European standards with great music from the UK, South Africa and Malawi, always at a different but beautiful location. Book your camping ticket, take insect repellent and sun lotion, some snacks and big bottles of water, your swimming gear and sturdy (closed) shoes for the evening, and enjoy! Be aware of pickpockets; there are thieves operating at this festival because they know a lot of international visitors attend lake of Stars with lots of cash and nice smart phones. Every year a different place on the lake and a different set-up, check [www.lakeofstars.org](http://www.lakeofstars.org) for information. LoS has not been happening for a few years now, s it worth checking their website for the latest info.

Sandfest: Usually on the lakeside (Sunbird Livingstonia) in October. This 3-day festival attract mainly Malawians and has its highlight on the Saturday when a big headliner will play late at night. Bring a tent, your swimming gear, insect repellent and sun lotion, and some healthy snacks! There won't be any/much vegetarian food for sale on site. Good fun, great music and very Malawian. Ask around for details.



Tumaini: An amazing project, the 1<sup>st</sup> weekend of November at Dzaleka Refugee Camp. A 2-day festival in Malawi's biggest and only permanent refugee camp. Take a hat and sun lotion, because it can be scorching hot. Info can be found on Facebook. We highly recommend the homestay!

There is a lot of live music in Malawi. In Zomba you can go to The Mixed, Vogue Africana or any of the other bars in town.

You can listen and download great Malawian music from [www.malawi-music.com](http://www.malawi-music.com)



Welcome to the green city in Southern Malawi, Zomba City Festival 2012, April until 2<sup>nd</sup> of May  
2012, please email [info@pakachere.com](mailto:info@pakachere.com) For accommodation, please email [info@pakachere.com](mailto:info@pakachere.com)



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## Landing package

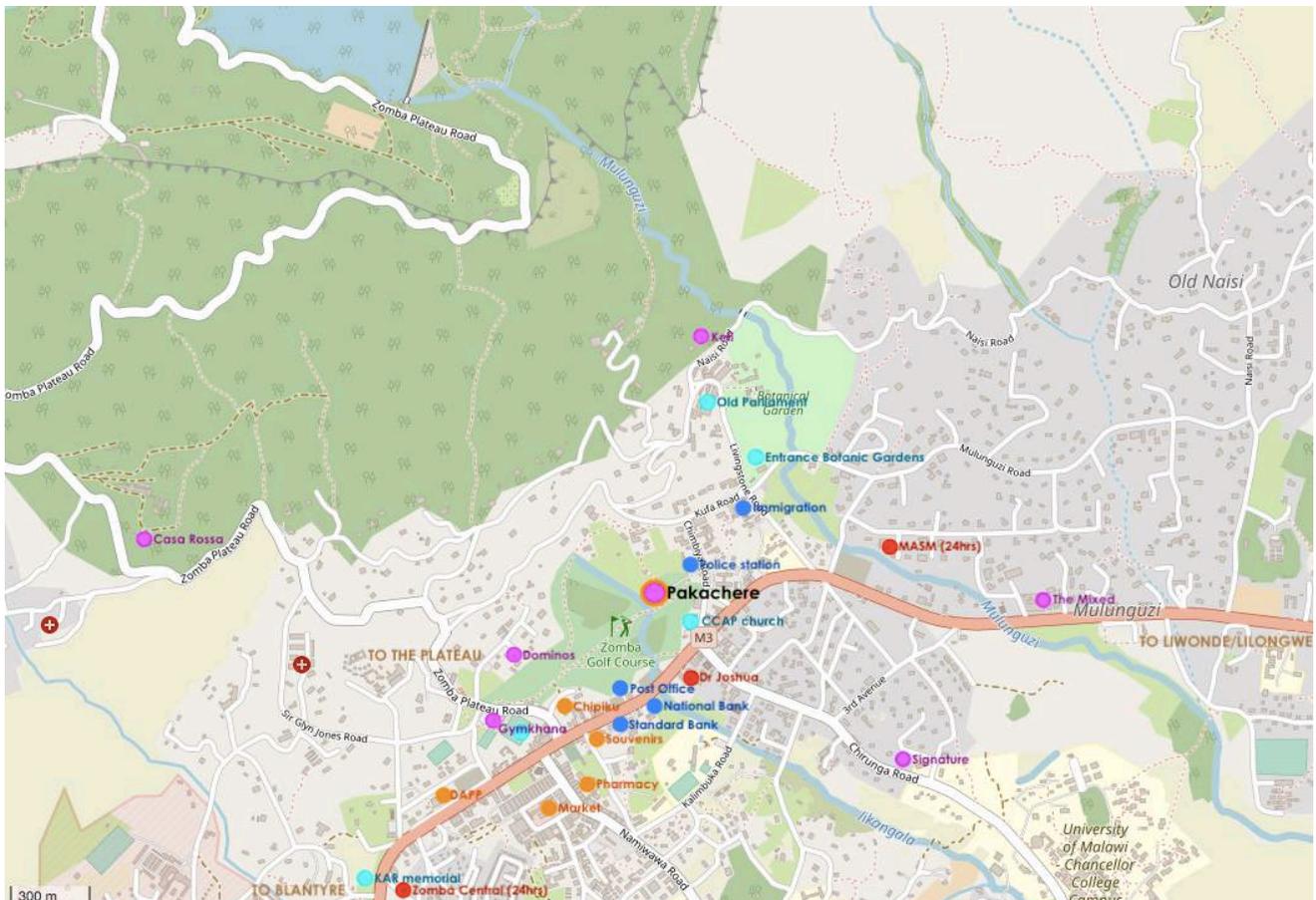
When travelling to a new country, the arrival can be a bit daunting because you don't know what to expect. We are happy to pick you up and settle in!

What do we offer?

- Arrival pack send to you by mail, including forms to fill in your visa application and information about Malawi;
- Pick up from the airport;
- Stop at the bank to get cash out (Malawi kwacha);
- We provide you with a local SIM card for your telephone if you want;
- A welcome drink on arrival at the lodge;
- One, two or more nights at Pakachere Backpackers in a bed (dorm) or private room with en-suite bathroom;
- Our personal recommendations for transfers, trips and tours;
- We can book your accommodation, rental car, transfers, and activities;

You can add extras to the welcome package, for example

- A walk around Zomba town
- Chichewa class to learn the basics
- Visit to a traditional village with local food (nsima & relish)
- Local tribal dance class or a painting workshop with a local artist
- A hike on Zomba mountain



# PAKACHERE

## Language

If you want to learn a little Chichewa, our staff at Pakachere is always happy to help.. Here are some words to start if you don't speak any Chichewa yet. In the North they speak different languages, like Tonga or Tumbuka.

|                         |                         |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Takulandirani           | Welcome                 |
| Zikomo (kwambiri)       | Thank you (very much)   |
| Abambo                  | Sir                     |
| Amai                    | Madam                   |
| How are you             | Muli bwanji?            |
| I am fine. How are you? | Ndiri bwino. Kaya innu? |
| I am fine. Thank you    | Ndiri bwino. Zikomo!    |
| Tionana                 | See you later           |
| Tionana mawa            | See you tomorrow        |
| Uzikwa bwino            | Good night              |
| Gonani bwino            | Sleep well              |
| Inunso                  | You too                 |
| Paribe vuto             | No problem              |
| Madzi                   | Water                   |
| Pepani                  | Sorry                   |

### Zomba to

|              |        |
|--------------|--------|
| Liwonde      | 50 km  |
| Blantyre     | 68 km  |
| Dedza        | 85 km  |
| Mulanje      | 125 Km |
| Monkey Bay   | 190 km |
| Cape Maclear | 200 km |
| Salima       | 270 km |
| Lilongwe     | 290 km |
| Ntchisi      | 276 km |
| Nkhata Bay   | 550 km |



**Pakachere Backpackers**  
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**Tel. 088 285 8089**  
**Tel. 099 468 5934**

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