

## **MALAWI AS A TOURIST DESTINATION**

Malawi is popularly known as the Warm Heart of Africa owing to its friendly people and rich cultural and natural heritage which makes it one of the unique and attractive destinations for tourists. The country's tourism has seen a remarkable growth from as low as 227,000 in the year 2000 to a record 637,000 in 2006 and is expected to grow further by an annual average of about 30% over the next two years. Tourism contribution to the economy currently stands at about 4.7% but with new investment incentives package put in place by Government in the 2007/2008 Financial Year, investment and tourist arrivals is expected to grow considerably

### **Major Tourist Attractions**

The country's tourism attractiveness lies in its diversity. Malawi is endowed with a variety of natural features, which provide a great potential for development of tourism. Some of the features, which make Malawi attractive, include:

#### **Lake Malawi and its Islands**

Lake Malawi and its islands and biodiversity take up 23,000 square kilometres of the total 118,000 square kilometres of Malawi. The Lake is about 570 kilometres long and between 16 and 80 kilometres wide. It is the third largest in Africa and 11<sup>th</sup> in the world and forms a very large inland sea with magnificent mountain surroundings harbouring over 800 species of fish. It is a fresh water lake. Its crystal clear waters and fine sandy beaches are a major attraction to tourists.

#### **National Parks, Wildlife and Forest Reserves**

Malawi has five national parks and four wildlife reserves, which offer a variety of fauna and flora. The national parks and wildlife reserves include Nyika, Kasungu, Lake Malawi, Liwonde, and Lengwe national parks, Vwaza, Nkhotakota, Majete and Mwabvi Wildlife reserves. The forest reserves include Chongoni, Mulanje, Ntchisi, Chikala, Dzalanyama, Chikangawa, Zomba, and Dedza.

## **Cultural and Historical attractions**

Malawians are a very friendly people who stem from a number of ethnic groups and whose culture is marked by a wide range of dance forms, music, handicrafts and carvings. Malawi has some World Heritage sites namely Lake Malawi National Park for its unique cichlids fish and the Chongoni Rock Art for the ancient traditional paintings. There are also several monuments, historical sites and archaeological sites throughout the country.

## **Natural Features**

Malawi is endowed with a diversity of natural features and offer potential for the development of tourism. Tourism sporting activities that take place in these natural features include mountaineering, horse riding, angling and aquatic sports such as scuba diving, skiing and yachting.

## **Urban Attractions**

Surrounded by impressive mountain terrain, Blantyre city is the country's main commercial, industrial and communications centre. Business travellers usually visit the city. Lilongwe is the capital of Malawi. It is well planned and beautifully laid out with a fine new style of architecture and potential for growth. Other urban centres include Mzuzu, the commercial city of the Northern region and Zomba, the former capital of Malawi. Urban centers are centers for business and conference tourism, entertainment and leisure.