



A FULL HOUSE

By revitalising its wildlife offering, Malawi has established itself as a compact all-round destination with an exceptional, and affordable, bush-beach appeal, says **Sue Watt**

If countries were children in a classroom, Malawi would be the shy one at the back, keeping quiet but with a secret charm and genuine soul. Get to know her and you'll be well rewarded. Over recent years, following a concerted conservation effort, she has become one of Africa's best all-round destinations.

At the turn of the century, Malawi's nine national parks and reserves were in a sorry state. Devoid of funding, they lay open to poaching and wildlife was sparse. In 2003, African Parks stepped in, partnering with the government on their very first venture: to revive Majete Wildlife Reserve.

Today, Africa's iconic species are back in Majete's rejuvenated miombo woodlands and granite hills. Tourism has returned too, benefitting communities living along its now fenced borders through employment, education and healthcare.

In 2015, African Parks took on Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve and Liwonde National Park. They translocated a staggering 500 elephants and 2000 other animals, including sable, eland and kudu, from overcrowded Liwonde and Majete to Nkhotakota.

Liwonde's Shire River floodplains teem with birdlife, elephants and hippos. Nkhotakota is more for adventurous travellers, offering walking, canoeing and hiking in its mountains. But Mount Mulanje in the south of the country has Malawi's highest peak, at 3002 metres, rewarding climbers with spectacular scenery and views.

Bird lovers are spoilt too. From Nyika Plateau in the north to Zomba Plateau in the south, Malawi's mosaic of habitats — wetland, lake and rivers, mountains, woodland and savannah — draws some 650 avian species. Even Lilongwe Wildlife Centre in the laid-back capital is a vibrant birding hotspot.

And that famous lake with its golden beaches? Spanning 29,600sq km, it's home to the highest variety of fish on Earth: 875 species of colourful cichlids shimmer like jewels in the water, with the cry of the African fish eagle echoing over its shores. 🦅

SIERRA LEONE: BUILDING TOURISM IN AN AI AGE

To boost its nascent tourism industry, Sierra Leone is introducing AI-powered online tools to simplify travel planning, curate tourism packages and generate data to support policy and investment decisions. It is hoped the partnership with digital tourism company Passporter will make it easier for prospective visitors to learn about the country.

Game time: Elephants gather at the Shire River in Majete National Park. They were reintroduced in 2006, part of an ongoing restocking exercise by African Parks, the latest being wild dogs in 2021. Tourism in Majete is led by Robin Pope Safaris' Mkulumadzi Lodge



ROBIN POPE SAFARIS