



## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT *WORLD WATER CORPS* TRAVEL TO MALAWI (April 2008)**

### **GENERAL INFORMATION**

This document contains comments and observations of past ***World Water Corps*** volunteers. The goal of providing this information to you is to make you fully aware of what to expect during your trip so that you may prepare in a way that will ensure you enjoy your participation to the fullest. Based on comments from previous volunteers, we understand that it is not the challenging and unexpected situations encountered during the trip that made some volunteers uncomfortable, but the lack of foreknowledge of the daily situations. Lack of awareness produces poor planning and poor planning leads to unpleasant results. Thus by providing this information, we hope to minimize the possibility of any unpleasant experiences during your upcoming adventure as a ***World Water Corps*** volunteer.

It has been our experience that as a volunteer, the level of satisfaction or frustration you gain from this trip, will be directly related to your willingness and flexibility to plan, work and coordinate with all Water For People and non Water For People team members. Your expertise combined with the understanding of the social, cultural and economic situation by our in-country partners result in a great team and a rewarding experience.

Finally, always remember that as a ***World Water Corps*** volunteer, you are Water For People's eyes in the field and your observations, comments and recommendations are the only way this program will continue to grow and maximize our resources as we seek to obtain sustainable results throughout the less developed world.

### **TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION**

#### **How can I get to Malawi?**

Several major airlines fly into the capital city of Lilongwe. Kenya Airlines flights arrive from London and Nairobi. South African Airlines flights arrive daily from Johannesburg. There are also limited international flights into Blantyre. Flights between Blantyre and Lilongwe are available on Air Malawi. World ***World Water Corps*** volunteers traveling from the United States should plan to spend two days traveling to Malawi.

**Is public transportation available?**

The primary form of public transportation in Malawi is the “minibus.” These are vans that are operated by individual drivers and pick up at points throughout the city. Minibus patrons should be prepared to share their seat with many other passengers. Visitors should use caution when riding on minibuses. The majority of Malawians rely on walking as an essential form of transportation and pedestrians are seen everywhere.

**Is it preferable to fly or drive between Lilongwe and Blantyre?**

Without a private car, flying between the cities is an easier (but more expensive) option. The road between Lilongwe and Blantyre is a paved two-lane highway in good condition. Minibuses can be found to make the trip but are often overcrowded and make frequent stops. Driving in Malawi demands constant attention to the road as pedestrians, bicyclists and vehicles often share the same space.

**How can I purchase a ticket to fly on Air Malawi?**

As of December 2007, Air Malawi tickets are not available online. Previous **World Water Corps** volunteers relied on in-country staff to purchase tickets at the Air Malawi ticket office in Malawi. In-country staff will request travel information from each volunteer and book and pay for the appropriate Air Malawi ticket (if applicable). Travelers should be sure to print and carry all documentation related to the reservation (receipt, itinerary, etc.) as proof of reservation. Travelers should proceed to the Air Malawi ticket desk upon arriving in Lilongwe to claim their tickets, if traveling on to Blantyre. Volunteers will be asked to reimburse the in-country staff for the cost of the ticket upon arriving in Malawi.

**What is required to enter/exit the country?**

A visa is not currently required (as of late 2007) to enter Malawi. Visitors must pay entry and exit fees at the airport. During the December 2007 monitoring trip, **World Water Corps** volunteers paid the entry fee (less than U.S. \$10) in Kwacha after changing money at the airport and paid the exit fee (less than U.S. \$50) in U.S. dollars. It is a good idea to retain some dollars for the exit fee, although money can be exchanged at the currency exchange desk at the Lilongwe airport. A yellow fever vaccine certificate may be required depending on whether the traveler has passed through certain regions of Africa prior to arriving in Malawi. Please check the U.S. Department of State website for updated entry requirements.

**MONEY**

**What is the local currency and can I use U.S. dollars?**

The currency in Malawi is the Kwacha. One U.S. dollar is equivalent to approximately 150 Kwacha (in late 2007). For most everyday purchases at stores, restaurants, and street vendors, visitors should expect to use Kwacha. Dollars are accepted some hotels, but the rates are typically listed in Kwacha. Currency exchanges can be easily found in the cities and at the airports. However, past **World Water Corps** volunteers found ATMs to be the most convenient way to obtain Kwachas. Remember to alert your bank or credit card provider that you will be traveling in Africa.

**Will it be possible to use an ATM, traveler’s checks, or credit cards in Malawi?**

ATMs are abundant in Lilongwe and Blantyre and have been used by past **World Water Corps** volunteers. Credit cards are not widely accepted and should not be relied upon. Travelers’ check bureaus are available in Lilongwe and Blantyre, but they were not used by past **World Water Corps** volunteers.

## **FOOD AND LODGING**

### **What are typical accommodations?**

Most hotels and lodges in the \$40 to \$60 per night range offer basic but pleasant accommodations. Rooms will usually have private bathrooms and showers (but not always hot water). Typical rooms are equipped with a mosquito net, pillows, bedding, and towels. Breakfast is often included with the price of the room and dinner is generally available at a reasonable price. Rates for double-occupancy are adjusted upward slightly but offer a much better value per person. Less expensive accommodations are available, but have not been used by **World Water Corps** volunteers in the past.

### **Is tap water safe to drink?**

Tap water is not reliable in Malawi. Occasional shortages or rationing affects all cities. Although the water is chlorinated, the distribution system is compromised of illegal connections, unstable pressures, and other issues. It is best not to drink tap water. Bottled water is widely available at grocery stores, gas stations, hotel dining rooms, etc.

### **What types of food and drink are available in Malawi?**

Typical beverages include bottled water, soda, beer, tea, and coffee. Most Malawians consider “nsima” (a porridge of corn flour and water) to be an essential part of every meal. A typical Malawian restaurant will offer beef stew, chicken, fish, and curry dishes, served with French fries, rice, or nsima. Depending on the season, a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables may be available.

### **Are local utilities reliable?**

Visitors are likely to experience occasional, brief (less than one-day long) power outages and water shortages in urban areas. In rural areas, electrical power is rare and tap water is not available.

### **Is Internet service available?**

Some hotels offer an internet café or even wireless service. However, many places do not. Internet cafes are available in Lilongwe and Blantyre. Although they are not available in Malawi airports, internet cafés are present in the Nairobi airport.

## **CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT**

### **How do Malawians greet each other and visitors?**

English is Malawi's official language and is widely spoken in the larger cities. However, very few of the rural village residents are fluent in English. There are several native languages in Malawi, but the most common of these is Chichewa. A standard Chichewa greeting is "muli bwanji" (how are you?). The common response is "ndili bwino" (I am well). “Zikomo” means thank you in Chichewa. Shaking hands is very common and expected.

### **How do people dress?**

Most Malawians dress conservatively, in pants or a long skirt. Until recently, it was illegal for women in Malawi to wear pants. Although this is no longer the case, most women wear a *chitenje*, or long cloth wrapped around the waist as a skirt. The *chitenje* cloth is widely available for purchase, but it is also acceptable to wear a skirt or dress. Although most Malawian women don't wear pants, they seem to expect that women from the U.S.

will wear pants. It may be considered impolite for women to wear shorts, however. Men can wear pants or shorts, but most Malawian men will wear pants.

### **TRIP PREPARATION AND PACKING SUGGESTIONS**

#### **What immunizations are recommended?**

**World Water Corps** volunteers are encouraged to check with their doctors or a travel clinic before traveling to Malawi.

#### **How can I protect myself from malaria?**

Visitors to Malawi should take prophylactic malaria medications before, during, and after their trip. Exact regimens vary with different medications. Bed net use is strongly encouraged, and nets are widely available at hotels. Long sleeves and pants are suggested for the evening, the time during which malaria is most likely to be contracted.

#### **What specific supplies might be useful?**

Past **World Water Corps** volunteers have found the following items useful:

- Shower shoes/flip flops
- Mosquito repellent (30 percent DEET)
- Flashlight or headlamp for power outages or work after dark
- Umbrella or raincoat for rainy periods
- Travel alarm clock or watch (clocks not always available at hotels/lodges)
- Sunscreen
- First-aid kit, including band-aids, Imodium, Tylenol, and a thermometer
- A few easy-to-transport, high-energy snacks for long days in the field
- Detergent for washing items in bathroom sink, although laundry is sometimes available for a fee at hotels/lodges
- A voltage adaptor for digital camera charger
- Backpack or other bag to carry supplies (water, camera, papers, etc.) in the field
- Anything required to survive very long layovers and flights (books, iPod, etc.)

#### **What supplies have past volunteers found unnecessary?**

Past **World Water Corps** volunteers have found the following items to be unnecessary (although requirements may be different for different people traveling under various circumstances):

- Iodine tablets or water filters (because of the availability of bottled water)
- Clipboards and other materials for the monitoring assignment (these will be provided by Water For People upon arrival)
- Excessive amount of cash (ATMs are widely available)

### **MAPPING AND MONITORING ASSIGNMENTS**

#### **Who will our team work with?**

Mapping and monitoring volunteers will work in a team that typically includes one or two volunteers, one or two Water For People–Malawi staff members, and one or two representatives from local partner organizations or local government.

#### **How will we get to the projects and villages?**

Private cars and drivers are provided by Water For People in Malawi. The drivers may be Water For People in-country staff or hired drivers. Most villages are in remote rural or peri-urban areas and require a one- to two-hour drive each way.

**What is a typical day like?**

Each day of the assignment will include visits to multiple project sites. Depending on the site characteristics and locations, between two and eight sites are typically visited by each team on a given day. Teams will conduct activities as described in the protocol. While in the field, there is usually a small town restaurant for lunch but the team should always carry snacks in case one is not available. Working in the field can be tiring and the weather may be hot, sunny, and humid. Some of the sites are two hours each way outside of Blantyre, so you should anticipate several long days in the field. Volunteers should be prepared to protect themselves from the sun and drink lots of water. Teams will enter data on laptop computers in the evening or on a designated “data entry day.”

**Where will I go to the bathroom?**

Many of the places where we will visit do not have sanitary facilities. You may find a rudimentary toilet, but be prepared to use open fields, if necessary. Most Malawian toilets use water instead of toilet paper for cleansing. Past volunteers have recommended having your own toilet paper with you at all times and a bag to put the garbage in for later disposal. Bringing hand wipes or gel cleaner is a good idea.

**Will Water For People provide supplies for the assignment?**

Yes, Water For People in Malawi will provide the necessary forms, writing implements, clipboards, digital cameras (for official pictures), laptops, and other supplies required to complete the assignment. However, volunteers may be asked if they can bring some additional digital cameras or laptops if there are not enough to equip the whole team.