

Volunteer Package DIN

This document gives you an overview of the volunteer package with DIN, advice about what to bring and some of the things to expect. There's also a volunteer's view at the end of the document that gives some more detail on the local area, the homestay, extra expenses, and some tried and tested ideas for time off.

About Development Initiative Network (DIN Malawi)

Development Initiative Network (DIN Malawi) is a local non-profit organization currently working in the Lower Shire southern region of Malawi. DIN was established in February 2012 to respond to the needs and challenges affecting vulnerable communities in Chikwawa and Nsanje. We believe, for change to be effective and sustainable development to materialize, communities need to be the drivers of the process. Our aim is to empower a network of community groups and organizations and ensure they have access to adequate resources and training in order to tackle poverty. Partnering with local, international and government organizations, our programs focus on improving water, sanitation and healthcare, providing access to good quality education and community awareness and addressing food insecurities through rural agricultural development, while tackling climate change.

DIN is registered under NGO Act number: TR/INC-6305.

For more information visit our website at: www.dinmlw.wordpress.com

Why volunteer with DIN

"If you ever think you're too small to be effective, you've never been in bed with a mosquito!" — Wendy Lesko

There are many reasons to volunteer with DIN including the following:

- It will be an unforgettable experience - you will get to engage in Malawian life, learn more about the culture, share your knowledge and get to know and learn from the locals.
- As a relatively new local NGO, DIN lacks the resources of other larger charities. As a small organization, it is more difficult for us to receive international funding - so we rely on the assistance and funds from our volunteer programs.
- We are more affordable than other international volunteering organizations as there is no middle man. This means there is no administration fee and your money will go to cover your food, accommodation and a small contribution to the running of the project.
- The Lower Shire is one of the poorest places in Malawi and currently does not receive many international volunteers. Therefore, there is great need in many of the communities and volunteers have the opportunity to make a real difference.
- Volunteering can be a great way to build confidence, develop personally, learn new skills or even just develop old ones. It looks good on your CV (resume) and may give you something interesting to talk about in a job interview.

Volunteer programmes

When we receive your application DIN staff will tailor a volunteer program suitable to your skills and the needs of the organization. When you arrive you will have an orientation meeting with the staff, where you will find out more information about Malawian culture, DIN projects and the type of work you will be carrying out during your stay. You will be given a local SIM, which you can buy internet data, to keep in touch with friends and family. Volunteers are expected to work five days a week and will have their weekends off.

Food and accommodation

Volunteers can choose from two types of accommodation:

- **Home Stay \$49 per week** - You can stay with a host family in a village which is a great opportunity to experience the unique culture of Malawi. When staying with a host, we will ensure you are safe and well looked after. However, facilities are basic and you would be expected to use local toilets and bucket showers. Your food will be prepared by the family and you will receive 3 meals a day.
- **Lodge \$98 per week** - You can stay in a lodge in Chikwawa and get a lift on a bicycle to your volunteering location each day. You will have a flush toilet and shower. You will receive three meals a day, mostly in the restaurant; some meals will be prepared on site where you are volunteering.

What to do before you come

Volunteers are responsible for arranging their own visas for Malawi, travel insurance and travel vaccinations. We recommend that volunteers take malaria tablets while here as Chikwawa is a malaria region; these should be attained before your visit, but it's possible to buy them in a chemist in Blantyre if needed.

To enjoy your stay more, we suggest volunteers come prepared. Teaching volunteers can research teaching activities, songs and games to teach students. Agricultural volunteers can familiarise themselves with subsistence farming techniques or research business training. If you are volunteering in our office, it would be useful to bring your own laptop as we don't have any to spare.

Fundraising

Volunteers can fundraise for their trip to cover their costs and also raise extra funds for DIN's work. This can lead to a more fulfilling trip as you will be able to see how your money is being spent and report back to your friends and family on the impact it has made. Please see below for some ideas for fundraising.

Fundraising Ideas

- Have a fundraising event or party with an entrance charge.
- Organise a raffle and try and get the prizes donated.
- Set up an online fundraising page and share it with your friends and family by email and social media.
- Research local civic groups such as Rotary and Lions, or other special-interest groups who might be interested in sponsoring you.
- Ask your local church, mosque, synagogue, etc. if they would be willing to hold a special collection for you.
- Have a bake sale at work or in your local community.
- Partner with your local supermarket and pack bags for donations.
- Arrange a fun quiz night.
- Have a clothing sale party and sell some clothes you do not wear anymore.
- Look for sponsorship from local businesses in your area.
- Buy some lollipops, put a thank you note on them and sell them to your neighbours, friends, family and work colleagues.

What to bring

This will vary from person to person for personal items, but we do recommend you bring the following:

- Travel insurance details
- Personal medication
- Insect repellent
- Sun cream
- Culturally appropriate clothes (women should wear dresses, skirts and trousers below the knee and not too tight) and clothes with light material, as it can get very hot in Chikwawa. However, between April and June it can be a bit cooler.
- A laptop or tablet if you can – especially if you want to work in the office.
- A SIM-unlocked phone
- A towel
- Mosquito net or you can buy one upon your arrival here.
- Toiletries
- Because of the heat and the mosquitos, we advise our volunteers to buy a fan upon their arrival.
- A torch, and ideally a solar lantern because of the blackouts.
- For coffee lovers: Instant coffee, or fresh coffee and a cafeteria or other coffee maker
- Breakfast is usually bread and peanut butter – bring a favourite spread from home if you have one (e.g. marmite)
- We are always very grateful for any resources volunteers can bring with them such as:
 - Educational and reading books, educational toys and posters, colouring pencils, crayons, colouring books, balloons, bubbles, balls and toys for preschool - as schools are often very under resourced.
 - Laptops, cameras or USB memory sticks that you or your friends and family are no longer using, as we work from a very basic office.

Visa Requirements

A valid passport with at least six months to expiry date (from intended exit date) is required to enter Malawi. If your passport is likely to expire you should get a new one before arriving. There are no Volunteer Visas in Malawi, so all volunteers should apply for Tourist Visas and give "tourism/travel" as the reason for entry. Tourist visas, which are valid for 30 days, are issued upon entry and cost \$75 (payable in \$ - some nationalities are exempt from payment, please check with your nearest Malawian Embassy for more information). Visa forms can be printed off from the Malawi High Commission (<http://www.malawihighcommission.co.uk>) and completed before travel to save time at the port of entry. We do not recommend that you apply for the visa in advance of arrival, as this is a simple process at the airport in Lilongwe or other port of entry. Completed forms are handed it at the first desk, payment (in dollars in cash) at the second desk and the visa is issued at the third desk. You can then proceed through immigration for your entry stamp. You can extend your visa for a further sixty days (just prior to the initial 30 day visa expiring) at a cost of MK5,000 per 30 days. Any volunteers staying for over three months should then expect to apply for a Temporary Resident Permit (TRP) after their 90 days has expired, which can be done in a nearby city of Blantyre and costs \$100

payable in \$ not MK. Volunteers staying for longer than one month in Malawi and who plan to travel to different countries during their stay should get either a 6 month multiple entry visa for \$150 or a one year multiple entry for \$250, which can be organised from your home country or upon arrival at the Malawi border. For more detailed information on visas please visit: www.malawihighcommission.co.uk and click on the consular and immigration services link.

Flight Options

There are no direct flights from the Europe, US, Australia etc. to Malawi. The main airlines that fly regularly to Lilongwe & Chileka Airports are Ethiopian Airlines, Kenya Airways and South African Airways. The easiest way to fly is with one stopover; however adding more stopovers usually decreases the cost of your flight. In general, Ethiopian Airlines is viewed as the cheaper option (though at peak times of the year there is less of a difference in price). Flights normally cost between \$500 and \$1,000 (return) depending on the time of year. Our convenient Airport is **Chileka**.

Entry Into Malawi

If you are flying in from the Europe with one stopover, you will arrive in Blantyre approximately 15 hours after original departure. It is at this point that you will receive your Tourist Visa in your passport. In general Malawi is considered to be a safe country where tourists are not at great risk, however in Lilongwe & Blantyre petty crimes and robberies can be frequent so visitors should make sure to watch their bags and carry only small amounts of cash when out and about. To withdraw from a cash point you will need either VISA (most commonly accepted) or MASTERCARD (only occasionally accepted). There are plenty of places to withdraw money in Lilongwe, Blantyre and Nchalo.

(Use either Standard Bank or NBS). Each individual withdrawal cannot exceed MK80,000 and most international banks have a daily withdrawal limit (normally MK400,000 per day).

Travelling Africa

Volunteers who wish to travel through other parts of Africa before or after their trip to Malawi must consult a travel clinic in order to check whether they need to take extra precautions. You can get to Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa and Zambia fairly easily by road. Volunteers should check visa restrictions for these countries (visas do not need to be obtained beforehand – except Mozambique – but the cost may vary depending on the country you are going to and the country you are from).

Cultural Awareness

Chikwawa is far from the city (Blantyre) and local village and most adults do not have a very good command of the English language. Volunteers staying for longer than a period of 2 – 3 weeks should consider learning essential words and phrases in Chichewa when they arrive in order to communicate better with the surrounding community. Female volunteers should be aware that in the towns and villages it is respectful to have your knees covered (and in some cases, your shoulders). Some practices in Malawi are very different to what volunteers may be used to at home. Visitors to the centre do not have to agree with all the customs around them but should act respectfully towards them and endeavour to understand the complex cultural history that has often shaped them.

Medical Matters

The main potential problem affecting volunteers is malaria. We insist on all our volunteers organising malaria prophylaxis prior to travel. Make sure you are taking your anti-malarial tablets each day (or week, if you are taking Larium), and continue to take them for the

recommended time after you get home. You should always use a mosquito net. Make sure to apply mosquito repellent (preferably with 25% – 50% DEET), and try to cover yourself up at night. If you start feeling any symptoms of malaria then immediately notify the Volunteer or Project Coordinator. HIV/AIDS is a problem all over Malawi and many volunteers arrive unaware of the risks involved in entering into relationships. All volunteers in such a situation, whether they consider themselves to be in long-term or short-term relationships, should make sure they use condoms. There are confidential clinics around Chikwawa¹²³ that offer free HIV/AIDS tests with same-day results. We also insist that all our volunteers purchase comprehensive travel/health insurance prior to travel and you will need to provide us with details of your insurance policy when you arrive along with emergency contact details and a signed code of conduct (forms available online). If a volunteer should fall sick there are private doctors and in Chikwawa and Blantyre. If a volunteer should suffer a serious condition at DIN Malawi, there will always be someone available to assist them with getting to appropriate health services. Important: Make sure you have read DIN Medical Pack, which contains more detailed information about medical matters and emergencies

How to get here

Most international flights go to Lilongwe International Airport. However, we recommend you to fly to Chileka International Airport since it is convenient to us especially when you want to be picked up. From Lilongwe you can get an AXA executive coach to Blantyre, which takes approximately **five hours**.

Currently, we don't have an Organizational vehicle, we use a car hire and volunteers are responsible for the payment of their pick up. A member of our staff will meet you in Blantyre and pick you up to Chikwawa, using a hired vehicle and you will be asked to pay US\$75 (Car hire & gas). In case you want to hang out on weekends, one of the places we recommend is Doogles in Blantyre.

Cultural differences

Note that you will find some culture very different from the western even in terms of working pace. People here will assure you of doing a certain task on the next day but not fulfill what they promised.

They may also not be time conscious. Sometimes they report late at a working place opposed to time agreed and they may not give excuse. As an Organization we learn a lot from our volunteers and we are trying to bring change to the communities we are working with. However, we don't tolerate racism; make sure you treat everyone as an important person.

Things to do on your time off

If you would like to explore other parts of Malawi while you are here, there are a variety of things to do on your time off.

- **Wildlife Safari:** Majete Wildlife Reserve and Lengwe National Park are both easily accessible from Chikwawa- wildlife viewing can be done from the comfort of a game viewing vehicle or on a bushwalk for the more adventurous. You can also experience village life and culture and enjoy the music, dancing and traditional cooking of Malawi.
- **Climb Mount Mulanje:** Mount Mulanje is the highest mountain in Malawi (over 3000m) and is one of the most beautiful mountain areas with its dense green valleys and dazzling waterfalls. There are a number of 2/3 day hikes you can undertake in the area.
- **Visit Lake Malawi:** Spend a weekend in Mangochi on the shores of Lake Malawi - relax by the lake, go kayaking or snorkelling!
- **Explore the Zomba Plateau:** Go hiking in the Zomba plateau - with wild vegetation, criss-crossed by streams with tumbling waterfalls and still lakes. There are a number of trails to be explored and guides can be hired.
- **Please Note:** *Volunteers must arrange these activities themselves and cover the cost of travel, food and accommodation.*

A big THANK YOU from DIN!!

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for deciding to come and volunteer with DIN. Your assistance is greatly appreciated and will help us continue our work to alleviate poverty in some of the most vulnerable communities. We are looking forward to working with and sharing our culture with you.

A map of the area

