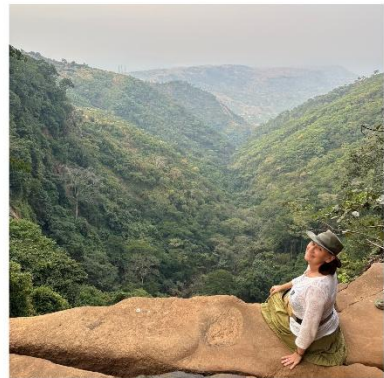
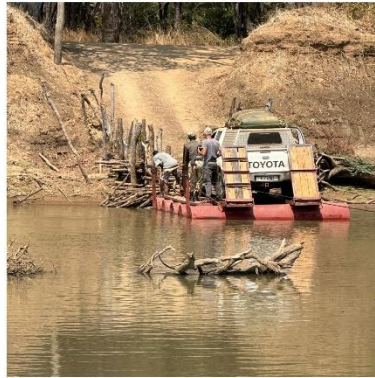
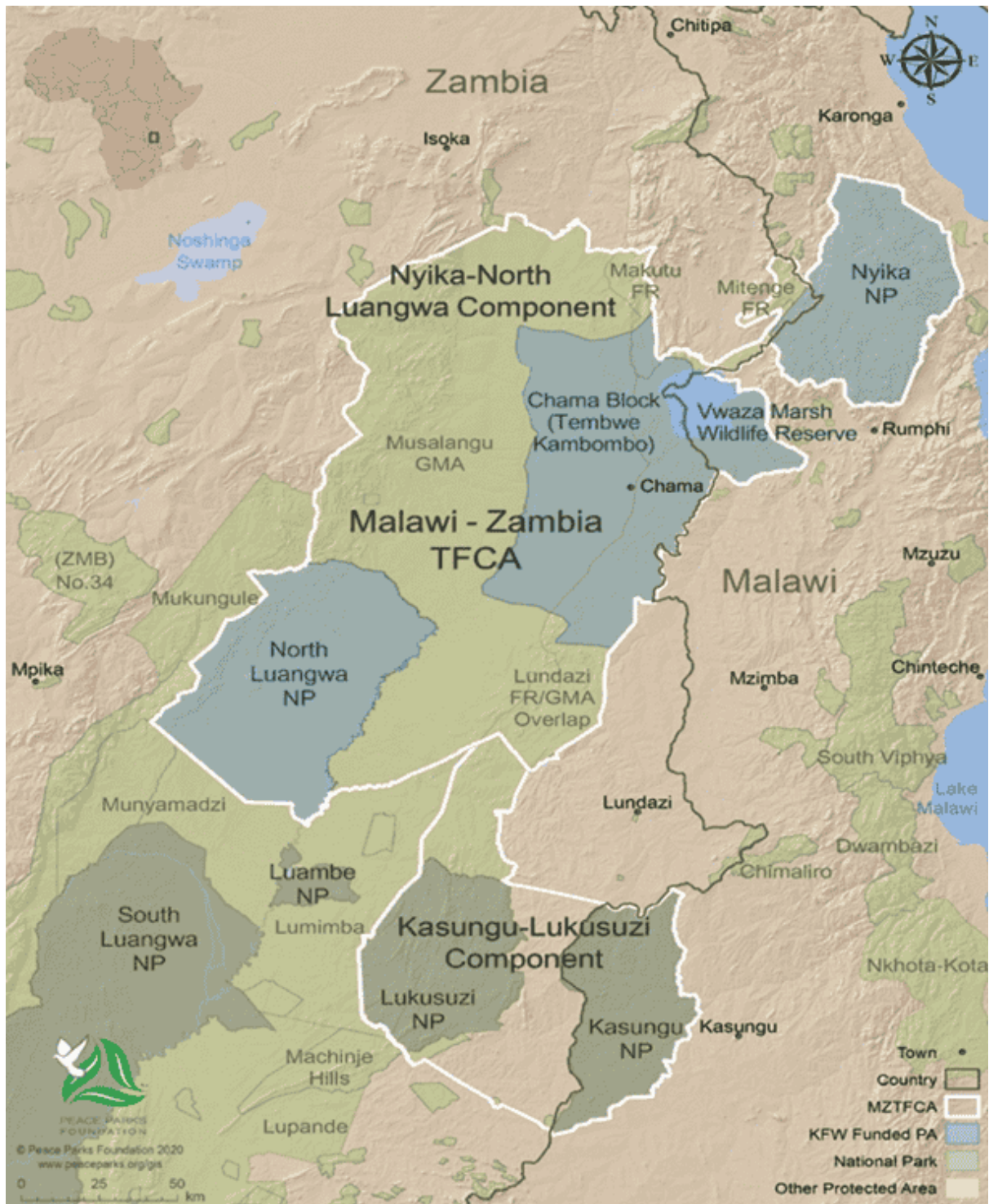


Adventures Across Malawi and Zambia



I ventured into a lesser-known Transfrontier Conservation Area known as MAZA, which crosses the boundaries of Malawi and Zambia. The Zambian parts of it are unknown to many 4x4 adventurers, which is the attraction and finding an elusive border post into Malawi adds to this African adventure.



The Malawi Zambia TFCA (MAZA) includes North Luangwa & Musalangu Game Management Area, Lundazi Forest Reserve and Lukusuzi National Park in Zambia, Nyika National Park, Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve, Kasungu National Park in Malawi. Not all these parks can be visited, and while TFCA boundaries seem a bit random, they are selected for the success that

cross-border collaboration could have on wildlife conservation, biodiversity, cultural heritage, socio-economic development and resolving human-wildlife conflict.

In MAZA, this requires cooperation between government and independent organisations who manage protected areas. Luckily there are enough interested parties to make great things happen. And once awareness dawns that you are travelling within a TFCA – often through signage at park entrances – this is your chance to support community-run camps, buy local products and dig deeper into what it takes for people and wildlife to thrive in close proximity through numerous projects.



North Luangwa & Musalangu Game Management Area

North Luangwa National Park is Zambia's least travelled game reserve and requires a 4x4. We had the fortune of travelling with Paula Vrdoljak of Tulukani, a community based tourism operator, whose intimate knowledge of North Luangwa as a Conservation Manager, was invaluable. Our Land Cruisers provided the rugged durability required, if not the soft suspension desired. The bumpy sand roads seemed endless, so take your time and be totally self-sufficient and capable of resolving any situation that may arise, like getting stuck in soft

riverine sand and driving onto a rickety pont without toppling off into the crocodile infested Luangwa River. This is remote Africa. You won't find any facilities, shops or a gas station. It's just the self-sufficient world you create and the wild African bush.



North Luangwa is blessed with pristine miombo woodland, winterthorn trees dripping with seedpods, and towering cathedral mopane.



It didn't have the prolific game I had expected from the Amatololo Experience brochure aimed at overland enthusiasts, which stated, "there is a thriving population of lions,

elephants and buffalo.” That may be so but I saw few of them. Perhaps the legacy of poaching and blood-sucking tsetse flies means that the prolific big game is found in South Luangwa. While this is outside the designation of MAZA, it is Zambia’s most popular big game park and the best place to get your animal fix before venturing into North Luangwa.



Relieved of the pressure to search for animals, we sat by the Luangwa River and watched birds, hippos, crocs and the occasional antelope. It was incredibly peaceful. Our 4x4 contained everything we needed for camping and cooking and the campsite’s longdrop toilet and hand water pump were simple but sufficient.



The Frankfurt Zoological Society oversees management of this enormous area, that together with adjacent game management areas is equal to the size of Wales. While we didn’t see another touring vehicle, German-funded utility vehicles roam around involved in conservation and community upliftment and the anti-poaching patrols are so discreet you don’t see them.

Senior Wildlife Police Officer, Ignatius Namabanda, 33 years in the job has no fear of bedding down on the ground in elephant and lion country during his 10-day patrols. “My job is to go towards gunshots. It’s dangerous,” he says calmly. This powerful statement underlies the complexity of life in and around wildlife areas and the courage of these officers.



Getting Around North Luangwa using the Amatololo Loop



This is the first time that North Luangwa National Park is being promoted as a destination for adventurous travellers to explore one of Africa’s most remote places. The Amatololo Experience offers four simple, community-owned campsites inside the park’s eastern boundary, each with its own charm; Lufila Falls, Nkhola, Muzungwe and Mushika camps. For

more comfort there's Samala Camp at the south gate and Ituba at the north, both with riverside en-suite chalets. These are part of community-based projects linking livelihoods and conservation, alongside strong anti-poaching efforts. More upmarket is the North Luangwa River Lodge & Camp with meals and game drives included. A 4x4 is essential preferably in convoy, roads are rough, and there are no facilities. You must be self-sufficient with food, fuel, and water.

Travel Facts

- North Luangwa Park hours: 06h00–18h00
- Dry season: June–mid-Nov (lows 10°C); Wet season: mid-Nov–May (park closed Dec–15 May). Hottest month: Oct (40°C); escarpment is cooler
- Best access: July–Oct, after the thick black cotton soil has dried out
- Pontoon ferry: one vehicle at a time across Luangwa River (trailers go separately)
- Fly fishing for yellowfish and tigerfish in Mutinondo & Mwaleshi rivers
- Campsite facilities: longdrop toilet, bucket shower, borehole (except Lufila which uses river water)
- Booking: bookings@northluangwa.com | WhatsApp +260 950987579
- Prices 2025: \$25 SADC / \$75 international

Finding the Zambia–Malawi Border

Getting to the remote Katumbi Post between Zambia and Malawi requires you to ignore the GPS – yes really! Ask locals for directions, but even people who don't know the way will take a guess, so your intuition needs to come into play here. Once found, it so happens that the border officials only man this post on market days, and this was not that day! “Come back on market day,” was the most helpful information on offer. But in Africa there is always a way. Nothing is impossible, but an element of patience is required to find the solution. Much discussion, head shaking and finally nodding, resulted in an ingenious plan where we surrendered our passports to a man on a motorbike who took off at high speed to another passport office some 60 kilometres away. Three hours' later with passports stamped we crossed the border in to Malawi. This was Colby's territory. His company Colby's Adventures was who we chose to tour Malawi with. His know how and reputation as a tour operator meant we didn't succumb to police bribery at frequent road blocks.



Nyika National Park, Malawi

It seems impossible that the awful road from the park gate at 1,646 metres above sea level into Nyika National Park, to Chelinda Lodge and Campsite at 2,400 metres asl, is also a thoroughfare for lorries to and from Tanzania.

A truck whose brakes had failed, with a contingent of hapless passengers, was using the earth bank to break their downward trajectory. The log bungalows and pine forests around Chelinda - the only accommodation in the park - give the destination a somewhat Swiss feel. Come October, when some of the 213 species of Alpine orchids are in flower, you may feel like bursting with the sound of music. Field Guide Blessings Munthari transfers his enthusiasm to guests through fascinating guided walks.



Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve, Malawi



The broken-down lorry and its passengers hoping to get to Tanzania through Nyika, were gone as we headed downhill from Nyika to Vwaza Marsh and Lake Kazuni. Climate change

may have receded the lake's shoreline to a crusty edge, but with the water shimmering in the sun and a herd of elephants in the distance, I felt the charm of this place and wanted to linger longer.

The chalets are crumbling and the roads impassable, but the Area Manager for this Vwaza Protected Area said that this disrepair will be just a memory after the 2027 upgrades. I have hope.

Local communities are deeply involved in protecting this area, and 18,000 people have benefited from the Nyika-Vwaza Water Project, which pipes fresh water from the plateau to the valley. It's a big deal! Because villagers previously risked their lives fetching brackish water from a shore dotted with hippos and crocodiles.





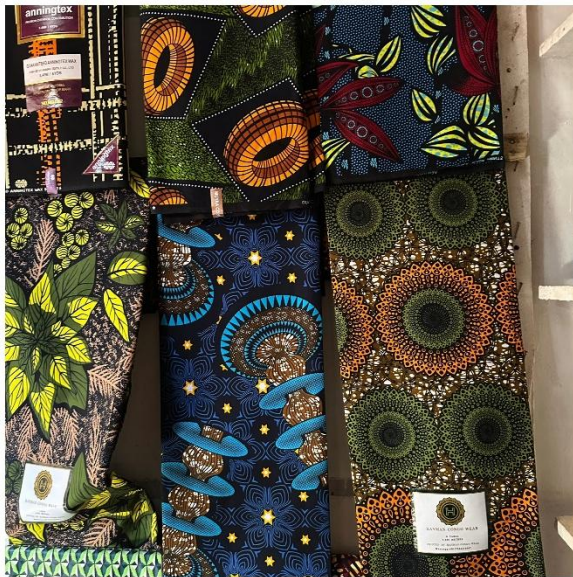
Lake Malawi Calling

Chilling at Lake Malawi was a logical extension to my explorations within MAZA. And I could think of nothing more pleasing and teasing - after bumpy Zambian roads and Malawian police road blocks - than sitting on a sun lounger overlooking Lake Malawi with cocktail in



hand. I found everything I wished for at Njaya Lodge in Nkhata Bay; a typically relaxed, not-quite-finished Lake Malawi guest house terraced into the hill with steps down to the lake. Soul tunes and rhythmic waves induced soporific bliss.

During a boat ride for a bit of snorkelling in the warm lake water, I asked the skipper to drop me off near town. I wanted to satisfy my desire to bring home a traditional Malawi chitenge (sarong). He quickly called his 'brother' who met me on the lakeshore and led through the labyrinthine market. I say 'brother' because it should not be taken literally. Stall upon stall of chitenge bamboozled me with colour and pattern until I felt weak. I chose two out of hundreds, then hung around beside the busy dirt road looking pale-skinned and out of place, and soon someone helped me get a cheap ride on the back of a motorbike to my lodging.



The author would like to thank Boundless Southern Africa, GIZ, Adventures with Colby and Tulukani community based tourism for all their parts in making this trip possible.

