



## **Safety in Malawi**

Village Volunteers is committed to the safety and well-being of all volunteers. Be sure to read the following guide carefully for tips on how to protect yourself from some hazards of international travel. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact our office at any time.

### **Tips for Protecting Yourself Against Crime in the Cities**

Visits to Malawi are generally trouble-free, but it is still necessary to take general precautions to protect against theft. The villages are generally very safe and hospitable for volunteers; however, travel to larger cities should be treated with more caution. Cities have higher rates of mugging and bag-snatching, so vigilance is highly advised.

In cities, belongings such as passports, plane tickets, credit cards, and money should be kept in a secure place on your person (money belt, neck pouch under your clothes, etc.) and completely out of sight. This is very important, as you may be very surprised at the boldness and clever tactics of some thieves. Most theft occurs around main bus stations in Lilongwe and Blantyre, at the main ports for the Llala ferry, shopping centers, and restaurants. Be particularly aware of your surroundings when traveling in these locations. Avoid walking around quiet areas, especially at night. Take extra precaution in market areas. There have been several incidences of protester violence involving police near market areas.

Below are some additional tips while in cities:

- Use common sense about safety, as you would at home.
- Avoid public demonstrations and civil disturbances.
- Do not travel alone at night, and stay in well-lit areas.
- Leave valuables at home, and attempt to avoid looking like a rich tourist.
- Do not draw attention to yourself, either through your actions or dress.
- Beware of pickpockets. Women with babies, children, or other unsuspecting parties may be potential pickpockets. You do not have to be necessarily rude, but be sure to keep your space. Pickpockets will often jostle you, create some sort of distraction or disturbance, or casually ask for the time or for directions.

### **Transportation Safety**

One of the biggest safety risks in Malawi is the potential of injury from traffic accidents, so take safety seriously by always wearing your seatbelt, and do not ride in the front seat of a taxi. Avoid traveling between towns by public minibus or pick-up trucks. These vehicles are often overloaded and in poor condition. Also, avoid night driving in rural areas due to poor road conditions, vehicles traveling without lights, and threats of vehicle robberies and carjacking. While in taxis, keep your doors locked and windows up in traffic or at lengthy stoplights.

## **Criminal Penalties**

Possession of illegal drugs, including marijuana, faces stiff penalties and lengthy prison sentences in local *gaols* (jails/prisons). Medication may only be imported in its original packaging along with a prescription or medical certificate. Village Volunteers will not be responsible for disregard for country laws.

## **What to Do If Problems Arise**

### **Lost or Stolen Passports**

If your passport is lost or stolen while you are abroad, report the loss immediately to local police authorities and the nearest embassy or consulate. It is imperative to keep a photocopy of your passport in your luggage, as you will need to provide information and documentation of your identity. If your passport is lost or stolen, a photocopy will expedite the renewal process.

### **Money, ATM's and Credit Cards**

Keep in mind that it is always best to avoid carrying large sums of cash. Instead, we suggest that you bring one credit/debit card and approximately \$100 USD (or equivalent in your local currency) to exchange upon arrival in Malawi.

Credit cards are not useful in villages. If you do bring a credit card, be sure to keep your card number and its "Lost or Stolen" 800 number separate and "at home." In the unlikely event that your credit card is lost or stolen, this information will help your family or friends cancel and reissue your card. You should keep your credit card information with you in a place separate from your actual credit cards.

If your money and credit cards are lost or stolen, you will have plenty of support from your In-Country Coordinator. You will have compassionate help from those in your village, who will make sure you are okay until the necessary plans can be arranged.

ATM access is often available only in the cities. Be aware that they are particular targets of watchful thieves. In the case that you run out of money, it is important to have a contact person at home who understands your banking and can deposit money into your account.

## **Internet and Phone Cards**

Phone communication may be difficult, and often times expensive. Therefore, you should let people at home know about the potential difficulties for calling, and that you may be out of touch for extended periods of time. Always try to avoid collect calls that can cost up to ten dollars a minute or more.

There are internet cafes in most of the larger towns, and are less likely in the rural regions. Although it is becoming more common in smaller towns, the service is extremely slow. Plan to be out of touch for the most part, keeping in mind that you will have the opportunity to visit the larger towns periodically.

If you are concerned about staying connected during your time in Malawi, you may want to consider purchasing a cell phone in Malawi. Your program coordinator can help with this if you are interested.

## **Contacts and Resources**

The environment of all village placements is very hospitable and supportive. If you are sick, injured, or need help, the Directors and Volunteer Coordinators are prepared to assist you. They are always on hand to answer any questions and provide assistance. Please see the **Malawi Contact Information** sheet for a current contact list.