

Your guide to researching at

# THE MARU

## Research Center

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## Who we are

In 2010 Justin Kraus and Okju Kim came to Malawi looking for a place to settle down. After a few years of working on and studying coastal management and development programs in Africa and Asia and working in the African tourism industry they found Kande Beach located on the beautiful shores of Lake Malawi and a little dive center there called Aquanuts Divers. In 2011 they bought the dive center and moved permanently to Kande. Astounded by the beauty and diversity of Lake Malawi's cichlid fish and dismayed at the inattention that the scientific and conservation communities were paying to the northern half of Lake Malawi they decided to found the Maru Research Center in an effort to better understand and promote the Lake both to the international community and more importantly to Malawians themselves. Lake Malawi is the most biologically diverse lake on the planet with an estimated 1000 species of cichlid fish alone. However by most counts barely half of those 1000 fish have been properly scientifically identified let alone studied. The rest of the lake's ecological, biological, and even socio-economic characteristics have been similarly understudied. There is a lot of work to be done. Unfortunately Malawian institutions, like most in Africa, have neither the expertise nor the resources to do it. At the Maru we want to do our small part in assisting them so that more can be done and so can you through our volunteer and internship opportunities.



**The Maru Research Center at Kande Beach on the Northern Shore of Lake Malawi.**

## What we do

The Maru Research Center currently has three ongoing research and education programs. As a volunteer or intern you will be working on all of them.



Here we are surveying possible new sites for underwater research.

## Weather and Water Quality Monitoring

The clear warm waters of Lake Malawi have always amazed it's visitors. At the Maru we monitor a variety of weather and water quality indicators. With increased development both on the shores of the Lake and further inland we want to keep track of what is coming into the lake within our research area and to know what effect it is having on the lake. Every Malawian and every living organism in the lake depends on the lake's waters for their daily needs and so knowing the quality of that water is important.

## Population and Biodiversity Surveying

Lake Malawi is home to the largest number of endemic fish on the planet. There are an estimated 1000 species of cichlid fish alone. At the Maru we are utterly fascinated by these little fellows and have developed a survey program to monitor and map their diversity and numbers at various sites within our research area. Using scuba equipment we conduct line transect surveys at various depths and times counting and identifying the lake's biodiversity.

## Fisheries Monitoring and Conservation

In cooperation with the Malawian government's Fisheries Department, Mzuzu University, and other local and international NGOs the Maru Research Center is helping Malawians to better monitor and conserve their lake resources. After the establishment of Beach Village Committees (BVCs) the Maru will work with them to better educate the local population through sensitization campaigns and other activities about the importance of using the lake's resources sustainably. It will also assist the BVC in setting up community monitoring programs so that the effectiveness of their outreach and management initiatives can be assessed.

## What you will do

You are going to be busy. The research we conduct at the Maru requires training and during your stay with us we will provide you with the skills you need to competently assist us in carrying out our research programs. This will include dive training, language training, and training in surveying techniques and methodologies for both land-based and underwater data collection. A typical volunteer staying with us for one month can expect their schedule to look something like this:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week One	Airport pick-up transfer to Kande	-Orientation -Language Lesson	Dive Training	Dive Training	Dive Training	Dive Training	Day Off
Week Two	-Monitoring Program Intro -Tonga Lesson	-Monitoring Training - Fish ID study	-Monitoring -Tonga Lesson -Fish ID study	-Monitoring -Fish ID study	-Monitoring -Tonga Lesson -Fish ID study	-Monitoring -Fish ID study	Day Off
Week Three	-Monitoring -Survey Training -Fish ID study	-Monitoring -Tonga Lesson -Survey Training -Fish ID study	-Monitoring -Survey Training -Fish ID study	-Monitoring -Tonga Lesson -Survey Training -Fish ID study	-Monitoring -Survey Training -Fish ID study	-Monitoring -Test Prep -Final Exam	Day Off
Week Four	Underwater Surveying	Underwater Surveying	Underwater Surveying	Underwater Surveying	Data Entry	Final Day	Transport to Lilongwe

Interns will follow a similar schedule to the one above for the first month. Afterwards they will work on a variety of projects and will work collaboratively with Maru staff to formulate a productive research schedule.



**Volunteer researchers observing the lake's 1000 species of cichlid fish**

## Where you will stay

During your stay with us you will live on the Maru Research Center premises located directly on the shores of Lake Malawi. Kande is a small village located on the major north-south highway of Malawi running along the western shore of Lake Malawi. It has no banking, internet, or modern shopping facilities. At the Maru Research Center your accommodation will be on a shared basis. All cottages are equipped with electricity, mosquito nets, beds, bedding, and adequate storage for your clothing and personal belongings. You will have access to a shared bathroom with hot and cold running water. You will also be provided with a communal kitchen and dining area where you will be able to prepare your meals. Food stuffs for dinner and a light breakfast will be provided as part of your program cost however you will be responsible for cooking and purchasing food for your lunch. You will have ample opportunity to go to markets to purchase required food stuffs. You will have free access to internet for any research related purposes and will have the ability to pay for internet access for personal use. Kande Beach Campsite is located directly next to the research center. It has a western-style bar and restaurant. In Kande village itself there are a couple restaurants serving local food.



A view of the lake from one of our volunteer cottages

## What it costs

Unfortunately the Maru is not able to finance the expenses that come with hosting volunteers and interns. The living costs for housing, feeding (two meals per day), and training you (excluding scuba diving training) are as follows.

Volunteers pay \$300 USD per week for the first two weeks and \$200 USD per week thereafter.

Interns pay \$150 USD per week remembering that internships require a minimum of a 12 week commitment.

If you are not already a certified scuba diver then in order to participate in our underwater surveys you will also need to take the PADI Open Water Diver scuba course. As a volunteer or intern you will receive a 10% discount if you do the course at Aquanuts Divers. The cost, including the discount, is \$315 USD. Thereafter all research related diving will be free of charge however additional fun diving or dive training that you may wish to do while with us must be paid for at normal prices.

Transport to and from Lilongwe, the capital and main entry point into the country if you are arriving by air, can be arranged for at an additional cost or we can help you to find local transport options. We are located approximately 4 hours north of Lilongwe by car or 8 hours by local transport options. To secure your placement with us either as a volunteer or an intern you will be required to pay 20% of your total living costs upon acceptance of your placement and the remainder two weeks prior to your arrival in Malawi. Details of how this can be done will be given once your application has been successfully received.

## How to prepare

What to bring depends on when you are coming. Although Malawi's weather is generally pleasant year-round with temperatures hovering around 20 degrees Celsius (70 Fahrenheit), during our short winter, June and July, temperatures can dip low enough that a light jacket is necessary. Otherwise shorts and t-shirts are the norm. In terms of pharmaceuticals we recommend that all of our volunteers and interns take anti-malarial prophylactics for the duration of their stay. See your local doctor to find out which will be best for you. It is important to let your doctor know that you will be scuba diving during your stay because some doctors prefer not to prescribe Lariam (one of the many anti-malarial prophylactics available) to divers. The other concern that your doctor might make you aware of is a parasite that is present in some parts of Lake Malawi called bilharzias. Staff of the Maru, who are in daily contact with the lake, have never been infected with bilharzias nor have they seen or heard of anyone being infected with it in our research area. Otherwise bringing healthy supplies of sunscreen and mosquito repellent is recommended. Anyone on prescription medication should bring enough with them to last their entire stay.

## How to apply

Anyone over the age of 18 is welcome to apply to volunteer with us. In order to intern with us you must be enrolled in or have already completed a university level degree related to our research interests. People with social science backgrounds are as welcome as those with physical science backgrounds. To apply simply download the application form available on our website at <http://www.themaru.org/involved.html>. Attach the filled out form to an email and send it to [info@themaru.org](mailto:info@themaru.org). After we review your application we will contact you with further details.

## More Questions?

Browse around our website at <http://www.themaru.org> and don't hesitate to send us an email at [info@themaru.org](mailto:info@themaru.org) with any additional questions or concerns that you might have.