

Nkhotakota, Malawi

By Tom Kirvan

Lake of Stars Festival

ANNUAL EVENT IN MALAWI SYMBOLIZES A CULTURAL, ECONOMIC SUCCESS STORY

Malawi, a landlocked nation in southeastern Africa, is widely known as the “Warm Heart of Africa,” a descriptive label that captures the essence of one of the country’s most popular events – the Lake of Stars Festival.

A three-day international music and arts event held on the stunning shores of Lake Malawi, the Lake of Stars Festival has grown from a small gathering into a major cultural movement that champions Malawian arts and boosts the country’s tourism economy. It quickly established a unique “partying with a purpose” model, blending tourism, local community support, and volunteer programs.

Attendees can enjoy music, art, and traditional African performances on pristine, white-sand beaches, blending a festival experience with a tropical getaway. Organizers heavily prioritize the local community by providing various free events, integrating local crafters into festival markets, and offering outreach trips that support local villages.

This year’s event will take place October 2-4 at the Fish Eagle Bay Lodge in Nkhotakota, and will feature performances by The Black Missionaries, Driemo, Keturah, Siofe Mw, Agorosso, Waliko Makhala, and the Madalitso Band.

International artists who are scheduled to perform include Lady Amar (South Africa), Mumba Yachi and James Sakala (Zambia), and three musicians from the Czech Republic – Felix Flavour, Wowrae, and Zdenka Kotva.

Adding to the festival flavor will be comedians Dee Satha and Zahir, while poet Sangwani Kaunda also will be in the spotlight. A range of art exhibits, wellness activities, and a football (soccer) tournament also are planned over the course of the three-day event.

The festival was founded in 2003 by British tourist Will Jameson who was inspired by a trip to Malawi and wanted to counter negative Western media portrayals by showcasing the country’s natural beauty and rich culture.

A MALAWIAN CONNECTION FOR PRIMERUS MEMBERS

Primerus has a member law firm in Malawi, **Sauti & Company**, with locations in Lilongwe and Blantyre 3, specializing in banking law, commercial law, finance law, international trade law, litigation, property law, tax law, and more.

Image credit: Lake of Stars (2024). Performers at 20th Anniversary Lake of Stars (LOS 24 - Day 3 (996)) [Photograph]. Lake of Stars Malawi Arts Festival. Retrieved September 22, 2026 from <https://lakeofstars.org/gallery/>.

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The festival drew its name from the sparkling lanterns of local fishing boats, a term originally coined by famed Scottish explorer Dr. David Livingstone (1813-73). A doctor and missionary best known for his extensive travels across Africa, Livingstone dedicated his life to spreading Christianity and fighting the East African slave trade.

Historically, the event has made a major economic and social impact, generating millions of dollars for Malawi's economy, boosting local hospitality businesses, and funding ongoing flood relief efforts and educational programs. The festival also has empowered more than 1,000 local artists and expanded into a year-round cultural organization, producing film festivals and other creative projects.

"Since its inception, Lake of Stars has been hosted in six different locations across Malawi, mainly along the lakeshore, where great potential for tourism revenue lies," according to an August 6 Glamour magazine article. "Once it creates tangible impact in one community, it moves to another, intentionally spreading opportunities and economic benefits. It has also been the catalyst for Malawi's festival culture. From having virtually no festival scene, the country now boasts more than 50 events on its annual calendar. As the late Lucius Banda aptly called it, Lake of Stars is "the mother of all festivals," a true trendsetter and trailblazer for Malawi's creative and tourism industries."

A land of nearly 22 million people, Malawi has seen its star rise in recent years as tourists visit the country's breathtaking highlands and the magnificent Lake Malawi, which covers about one-fifth of Malawi's total area.

As the eighth largest lake in the world, Lake Malawi also is known as "Calendar Lake" because it is roughly 365 miles long and 52 miles wide. The lake is a UNESCO World Heritage site and contains more than 1,000 species of cichlid fish – surpassing all the freshwater fish species found in Europe and North America combined. Cichlids are a large and diverse family of freshwater fish known for their vibrant colors and intelligence, according to marine biologists.

They also could serve as the poster "fish" for a Malawi event that each year seems to become more colorful and culturally enriching.



Image credit: Lake of Stars (2024). Performer at 20th Anniversary Lake of Stars (LOS 24 - Day 3 (74)) [Photograph]. Lake of Stars Malawi Arts Festival. Retrieved September 22, 2026 from <https://lakeofstars.org/gallery/>