

Mushroom Farm Eco-Lodge Hiking Guide

Livingstonia to Usisya Bay Eco Lodge with a stop at Zulunkhuni River Lodge



Above: Stunning views just past Khondwe Village, after hiking up a big hill.

General Information

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

DISTANCE: 62km in total from Mlowe to Usisya Bay.

From Mlowe Trailhead to Usisya Bay we recommend 4 days in total, which is an average of just over 15km per day. If you'd like to shorten the hike you can do this by either increasing the distance you hike per day or by using boat transport for part of your journey.

SCENERY: Experience some of Malawi's most untouched communities as you travel through places only reachable by foot or boat. You will hike alongside unforgettable beaches, stunning bays and cliffsides, and crystal-clear water. This trek is mostly flat with the exception of a few scattered hills. The trail has some tall forest portions which provide great cover from the sun, but otherwise is exposed and can be hot, especially during the October-December Months.

During the rainy season, late-December to early-April, some river crossings may be impossible by foot due to flash flooding or heavy river flow. For these months, canoes and other boats are able to assist in the crossings if necessary.

WHERE YOU START: From Mushroom Farm, you'll take a motorbike down to Chitimba and then continue on to Mlowe Trailhead. This is where most people begin their hike.

WHERE YOU STAY: Along the hike you'll pass by a number of suitable places to stay the night. This includes community halls, beaches, or even within local villagers' houses. For this reason, at almost any time you are tired or would prefer not to continue the hike for the day, you can choose to make camp. Your guide will help you to find the best options for setting up camp, but we recommend somewhere with a clean pit latrine, access to a bathing facility or beach, and shelter for your tent.

Your final two nights of the hike are spent at Zulunkhuni River Lodge and Usisya Bay Eco-Lodge. Please be sure to arrange these accommodations before the start of your hike (see phone numbers below in FAQs).



WATER: Water is ever present during your hike as you follow one of the largest fresh water lakes in the world. However, drinking water is a little bit harder to come by. In our opinion, the best option for water is to bring a filter or to boil water (for at least 3 minutes) at night for the following day. Some guests may choose to bring UV steri-pens or chlorine tablets which are also suitable for water purification. Having enough bottles for your drinking water during the day is something to keep in mind, as water is an essential part to your hike.

FOOD: While the variety of food available during your hike may be limited, there will almost certainly be fish, cassava nsima, and biscuits available throughout the journey. Fresh vegetables, fruits, and other specialty items will be hard to come by, so please plan ahead. If you plan to pack your own food, here's what we recommend: something quick and easy for breakfast, like porridge, fruit or bread and tea or coffee. For lunch, consider sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs – prepared before the hike. Dinner can be a little more intricate while keeping the weight of the food in mind (pasta, ramen noodles, rice). *If you don't want to arrange your own food it can be arranged by Mushroom Farm (see pricing below).*

Each morning and night, the guide will prepare a fire for cooking, but not during the day along the route, unless you have previously planned for it. The guide is not a personal chef, but can assist with simple cooking tasks, especially if you are not familiar with cooking on fire. If you plan to rely heavily on the guide for cooking, please discuss this before the hike begins so that plans can be made (also, consider a small top up financially for their extra services in going above and beyond).

Both Zulunkhuni River Lodge and Usisya Beach Eco-Lodge have amazing restaurants with delicious food, so you can eat there for the final 2-days of your hike. Advance notice of your stay at these lodges will be necessary to ensure food stocks are adequate before your arrival.

WASTE MANAGEMENT: Throughout your hike, responsible waste management should be practiced. If you bring or purchase any non-biodegradable waste like plastic, you can ask community members along the trail to place the waste in their pit or burn your waste as a fire starter.

You will pass a number of long drop toilets at households along the way. Your guide can help ask if the owners of the toilet will allow you to use of it if needed. Remember to carry some toilet papers for the trip.

Quick Reference Trek Costs

Length of Trek	How Many People	Cost
3-Day Trek to Zulunkhuni River Lodge Day 1: Motorbike to Mlowe, Hike Mlowe to 1 st Community Campsite Day 2: 1 st Community Campsite to 2 nd Community Campsite Day 3: 2 nd Community Campsite to Zulunkhuni River Lodge	1	406,000mk
	2	483,000mk
	3	560,000mk
	4	637,000mk
4-Day Trek to Usisya Bay Eco-Lodge: Day 1: Motorbike to Mlowe, Hike Mlowe to 1 st Community Campsite Day 2: 1 st Community Campsite to 2 nd Community Campsite Day 3: 2 nd Community Campsite to Zulunkhuni River Lodge Day 4: Zulunkhuni River Lodge to Usisya Bay Eco-Lodge	1	430,000mk
	2	507,000mk
	3	584,000mk
	4	661,000mk

All of the above payments need to be paid in CASH directly to the guider (there is NOT an option to put these payments on credit card at Mushroom Farm). Sorry for any inconvenience.

*If your group is 5-6 people, pricing should be discussed directly with the guide, and there may be a request for an additional guide or porter to join

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THESE PRICES? Guide Fee, Community Donation, Mushroom Farm Organization Fee, Motorbike to Trailhead (Mushroom Farm to Mlowe), and Guide Return Transport.

The costs of Zulunkuni River Lodge and Usisya Bay Eco-Lodge Accommodation, Porters, Camping Equipment, and Food are not included in this price!

What's the Guide Fee? The guide fee is a payment set by the local guides for their services along the trek. It helps to cover their incidentals and is a fair pay for their great work.

What is the Community Donation? This money goes to the community supporting you along the way. It may go towards the firewood that's provided to cook your dinner, for someone to bring you water, or as a thank you for a place to sleep.

What is the Mushroom Farm Organization Fee? This fee is the only income which Mushroom Farm takes from assisting with the organization of the hike (30,000mk per group). It covers the cost of our airtime and time spent helping to organize with the Guide.

What is the Motorbike to the Trailhead? On the first day you will take a 30km motorbike ride from Mushroom Farm to Mlowe.

What is the Guide Return Transport? Guests either finish their hike at Zulunkhuni River Lodge or Usisya Bay Eco-Lodge, both of which are far from Livingstonia. For this reason, the guides charge a fee to assist them with their return transport. *If you hire a porter, this fee will also need to be added for their return transport as well.*

Cost of Optional Add-Ons

Porter Costs (per porter)	
3-Day Trek	106,000mk labor + 110,000mk return transport
4-Day Trek	137,000mk labor + 110,000mk return transport

**Please note that if more than one porter is needed an additional 60,000mk will be charged per two additional porters due to the cost of the motorbike from Mushroom Farm to Mlowe

All fees for the porter are paid in cash directly to the porters.

Food Arranged by Mushroom Farm	
2.5 Days of Food (enough to reach Zulunkhuni)	100,000mk (per person)

Food should be arranged with Mushroom Farm AT LEAST one day in advance and will be added to your Mushroom Farm Tab. Additional days of food cost 40,000mk per day per person.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE FOOD PACKAGE: Homemade muesli with roasted groundnuts, freshly baked bread, locally-made peanut butter, honey, locally grown vegetables, coffee or tea, fruit, milk, spaghetti, soya pieces, and boiled-eggs. This package also includes all necessary cutlery needed for cooking and eating. CHEF NOT INCLUDED.

Camping Equipment Rental

Maybe you have some camping gear with you, but want to rent some different items to make your hike a little more comfortable. You are welcome to review the list below of items...

All Prices are Per Night:

- Tent Rental: 20,000mk
- Sleeping Pad Rental: 10,000mk
- Sleeping Bag Rental: 10,000mk
- 80L Hiking Backpack: 15,000mk
- Cookware, Dishes, Cutlery: 10,000mk



*All camping rentals will be added to your Mushroom Farm Tab

Length of Trek	Item	Cost (per item)
3-Day Trek	Hiking Bag	45,000mk
	Tent	60,000mk
	Sleeping Pad	30,000mk
	Sleeping Bag	30,000mk
4-Day Trek	Hiking Bag	60,000mk
	Tent	80,000mk
	Sleeping Pad	40,000mk
	Sleeping Bag	40,000mk

Means of returning camping equipment should be discussed with Mushroom Farm staff and your guider before the hike, to make sure all gear is returned in good time and condition.

Additional fees for transport of gear may be required.

Frequently Asked Questions:

This is too much information; can't you just arrange everything for me?

Your guide will be happy to meet any needs or questions you may have, however it's important you understand some details beforehand, so you can be fully prepared. For this reason, we like to organize a sit down between guiders and all hikers before departure to discuss the most important details about the hike.

I have never camped before, so I don't know if this is right for me. Is it?

This multiday adventure is approachable to novice hikers and first-time campers, as well as experienced camping gurus. Your assigned guide has escorted individuals of all experience levels and ages. If you have any questions about the hike, we encourage you to ask them to the guiders beforehand.

Is it possible to hike in reverse, meaning starting at Usisya Bay and ending at Mushroom Farm?

Yes, it is definitely possible to reverse this trek if you'd rather begin in Usisya Bay and end at Mushroom Farm. If this is your preference please let us know at least a week in advance so our guiders can meet you the night before your hike begins.

What weather should I expect?

The weather will be similar to the rest of Malawi, with a higher expectation of rains from January to April, colder weather from June to August, and hotter weather from September to December. With that being said, the lakeshore is notably hotter than other parts of Malawi, so plan to bring sunhats, sunscreen, and breathable clothes if possible, to limit sun exposure and increase ease of hiking. The rainy seasons bring a beautiful green that blankets the hills, but it can also soak paths and flood rivers on the trail. We usually recommend hikers prepare for the weather of the season, and encourage them to think of the hike as an adventure with the weather that's delivered to you.

This hike seems amazing, but it's a bit long for me. Is there any way to reduce the length?

It is possible to shorten the trail by hiring a local boat to take you as far as you'd like. Finding a local boat and negotiating a fair price is something your guide can help you with. If taking a boat isn't something you're into, planning to hike longer days can help reduce the distance. We strongly recommend taking a porter or two with you, if you're trying to reduce the number of days on the trail by walking.

The cost of the hike is too high for my budget, can you make any discounts?

We understand every traveler has a different budget and plan for their trip, and we've tried our best to accommodate for different budgets by offering different packages above. The current prices have been intentionally discussed and are fair for the labors and experience for all involved. We recommend those restricted by budget to bring their friends or encourage fellow travelers to join them to share the costs as most fees can be divided between all hikers.

How do I get in contact with Zulunxhuni River Lodge and Usisya Bay Eco-Lodge to pre-arrange my stay and meals with them?

Due to the remoteness of these lodges, they prefer if guests let them know they are coming beforehand. To book your stay and meals please contact the numbers below on WhatsApp:

Zulunxhuni River Lodge: +265 988 560 251

Usisya Bay Eco-Lodge: +265 995 636 585

I want to leave the last day of the hike (the same day we plan to arrive to Usisya), is this possible?

If you would prefer not to spend a night in Usisya Bay, you can arrange for a taxi ahead of time to meet you the day you plan to arrive. However, we do not recommend this because it may be difficult to finish the hike, and get transport to your final destination before dark (the road from Usisya Bay to Mzuzu is more dangerous at night). If that's not enough of a reason to convince you to stay, Usisya Bay Eco-Lodge is such a relaxing and beautiful place to end your hike, and we encourage you to soak it all in before you go.

I'd like to stay a few extra days in Usisya, can I continue to rent the camping equipment after the hike?

You are most welcome to continue to rent our camping equipment with the inclusion of the daily fee. Please organize with us ahead of time, so we can arrange the return of camping equipment after use. If you plan to sleep in a room at Usisya Bay Eco-Lodge, the easiest way to return your camping rental would be to organize with your guide to carry it back to Mushroom Farm. For longer rentals, in the past we have arranged for camping equipment to be given to lodges in Mzuzu (Umunthu or Macondo Camp) and/or Nkhata Bay (Mayoka Village or Butterfly Space).

How do I travel from Usisya Bay?

There is only one drivable road out of Usisya Bay, and it will take you to Mzuzu. Public transport options include the back of a truck (the cheaper option) and motorbikes, which can be arranged once you reach Usisya. We've also listed some private taxi phone numbers below.

Gift: +265 886 973 006

Frank: +265 999 579 120

Phillip: +265 993 530 701

Paul: +265 994 373 456 / paulnyirenda@gmail.com

If you prefer to head south towards Nkhata Bay, boat taxis and the Ilala Ferry are also option. Dani at Usisya Beach Eco-Lodge can help you with more details about boat transfers.

If I drive to Mushroom Farm in my personal vehicle, how do I get my vehicle to Usisya?

Below is a list of drivers that we trust. Please feel free to reach out to them to organize transport options.

Gift: +265 886 973 006

Frank: +265 999 579 120

Phillip: +265 993 530 701

Paul: +265 994 373 456 / paulnyirenda@gmail.com