

Blog Post: Shopping in Malawi (Part 1)—Bringing a Piece of Home Back to Poland! Delicious Food and Creative Local Products

Level B1-B2

SHOPPING IN MALAWI: AN IRRESISTIBLE ACTIVITY I COULDN'T GET ENOUGH OF!

Topic: What is it like to shop in Malawi? What did I manage to buy and bring back to Poland? Come along as I haggle at roadside stalls, explore colourful markets and discover the local products I couldn't resist bringing home.

"Whoever said money can't buy happiness simply didn't know where to go shopping."

~Gertrude Stein, American Novelist and Poet





SHOPPING IN MALAWI: WHAT DID I MANAGE TO BUY AND BRING BACK TO POLAND?

Going through security checks is always a daunting experience. Imagine how we felt when immigration officers at Lilongwe International Airport asked us to open one of our suitcases after it had just been screened.

The suitcase happened to be my husband's. It was the heaviest and the most loved because it was carrying our most valuable treasures: Malawian food and local products!

My heart sank when we were told to step aside so that they could carry out a thorough check. No! No! No!

Images of Charles de Gaulle Airport flooded my head. This had happened a few years before. We had just been to Malawi and had bought duty-free Sobo, our local favourite bottled drink, along with Malawi Gin. The immigration officers had confiscated everything because the bag was not sealed!

I saw the scene replaying in front of my eyes, only this time we were at the source. All those goodies were going to be taken away, and I would be left with only my teeth to gnaw!

How surprised the immigration officer was when he opened the suitcase. He took out a piece of sugarcane and showed it to my cousin.

"Really, what are you teaching our in-law?" he asked, laughing.

There was more where that came from. His eyes continued to widen when he saw the baobab fruit, the charcoal burner and all sorts of Malawian clandestine fruit that you will soon discover.

Soon, more people started to partake in the drama.

"What was the *mzungu* taking back to Europe?"

There was urgency here. Something needed to be done.

Therefore, we filled in a form that was meant to reassure their European counterparts that we were not involved in any botanical or animal trafficking. Everything in the suitcase was consumable and fit for our beloved Europe!

The form itself cost 15,000 Malawian kwacha, which is about €8. Fair enough. My cousin and her husband came to our rescue and paid the fee.

My husband wrote the list of items in Chichewa and tried to translate the words into English. The officer advised him to continue writing in Chichewa and said that he would translate everything later.

The situation was, indeed, funny, and we laughed our hearts out.

The suitcase was eventually cleared and we boarded our plane. However, at the back of my mind, I wondered if this piece of paper would be enough for European airports and their close scrutiny. Would my *bwemba* make it past Warsaw Airport?

I was yet to discover.

During the flight, I thought about how we had struggled to buy those products. What a great disappointment it would be to see our suitcase delayed, or simply to encounter a worse fate.

Confiscation!

Yes, confiscation! As if we had smuggled it!

It had happened before.

This time, my husband had been travelling alone from Malawi and his suitcase had been kept, only to be brought to him two days after his arrival, minus the dried fish and maize flour.

What would happen this time round, then?



I kept thinking about how we had acquired those goods. First, there were the impromptu stops at roadside stalls. We were often awe-struck by the products we would find.

The amount of creativity astounded us. It was often difficult to leave without purchasing anything.

When it came to food, I knew what I was looking for. I wanted to buy products that I would not find in Europe.

Most of the time, I consumed the fruit the same day. Talk about *masau* and *bwemba*. Irresistible!

Sometimes, I even tasted the fruit before buying it, just to make sure that I was buying the right thing. I threw caution to the wind, I must say.

Even European-style fruit were delicious, such as strawberries, apples and tangerines. However, I did not want to buy these.

I wanted the ones that I would not be able to find at Carrefour or in Polish markets.

During the whole flight, I dreamt about what was in that suitcase. Surely the gods would be gracious enough to let us enjoy our well-deserved goodies.

Warsaw Airport soon came into view. We descended from the plane and rushed to the baggage claim area. On the way, we had stopped to make some last-minute duty-free purchases.

When we arrived, there were only two bags left to claim.

Two bags, the screen said.

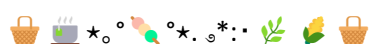
We had checked in three bags...

We rushed over and were so delighted to find our three lonely bags on the baggage carousel. They had been painstakingly waiting for us. How happy we were to pick them up and rush back home so that we could check the contents.

A last check at home proved very satisfactory. All our goodies were there, and we could enjoy them whenever we wanted.

Or could we?

First of all, I had a video to make...





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