

MYANMAR

MYANMAR THE COUNTRY



FAST FACTS



Myanmar is recognized by many as the Golden Land for good reason. Burma, as it is still more commonly known in the west, is a country of magnificent, ancient Buddhist temples, broad flowing rivers, lush mountain forests, interesting cities and vastly contrasting countryside.

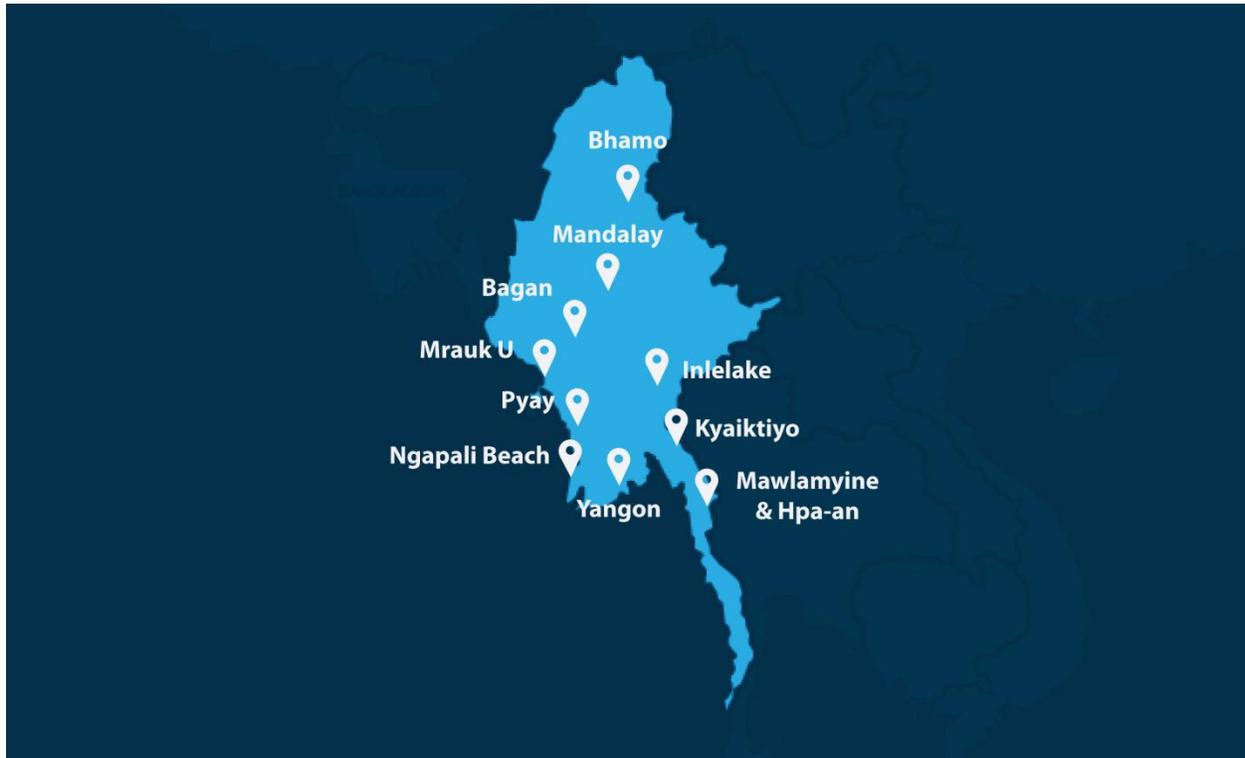
It is a fascinating country and a real treat for travellers. It is not only a voyage into a different geographic region, but also into another time, another world. Everywhere a stranger travels, he or she will be welcomed with kindness, helpfulness and gentleness..

Highlights in Burma include Yangon, formerly known as Rangoon, Pyay, and Mandalay, with its beautiful temples Bagan and Paga. Myanmar is often called the land of festivals (see events) and the land of Pagodas. Each destination within the country offers a compelling and diverse look at the history and development of the country from its hill tribes that live as people did hundreds of years ago to the vibrant capital of Yangon. All Sightseeing opportunities abound and there is a lot to see and do in this colourful country where time seems to have stood still.

Myanmar's terrain includes white-sand beaches in the west and a fertile delta in the south, dry plains in the centre and long rivers. In the north there are ice-capped mountains seldom ascended, virgin forests hiding precious orchids, and white-water rivers where intrepid adventurers can test out their rafting skills. The very essence of nature is found in several wildlife parks and thick jungles where rare birds and butterflies find refuge. These parks, crisscrossed with animal trails to entice the determined trekker, provide sanctuary for endangered species such as leopards, tigers, crab-eating mongooses, the Asiatic black bear, and the beautiful red panda with its bandit mask, thick red fur and striped fluffy tail.

MYANMAR HIGHLIGHTS

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MANDALAY

the economic and religious hub of upper Myanmar, centred around the Royal Palace, Mandalay is the second largest city in the country after Yangon. Over half of Myanmar's monks reside in Mandalay and the surrounding areas.

Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city and the last capital before British rule, is an intriguing mix of ancient and modern, with a distinctly Chinese flavour. The old-style elegance of the past remains in its shrines and monasteries, and the workshops of traditional crafts are the best in the country. The main city spreads out in a southerly direction from the Fort and Palace, the latter of which has just been fully restored and is open to visitors. Other unique attractions include 'the world's biggest book'— 729 marble slabs on which are inscribed the Tripitaka, a Buddhist doctrine, around the central stupa at Kuthodaw Pagoda.

NORTH MYANMAR (BHAMO / MYITKYINA / PUTAO)

Kachin State is Myanmar's northernmost state. After Sagaing division and the combined Shan states Kachin State is the next biggest province in the country. In terms of wild beauty, colourful ethnicities and rare fauna & flora, this region stands out from all others. From the snow-capped

mountains of Putao, to the decimated tiger colony of the Hukawng Valley, to the rare orchid & butterfly varieties hidden high up in the deep forest and jungle, to the jade mines of Hpakant, to the confluence of the Maykha & Malikha rivers (and as such the birthplace of the Ayerwaddy river) near Myitkyina, to the scenic Indawgyi Lake with its many bird species, to the colonial-era Bhamo of the days of George Orwell, Kachin State does not stop amazing us. It should be considered a privilege to visit this area of exceptional value!

BAGAN

located on the banks of the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River, Bagan is home to the largest and densest concentration of Buddhist temples, pagodas, stupas and ruins in the world with many dating from the 11th and 12th centuries.

Bagan, with its collection of over 2000 awe-inspiring pagodas, is surely the most splendid sight in the whole of Southeast Asia and a must for any visitor to Myanmar. Nowhere else in the region do manmade relics mix so evocatively with nature as on the plains of Bagan. The sheer variety of temples, many of which were built in the 12th century, will overwhelm most visitors. The most imposing pagoda is perhaps the Dhammayangyi dating back to 1167 A.D., with bricks so finely laid that a needle could not be inserted between them. Visitors can enjoy a horse-and-cart ride around the site. On nearby Mount Popa, one can enjoy trekking, horseback riding trips and spectacular views.

SITTWE & MRAUK U

Mrauk-U is Myanmar's second-most-famous archaeological site, a centuries-old city of hundreds of temples around which village life thrives. Tourists are a rarity here and are treated by the locals with a mixture of sceptical reserve and cheerful curiosity.

After the ancient Site of Bagan Mrauk-U is the most important archaeological site in Myanmar. Although smaller than the vast plain of temples & pagodas of Bagan, there is something unique and almost mystifying about the Mrauk-U site. In addition, the plentiful waterways in Rakhine State and the very rural atmosphere in general make it a very nature-based experience. The presence of Chin Face-Tattooed Women on the banks of the Lemro River, up from Mrauk-U, makes a trip here all the more special.

Sittwe, an important port on the west coast facing the Bay of Bengal, is the gateway to any destination in upper Rakhine State. Sittwe is further very important for its fisheries.

INLE LAKE & SURROUNDINGS

located in the heart of the Shan Plateau, 900 metres above sea level, Inle Lake is 22km long and 10km across, and is inhabited by many different ethnic nationals of the area. The Intha people are the Lake dwellers who are unique for their traditional leg rowing style that attracts many visitors.

Inle Lake ranks as one of the must-see destinations in Myanmar and for good reason; each side is banked by tall hills creating a stunningly beautiful expanse of water surrounded by a unique community of 17 villages. The Intha people that live here are culturally different from the rest of the Shan State and are perhaps most famous for their extraordinary skill in leg-rowing on skiff boats that glide across the water. Visitors to the area can also experience life on the lake by staying in the numerous hotels and guesthouses perched on stilts out on the water. Bargain-hunters can choose from the array of silk weaves and silver from lakeside workshops available at markets that move from village to village. One of the best times to visit is during September and October when Inle Lake comes alive in a flotilla of starry lights for the sacred three-week festival Phaung daw oo.

PYAY

situated half way between Yangon and Bagan, on the eastern bank of the picturesque Ayeyarwady River, Pyay is an important commercial centre for trade between the Ayeyarwady Delta, central and upper Myanmar and the Rakhine State.

NGAPALI BEACH

idyllic palm-lined pristine white sands on the Bay of Bengal's blue water, Ngapali is an unspoilt beach haven. Don't expect jet skis and windsurfing here, this is a truly laidback and unspoilt paradise in Myanmar, where all there is to do is lay back and relax.

Ngapali Beach is heaven for peace and tranquility "far from the madding crowds." Situated about 7km from Thandwe, it is one of the ancient Rakhine towns and is famous for its natural beauty up to this day. The beach stretches about 3km (2 miles) with soft white sand fringed by coconut palms. It serves as the best ground for sunbathing and recreation, such as beach strolling, cycling and so on. Unlike today's beaches of Asia, it is free of noisy beachside bars, crowds and hawkers trying to persuade you to buy their things. There is only the natural scenic beauty of the blue sea, white sand and the lovely sun. The sea is cobalt blue, clean, and free of dangerous marine animals.

YANGON (RANGOON)

This city is an amalgamation of British, Burmese, Chinese and Indian influences, and is known for its colonial architecture, friendly people, numerous street vendors and their pungent smells!

Yangon, the former capital of Myanmar, is as busy as it gets in the country – the downtown area is always alive with people in the distinctly, laid back Myanmar way. The highlight of any trip to Yangon is undoubtedly the magnificent Shwedagon Pagoda, surely one of the most incredible sights in the world and certainly one of the best preserved and maintained. A priority for many

will be the chance to shop for exotic fabrics, rubies from the famous Mogok mines and handicrafts competitively priced even when compared to the rest of Southeast Asia.

THE GOLDEN ROCK

Kyaikhtiyo, or The Golden Rock as many people rather know it, is truly something out of the ordinary. Located in Mon State it is a one-night excursion from Yangon away. More than the 5.5 m gilded chedi on top of a gilded boulder, itself balanced on top of a cliff, for the local followers of Buddhist faith it is the place of pilgrimage per excellence in Myanmar. It is a chance to meet and fraternize with friendly locals who have come from near and far to pay homage to the lord Buddha. Especially around sunrise and sunset time the sweeping views from the top of Mount Kyaikhtiyo can be very beautiful.

MAWLAMYINE & HPA-AN

Also located in Mon State, but more toward the centre, Mawlamyine is the country's 3rd biggest city. In the context of the planned (2015) East West economic Corridor land connection linking Vietnam, Cambodia & Thailand with Myanmar, Mawlamyine is the convenient terminus of this very-important-to-be highway.

The city still has many reminders of the British colonial era, it has a number of nice and interesting pagodas and monasteries, and is the starting place of many an excursion in every direction.

Hpa-An, a good one-hour drive away from Mawlamyine, is located in the neighbouring Kayin State. It is the area of green paddies, scenic panoramas, and many caves.

HISTORY & GOVERNMENT

The ethnic origins of modern Myanmar, known historically as Burma, are a mixture of Indo-Aryans, who began pushing into the area around 700 BC and the Mongolian invaders under Kublai Khan, who penetrated the region in the 13th century.

HISTORY

Anawrahta (1044–1077) was the first great unifier of Myanmar.

In 1612, the British East India Company sent agents to Burma, but the Burmese doggedly resisted efforts of British, Dutch, and Portuguese traders to establish posts along the Bay of Bengal. Through the Anglo-Burmese War in 1824–1826 and two subsequent wars, the British

East India Company expanded to the whole of Burma. By 1886, Burma was annexed to India; it then became a separate colony in 1937.

During World War II, Burma was a key battleground; the 800-mile Burma Road was the Allies' vital supply line to China. The Japanese invaded the country in Dec. 1941, and by May 1942, had occupied most of it, cutting off the Burma Road. After one of the most difficult campaigns of the war, Allied forces liberated most of Burma prior to the Japanese surrender in August 1945.

Burma became independent on Jan. 4, 1948. In 1962, left-wing general Ne Win staged a coup, banned political opposition, suspended the constitution, and introduced the "Burmese way of socialism." After 25 years of economic hardship and repression, the Burmese people held massive demonstrations in 1987 and 1988. These were brutally quashed by the State Law and Order Council (SLORC). In 1989, the military government officially changed the name of the country to Myanmar.

In May 1990 elections, the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) won by a landslide, but the military, or SLORC, refused to recognize the election results. The leader of the opposition, Aung San Suu Kyi, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. Although the ruling junta has maintained a tight grip on Myanmar since 1988, it has not been able to subdue an insurgency in the country's south that has gone on for decades.

On November 13, 2005, the seat of government was removed from the capital Rangoon to a mountain compound called Pyinmana. More than 1,000 delegates gathered in December 2005 to begin drafting a constitution, which the junta said was a step toward democracy. The convention adjourned in late January 2006 with little progress. In 2007 a series of anti-government protests were held, resulting in numerous civilians being arrested, around 70 being killed and around 40 monks being severely beaten and killed in the process. On 7 February 2008, SPDC announced that a referendum for the Constitution would be held, and Elections by 2010.

The 2011–2012 Burmese democratic reforms are an ongoing series of political, economic and administrative reforms in Burma undertaken by the military-backed government. These reforms include the release of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and subsequent dialogues with her, establishment of the National Human Rights Commission, general amnesties of more than 200 political prisoners, institution of new labor laws that allow labor unions and strikes, relaxation of press censorship, and regulations of currency practices. As a consequence of the reforms, ASEAN has approved Burma's bid for the chairmanship in 2014. United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Burma on 1 December 2011, to encourage further progress; it was the first visit by a Secretary of State in more than fifty years. United States President Barack Obama visited one year later, becoming the first US president to visit the country.

Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy, participated in by-elections held on 1 April 2012 after the government abolished laws that led to the NLD's boycott of the 2010 general election. She led the NLD in winning the by-elections in a landslide, winning 41 out of 44 of the contested seats, with Suu Kyi herself winning a seat representing Kawhmu Constituency in the lower house of the Burmese Parliament. However, uncertainties exist as some other political

prisoners have not been released and clashes between Burmese troops and local insurgent groups continue.

TIMELINE

- 
- 700 BC
Early settlers in Myanmar
 - 13th century
Penetration of the Mongolian Invaders
 - 1612
The British East India Company sent agents to Burma
 - 1824 – 1826
Anglo-Burmese War
 - 1886
Burma was annexed to India
 - 1937
Burma became a separate colony
 - 1941
Japanese invaded Burma
 - 1948
Burma became independent
 - 1989
Burma changed name to Myanmar

GOVERNMENT

Myanmar has been a Socialist Republic since 1974. Power was assumed by the army in 1988. Since early 2011 Myanmar has become the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

GEOGRAPHY



Myanmar is a diamond-shaped country extending 925km (575 miles) from east to west and 2,100km (1,300 miles) from north to south. It is bounded by China, Laos and Thailand to the east, by Bangladesh and India to the north and by the Indian Ocean in the west and south.

The Irrawaddy River runs through the centre of the country and fans out to form a delta on the south coast; Yangon stands beside one of its many mouths. North of the delta lies the Irrawaddy basin and central Myanmar, which is protected by a horseshoe of mountains rising to over 3,000m (10,000ft), creating profound climatic effects.

To the west are the Arakan, Chin and Naga mountains and the Patkai Hills; the Kachin Hill are to the north to the east lie the Shan Plateau, which extends to the Tenasserim coastal ranges. Intensive irrigated farming is practiced throughout central Myanmar, and fruit, vegetables and citrus crops thrive on the Shan Plateau, but much of the land and mountains are covered by subtropical forest.

CULTURE

Myanmar has a long history dating back several thousands of years. The traditions and culture of Myanmar as well as the philosophy of life of its people, the majority of whom are Buddhists, have been shaped profoundly by Buddhism and the worshiping of ancient Nat...



Hence, Myanmar's people, regardless of their race or ethnic origin are peace-loving, friendly, generous and hospitable. They also have an innate sense of duty to family, community and country.

Myanmar culture is also inspired by the Chinese and Indian traditions, and it can claim to have retained its own beliefs and culture due to the post-war and post-independence national isolation policy. The culture is complex and rich. Each of the 135 national races that comprise the Myanmar nation has its own language, dialect and characteristics. They live in harmony with each other and with nature, most of them living in remote areas. The major ethnic groups are the Kachin, the Kayah, the Kavin, the Chin, the Mon, the Bamar, the Rakline, and the Shan.

An interesting tradition, taking place particularly in rural areas, is to see the people collectively helping with each other's work and participating in communal activities. These traditional practices not only contribute to community development but also bring members of the community closer and thus help to foster solidarity in the building of a peaceful and developed nation.

HINTS

1. Myanmar's people, regardless of their race or ethnic origin are peace-loving, friendly, generous and hospitable.
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The benevolent prince, called Lawkanat is often portrayed in Myanmar and regarded as the patron of performing arts. He stands for peace and harmony, happiness and joy and all that is right and good. His role as a peacemaker is based on a fascinating legend handed down through

the generations. It is also the favorite subject of Myanmar's sculpture and painting, and its graceful figure is frequently seen adorning the Myanmar traditional orchestra.

DOS & DON'TS

1. Respect the local people and their unique traditions.
2. Don't take any photos that may make people feel embarrassed.
3. Do smile; it can go a long way.
4. Don't point with your foot.
5. Wear decent clothes that cover your shoulders and reach to your knees when visiting religious sites.
6. Don't touch anyone on the head.
7. Don't kiss in public.
8. Women travellers are generally very safe in Myanmar
9. Learn the local customs before visiting ethnic minority villages.
10. Be understanding when experiencing electricity outages.
11. Don't touch the robe of a monk.
12. Spread your wealth, use your money wisely.
13. Giving money or sweets to children is not advisable and encourages begging.
14. The Burmese people are delighted when tourists participate in their festivals.

RELIGION

Buddhism plays a central role in the people's daily life in Myanmar. A large majority of the population is of Buddhist faith. They live by its principles of gentleness, contentment and helpfulness. There are two major churches in Buddhism: Mahayana and Theravada.

The latter form dominates in Myanmar and meditation is central to its followers, it led through a succession of stages to the final goal of spiritual freedom, also called nirvana. Meditation combines, in its highest stages, the discipline of progressively increased introversion with the insight brought about by wisdom. Buddhist faith embraces the concept of life after death and recognizes 31 forms of beings, six floors of heaven, and seven floors of hell.

The other form of spirituality often seen in Myanmar is the ancient traditional beliefs about the 37 Nats (spirits), who are viewed as supernaturally powerful beings, situated between the gods and the spiritual beings. The number of the Nats was set in the 12th century in order to contain a cult that Buddhism had failed to eliminate. And, Myanmar remains superstitious in many ways. Its people carry out the traditions and cultural heritage of the older generations. They believe that the Nats can



bring luck and prosperity to the worshipers and can also bring danger to those who do not respect them.

The official religious faith in Myanmar is Buddhist 89%, Christian 4% (Baptist 3%, Roman Catholic 1%), Islam 4%, Animist 1% and other 2%.

CLIMATE

Myanmar has a tropical climate with the dry season from mid-February to mid-May. The monsoon or rainy season is from mid-May to mid-October with the cool season from mid-October to mid-February. The hot season is generally from March to April.

The coast and delta areas have an annual rainfall of about 250 cm (100 inches) and an average annual temperature of about 32° C (90F). In these areas, depending on the season, temperatures can fluctuate between 16° to 40°C (61 to 104F).

In the central belt, known as the dry zone, where Mandalay the chief city is, the rainfall averages about 70 cm (28 inches) per year, with a mean annual temperature of around 27°C (81F). Maximums are 46°C (115F) in hot season and 15°C (59F) during the cool season.

Average daily temperatures in Yangon range from 18° to 32°C (64 to 90F) during the cool season and from 24° to 36°C (75 to 97F) during the hot season.

The climate in upper Myanmar, particularly at altitudes ranging from about 300 to 1,220 m (984 to 4000 feet), is the most temperate throughout the year and rainfall during the monsoon season totals more than 500 cm (197 inches).



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Useful, practical information regarding money, credit cards, ATMs, health & safety, food & drink, transportation, communication, and much more...

MONEY

Currency

Kyat (MMK) = 100 pyas. Notes are in denominations of MMK1000, 500, 200, 100 and 90 pyas. Coins are in denominations of MMK1, and 50, 25, 10, 5 and 1 pyas.

Note, it is important to bring with you clean, new, unmarked US Dollar bills. Damaged or marked ones will most likely not be accepted

Currency Exchange

FECs, which are printed in China, are Myanmar's second legal currency and are issued by the Bank of Myanmar specifically for visiting tourists. They come in denominations equivalent to US\$20, 10, 5 and 1. Payment for FECs is only accepted in US Dollars. One US Dollar equals one FEC. FECs can be exchanged into Kyats at officially authorised banks, bureau de change, hotels and Myanmar Travel and Tour offices, and can be spent anywhere in the country. Cash payments can also be made in US Dollars, but only at establishments (eg hotels, railway stations, airlines) that have an official licence allowing them to accept dollars. Wherever possible, it is advisable to change US Dollars into Kyats rather than FECs, as FECs usually have a poorer exchange rate than Kyats. However, US Dollar traveller's cheques can only be exchanged into FECs and not directly into Kyats unlike US Dollar cash. It is also recommended to carry small change as large notes may be difficult to change. Euros are now also accepted in all banks and currency exchange bureaus.

Credit / Debit Cards and ATM

It is unlikely that credit or debit cards will be accepted, except in a few major international hotel chains; it is best to check with your card company prior to travel. Though there are an increasing number of ATMs in tourist areas, they are few and far between, therefore we recommend bringing mostly cash with you for your trip. Locate ATMs accepting VISA cards (Place link – <http://visa.via.infonow.net/locator/global/jsp/searchpage.jsp>). Locate ATMs accepting MasterCard here (Place link – <http://www.mastercard.com/us/personal/en/cardholderservices/atmlocations/index.html>).



Currency Restrictions

The import and export of local currency is prohibited. There are no import limits on foreign currencies, but any amount must be declared on arrival and the declaration certificate kept safe – on departure, foreign currencies are checked with the amounts declared on entry. There are regular customs checks at Yangon airport, aimed at curbing black-market activities; this makes it essential to keep all receipts in order to account for money spent while in the country.

Approximate exchange rates (Feb 2014)

- 1USD = 973 MMK
- 1 EUR = 1,348 MMK
- 1GBP = 1,616 MMK

For up-to-date exchange rates, please visit e.g. www.oanda.com

Health & Safety

Health care

Health insurance is strongly recommended. There are hospitals and clinics in cities and larger towns, and regional health centers in outlying areas. It is advisable to carry a remedy against minor stomach upsets.

Vaccinations

A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from all travellers arriving from infected areas. Cholera vaccination certificate is no longer a condition of entry to Myanmar. However, cholera is a serious risk in this country. Immunisation against typhoid and poliomyelitis is strongly advised. Malaria risk, predominantly in the malignant falciparum form, exists below 1000m (3281ft). The recommended prophylaxis is mefloquine and doxycycline, depending on the specific area visited.

Food and drink

All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilized. Milk is not pasteurized and should be boiled. Avoid dairy products that are likely to have been made from un-boiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Other Risks

Diarrhoea, amoebic and bacillary dysentery, and typhoid fever are all common. Japanese encephalitis may be caught via mosquito bites, particularly in rural areas between June and October. A vaccine is available, and travellers are advised to consult their doctor prior to departure. Filariasis, Dengue Fever, Trachoma and Hepatitis A, B and E are also present.

SAFETY

The people in Myanmar are extremely friendly and polite, so for the tourist, it is a very safe country. Robberies and thefts are extremely uncommon. But like always, use your common sense, take care of your valuables in crowded places, and don't expose your wealth when changing money. Take care when you want to talk about politics, not for yourself, but because the people you talk to can get in trouble. They will give you a sign when it's safe for them to talk about it.



Natural Hazards

Almost the entire country is affected by natural hazards. Drought is the most persistent hazard and cyclones impact three small distinct regions. Earthquakes and floods significantly affect similar areas and landslides also present a significant risk to the regions on the western border.

Transportation

Getting around by air

This is still the most efficient way to move within Myanmar. There is a rather limited schedule of flights, and a rather less than perfect safety record. Air Mandalay and Air Yangon operate internal flights. Internal security can restrict ease of movement. There are daily flights to most towns, charter flights are also available. There are over 60 airstrips in the country.

Travelling in Myanmar		
<p>BY AIR</p>  <p>This is still the most efficient way to move within Myanmar</p>	<p>BY RAIL</p>  <p>The principal line is Yangon to Mandalay which takes an estimated 12 to 14 hours.</p>	<p>BY ROAD</p>  <p>Public bus services tend to be unreliable and uncomfortable</p>

Getting around by train

Myanmar Railways does provide services on several routes. The principal line is Yangon to Mandalay which takes an estimated 12 to 14 hours. Overnight trains have sleeping carriages. There is also good service from Mandalay to Lashio to Myitkyina. The state-run railway has 4,300 km (2,700 miles) of track and serves most of Myanmar. First class is available but, with the exception of the Yangon to Mandalay line, services are regularly afflicted with delays caused by climatic, technical and bureaucratic difficulties. Tickets must be purchased as part of an organized tour group. Visitors should be aware that much railway equipment is decrepit and some accidents are unreported.

Getting around by road

The traffic drives on the right and there has been some modernization of Myanmar's once-antiquated vehicles. Visitors must remember that, under Burmese law, the driver of a car involved in an accident with a pedestrian is always at fault. Buses are generally operated by the state-owned Road Transport Enterprise. Public bus services tend to be unreliable and uncomfortable, visitors may pay using the Kyat currency on certain lines only. Owing to the ongoing privatization program of the transport industry, a fleet of privately operated buses is also available. The main lines are from Yangon to Meiktila, Pyay, Mandalay and Taunggyi. Private buses are air conditioned and accept payment in Kyat, US Dollars or FECs. Bicycles are available for rent. An International Driving Permit is required. This must be presented to the police, who will endorse it or issue a visitor's license.

Getting around in the city

Yangon has a circular rail service and there are also antiquated and overcrowded bus services in all cities. Yangon has blue government taxis with set fares. Un-metered three and four wheel taxis are available in cities, as are rickshaws; it is wise to pre-arrange fares. Taxi drivers do not expect a tip.



Communication

Telephone

IDD is available in the main cities. The country code is 95. For emergencies, dial 199 (police), 191 (fire) and 192 (ambulance). There is a limited internal public service. Only larger cities can be dialed direct from within Myanmar. Smaller towns still use manual switchboards and callers need to ask the operator to connect them to a specific town operator. The Central Telephone and Telegraph (CTT) office on the corner of Pansodan and Mahabandoola Street are the only public place in the country where international telephone calls can be conveniently arranged. The office is open Mon-Fri 0800 to 1600 and weekends and holidays 0900 to 1400.

Mobile Phone

Fees are high and the coverage is limited. All visitors who want to use communication devices such as mobile phones and receivers must first apply for permission from the Government of the Union of Myanmar. Without prior permission granted, mobile phones will be temporarily held by customs on arrival.

Mail

The General Post Office (GPO) is beside the Morning Market in Vientiane. Normal postal service is inexpensive and generally reliable. A courier service is recommended for urgent or valuable mail. Airmail to Europe takes at least a week and longer to the USA.

Internet

There are a few Internet cafes but access to many free international e-mail services is blocked. All Internet use is monitored by the government and is usually expensive.

If an internet connection at your hotels is vital please advise your Focus Asia travel consultant.

Regular Mail

Service to Europe takes up to one week. To ensure successful delivery, it is advised to go to the post office personally to obtain a certificate of posting, for which a small fee is charged

FOOD & DRINK

Regional food can be tried at street and market stalls, but you must be careful with hygiene. Burmese are lovers of snacks and you'll find plenty of street stalls selling these towards the evening.

The traditional breakfast is varied, composed of fried rice and peas, nan pya (Indian bread) and cream or goat-leg soup, monhingar, nangyi, coconut noodles, assorted fried vegetables, steamed glutinous rice and peas. Traditional snacks include bread and butter. It is usually washed down with Chinese or strong green Burmese tea or coffee.

A typical lunch or dinner consists of a main dish, a side dish, a sweet or sour soup and a form of fish paste or shrimp paste. The main dish typically features pork, chicken, mutton, beef, fish, shrimp, duck, eggs, or catfish, that's cooked, stewed, fried, steamed, roasted, broiled, boiled or simmered in various ways. Ngapi, which means pressed fish, is a speciality present at most meals. Another common dish is balachaung, a fried shrimp paste with crushed garlic, onions and chillies. Side dishes are usually a salad made with vegetables combined with meat, fish or shrimp. Soups are either sweet or sour and mostly vegetables with meat or fish. A popular finish to a meal is the betel chew. The dried areca nut is wrapped in the betel leaf with a lime paste. Sometimes tobacco, peppermint or other spices are added.

Traditional ethnic specialities include the Khauk-swe that is composed of wheat noodles in a broth made with chili-marinated chicken; it is typical of Shan cuisine. Other Shan dishes are htamin chin, a rice salad made with turmeric, and khauk sen, rice noodles with fish. The Mon food usually contains chillies and curry. The Rakhines cuisines enjoy spicy curries and seafood is popular. Talapo is a Karen dish made of rice and bamboo shoots, lemon grass and fish paste that is certainly worth a try.



Drinks

HINTS

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2. A typical lunch or dinner consists of a main dish, a side dish, a sweet or sour soup and a form of fish paste or shrimp paste.
3. Talapo is a Karen dish made of rice and bamboo shoots, lemon grass and fish paste that is certainly worth a try.
4. Tipping is not customary, but is becoming more common in tourist areas, especially in the big cities

Tea is one of the most refreshing drinks in the tropics or fresh lemon/lime juice mixed with water. Chinese tea is generally preferable to the over-strong, over-sweet and over-milky Burmese tea. Sugar-cane juice is a popular street-side drink and stronger refreshments include orange brandy, lychee wine, white liquor or the local jungle liquor, fruit juice, water-buffalo milk and Mandalay beer.

Tipping is not customary, but is becoming more common in tourist areas, especially in the big cities.

EVENTS

Myanmar is often called the land of festivals and its citizens love to throw events and festivals all year round. It is among the greatest experiences one can enjoy when discovering this great nation. It happens all year around and all over the country. Below is an outline of the main festivities. Please confirm dates with us before booking any trip, as these dates change every year due to the Buddhist lunar calendar followed in Myanmar.

JANUARY

The Kachin Manaw Festival is a delightful festival and one of the most popular in Myanmar. It is held in Myitkyina and Putao in Kachine state. It celebrates the New Year, victory in battles, reunion of the tribes and more. Everybody joins the spiritual dance lined up behind one another. The traditional Manaw poles are decorated in colourful Kachin motifs and are centred in the middle of the festival ground. All who came to the festival wear their best traditional costume and the main feature of the festival is dancing around the erected Manaw poles.

The Ananda Pagoda Festival symbolizes the limitless wisdom of Buddha. It is a month-long sanctified festival for the temple Ananda, which is the most beautiful one out of 2,000 holy monuments in Bagan. The busiest day of the festival is on the full-moon day of the lunar month. Villagers and pilgrims around Bagan roll in the sacred site of Ananda for the consecration. The festival is also meant for social gathering, reunification, propagation and perpetuation of the religion that is Buddhism. During the festival, walk around the sea of vendors and shops that sell traditional Myanmar food and enjoy the local atmosphere.

FEBRUARY

The Mahamuni Pagoda Festival takes place in Mandalay and falls on the full moon day of Thabodwe. It usually lasts for two days. Delicate glutinous rice contests are being held on the pagoda's platform. A variety of incense sticks are burnt for the Myanmar Buddha image on the full moon day and thousands of people from all over the country make the pilgrimage to the Mahamuni Pagoda. The temple is always the centre of activities and during this festival it explodes with energy.

The Salone festival is held at Majungalet Village on Bocho Island near Lampi Island in Myeik, Thanintharyi division. It is celebrated every year to promote Salon and Myeik Archipelago as one of the main tourism attractions for international markets. You will witness traditional and spiritual dances, diving competitions and a fascinating way of life. There are also rowing competitions, folk singing and a traditional Salone feast. The Salone people, or sea gypsies, live nomadic sea lives for seven months of the year, living off their ingenuity and the resources of the ocean.

MARCH

The ShweDagon Pagoda Festival takes place in Yangon and is celebrated on the full moon day of Tauaung every year. It happens on the hill of Seinguttra in the richest and most stunning

pagoda you can ever see. The Stupa of shimmering gold measures 326 feet and is the second-tallest religious structure in the country. With its glittering crown embedded with precious gems and weight of gold beyond enumeration, it remains one of the modern wonders of the world.

The Kakku Pagoda Festival takes place on the full moon day of Tabaung, which is the last month of the Myanmar lunar calendar. It begins usually two or three days in advance, for this is not just a religious festival but also a social occasion. It is the time for all to have fun, exchange news and gossip, and to trade. For the youngsters, it is the set time to meet their friends from other villages or for the boys to fall in love with the girls. People of the region arrive by the thousands dressed in their traditional costumes. Some come in bullock carts while others arrive by more modern conveyances on the village tractor. The most interesting time to visit during this event is to get there before dawn of the full moon day of Tabaung where the Pa O people in all their finery come with gaily decorated trays bearing morning food offerings.

APRIL

The Mann Shwe Sattaw Pagoda Festival is one of the most significant pagoda festivals in upper Myanmar. It usually lasts from mid-February to mid-April. It is situated 36 miles away from Magwe and people from the entire nation come to experience the pilgrimage to a sacred and holy place. The footprints of Lord Buddha are to be seen as well as amazing panoramic views. Another exhilarating experience is the final bathing taken in cool, clean and sparkling waters of Mann Creek after an exhausting day. This place is simply beautiful, peaceful and pleasant. A must see and not to be missed on your journey.

The Mekong Water Festival also takes place in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos. It is believed to wash away sins and to welcome the New Year. The festival is the most popular and colourful celebration of the year for 20 million people who will abandon any thoughts of work and bring their nation to a standstill. People around the country gather together and visit pagodas, make offers and pay homage to the monks, play traditional games and celebrate with their joyous spirit. After playing around and having fun throughout the country, the city-dwellers welcome the New Year on the 17th by cleaning the floors of the pagodas and monasteries, washing elderly people's hair, and help them cut their nails. Some offer free food and drinks for everyone who visits the pagodas, some make donations. If you can be there, you will never forget the true joy.

MAY

The Bo Tree Watering Festival takes place all over the country during the month of May. It celebrates spring season when water pours into ponds, lakes and creeks. The people of Myanmar march in a grand procession to the pagodas, to the Bodhi tree and to the holy Banyan tree where Buddha attained enlightenment to pour scented water. On the full moon day of Kason, Buddhist devotees celebrate not only the water pouring ceremony at the Bodhi tree but also perform meritorious deeds by keeping Sabbath, meditation, offering flowers, light, water and incense to the images of lord Buddha.

AUGUST

The Taung Byone Festival is only about an hour drive from Bagan and this festival is usually held for three days. Devotees from all over Myanmar come to this special festival and offer their donations and enjoy themselves with the blessings of the spirits, every year. They pray for prosperity, fame, and luck for the coming year. It happens on Mount Popa, a vast volcanic mountain that has many legendary stories about the Nats spirits. The word “Nat” is believed to be derived from the Hindu Natha which means lord, saviour or protector.

OCTOBER

The Phaung Daw Oo Pagoda Festival is usually held during October. The festival takes about 18 days. It is the biggest occasion held in the Inle Lake, Shan State, one of the most dazzling and magical places in Asia. The festival is held with great magnificence and pageantry. The holy Buddha’s images are placed on a decorated royal barge and towed by leg-rowers around the lake. Large crowds of people gather on the lake shores to celebrate the occasion, a splendid sight. Leg-rowers compete in Shan traditional boat races.

The Dancing Elephant Festival is also famous in Myanmar. It is held in Kyaukse, near Mandalay. It is a marvellous performance of two men that takes place inside a huge elephant figure made from bamboo and paper. The men dance around the town to the accompaniment of dobat and drums. The elephant dancers circle three times at the foot of the hill to pay homage to the Shwe Tha Lyaung Pagoda. The dance requires precise rhythm and timing in order for the elephant dancers to maintain unity inside the elephant figure. People from far and near come to visit Kyaukse and watch the elephant dance.

The Kyaikhtiyo Pagoda Festival is a special lights celebration that takes place on the Full Moon Day of Thadingyut where locals offer 9000 lighted candles and 9000 flowers to the Buddha. The next morning, rice, sweets and other snacks are offered. The pagodas’ platform and passage are suddenly filled with visitors and most hotels in the area are fully booked well in advance. Note that appropriate clothing is recommended since the weather is cold up on the mountain.

NOVEMBER

The Tazaungmon Festival is an auspicious time for the offering of yellow robes to the monks. The Buddha’s mother, reincarnated as a god in Tavatimsa, perceived from her heavenly abode that her son would soon be discarding the royal robes and wearing a monk’s garments. She wanted to provide the yellow robes of the monk and she had only a night’s time. But she had it woven in a single night and offered it to the Prince Siddhartha by a celestial messenger. In commemoration of this event, weaving competitions of yellow robes are held all over the country.

The Lu Ping Festival takes place in Taunggyi, the capital of the Southern Shan State. It is commonly known as the hot balloon festival celebrated by Pa O, one of the many ethnic groups in the region. On the occasion people enjoy fun and merriment by holding firework-launching competitions. The firework is in the form of rockets. There are also hot balloons competitions on

the day and night occasions. Day balloons are usually in the form of Pagodas, and animals such as elephants, dragons or ducks. The night balloons are usually in the shape of a rugby ball, huge elongated paper balls with small lighted multicoloured paper lanterns.



PUBLIC HOLIDAYS IN INDONESIA

1. **January 1**
Kayin New Year Day
2. **January 4**
Independence Day
3. **February 12**
Union Day
4. **March 2**
Peasant's Day
5. **March 15**
Tabaung Full Moon Day
6. **March 27**
Armed Force Day
7. **April 12**
Myanmar New Year
8. **April 13, 14, 15, 16**
Thingyan Festival
9. **May 1**
World Workers' Day
10. **May 13**
Fullmoon Day of Kaso

11. **July 11**
Fullmoon Day of Waso
12. **July 19**
Martyrs' Day
13. **October 8**
Fullmoon Day of Thidinkyut
14. **November 6**
Fullmoon Day of Tazaungmoe
15. **November 16**
National's Day
16. **December 21**
Kayin New Year Day
17. **December 25**
Christmas Day

SHOPPING

In the larger towns, bargains can be found at public markets, known as zeï or zay or at main central markets in most areas known as zeïgyo or zay-cho.

There are lots of things to buy in Myanmar including antiques, but be aware that there are strict regulations regarding their export. The same restrictions apply to archaeological artefacts. There are some wonderful items made from bamboo available. Coconut masks make for interesting decorations and come in all shapes and sizes and are popular gifts to take home. The most sought-after embroidery is the Kalaga, a traditionally crafted tapestry depicting Buddhist scenes.



Folk Dolls reflect the numerous national races in Myanmar; they come in many different varieties and are a popular souvenir. Teakwood furniture is made by local craftsmen and can be made to order. Burma's red rubies are among the worlds' finest. These high quality stones are now rare but are sometimes available from reputable shops in Yangon. Jade and sapphires are more widely available. Don't be tempted by friendly street vendors offering stones, they are likely to be fake.

Gold is sold in Yangon's reputable jewellers. A wide variety of silver (of varying quality) is available in many tourist shops, from beads to intricately designed boxes and bowls. Tribal jewellery is more valuable and rare. Though design and workmanship is not generally up to international standards, there are some unusual and attractive pieces. Gold needs to be checked to make sure that it is not merely gold plated silver.

Gold embroidery is expensive, but some very fine pieces can be found throughout the country, though the larger cities have more variety. The manufacture of gold leaf is concentrated in

Mandalay as a cottage industry. It is sold in little packets and is used as an expression of reverence for temple images but is popular with overseas buyers for handcraft work back in their homeland. Older pieces of silverware are particularly attractive and are more plentiful in the main cities where the choice is better too.

For those who are interested in handicrafts, the Bogyoke Aung San Market in Yangon or the Zeigyo Market in Mandalay are good choices to shop. The array of goods for sale is huge and cheap. You can purchase just about anything you want from these two markets. Bagan is the centre of lacquer-ware production, with a range of pieces available. Scott Market in Yangon sells similar pieces. Most designs are based on religious scriptures.

Attractive items from small purses to large leather bags which will last for years are available in most areas. The men's traditional longyi is a much more comfortable alternative to tight jeans or trousers when travelling through Myanmar. Delightfully styled marionettes of all sizes dangle at market stalls. Superbly woven items from baskets to placemats are available throughout Burma. Shan style shoulder bags are both an attractive and practical buy.

Stone carvings are lovely pieces for the house or garden, but shipping can be complicated and the advice of a local person is advised. Kalaga embroidered tapestries are the ones to look out for. These beautifully ornate creations make magnificent wall decorations when suitably framed, though quality can vary greatly and older pieces tend to look more aesthetic.

Thanaka paste can be seen being worn (mainly by women) across Burma. It controls oiliness, tightens pores, cools the skin and acts as a sunscreen. Beautiful high quality silk and cotton longyis are found countrywide. These are well-priced and easy to pack. The famous Shan shoulder bags are popular gifts and can be bought throughout the country. Many wooden carved pieces are available, both old and new, in different woods. Avoid purchasing any teak products as this is an endangered hardwood.

Do be advised that there is no trading standards authority in Myanmar, so check the quality of what you're buying very carefully, especially if there are safety concerns involved. Don't expect to get your money back if you change your mind after making a purchase, or even if you realize that the goods you have been sold are not as advertised.

TIPS TO SAVVY SHOPPING

1. **Check everything** you can check before handing over your money
2. Always **ask around to get an idea of basic prices** for common necessities. For more important purchases, try and get a local friend to go along with you, or better still, let them do the buying without you
3. **Don't feel awkward or rude about bargaining**, everyone bargains in Myanmar and you'll look like a green tourist if you don't
4. Don't look happy or resigned about paying what you're asked; always **begin by showing your gentle disapproval**
5. **Walk away if you cannot agree on a price**: either they'll come after you or you'll find the same thing on sale somewhere else

TRAVEL TO AND FROM MYANMAR

Travel to and from Myanmar



BY AIR

The national airline is Myanmar Airways International. Main airport Yangon (RGN) is 19 km (12 miles) from the city

Getting there by air

The national airline is Myanmar Airways International (UB). Yangon has direct air links with Abu Dhabi, Bandar Seri, Bangkok, Bangladesh, Begawan, Bombay, Calcutta, Jakarta, Kunming, London, Moscow and Singapore. Airlines serving Myanmar include Air China, Austrian Airlines, Bangladesh Airlines, Indian Airlines, Qatar Airways, Silk Air and Thai Airways International.

Main Airports

Yangon (RGN) is 19 km (12 miles) from the city. To/from the airport: Buses go to the city (travel time – 30 minutes). Taxis are also available (travel time – 45 minutes). Facilities include restaurants, bars, snack bars, banks, post offices, duty free shops and tourist information.

Departure tax

USD\$10, payable also in FECs (Foreign Exchange Certificates; see Money section for details). Passengers in direct transit are exempt.

VISA INFORMATION

According to the official requirements from the Myanmar immigration authority, visitors to Myanmar who have a Myanmar embassy in their home country are required to obtain a tourist visa from the embassy in their home country.

Visas are required for all nationals of Britain, Australia, Canada, USA and EU member countries. This excludes transit passengers continuing their journey by the same or first connecting aircraft, provided they have valid onward or return documentation and are not leaving the airport.

A separate visa is required for each child over seven years of age, even if travelling on their parent's passport

Tourist visas are valid for two months from the date of issue for stays of 28 days in Myanmar. This can be extended for an additional 14 days. Business visas are valid for three months from date of issue for stays of up to 10 weeks, extendable for up to 12 months on an individual basis.

Transit visas are valid for 24 hours.

Costs: Tourist (Foreign Independent Travellers – FIT): USD\$28. Business and Social: USD\$40

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

1. Please make sure your passport is valid more than 6 months from the date of departure of each country you are visiting. Also, make sure you have enough blank pages – you may need up to 1.5 pages for each country you visit in Southeast Asia.