

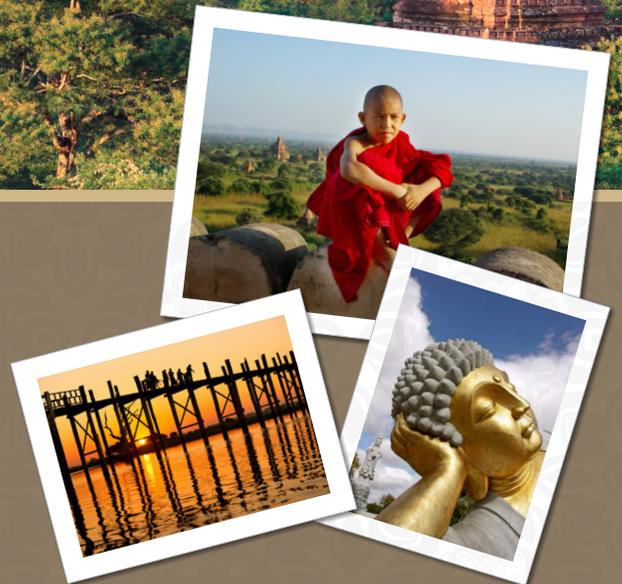
ALLURING ASIA



DESTINATION

MYANMAR

TRAVELER'S GUIDE



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POPULATION

Myanmar has a population of approximately 56 million although it is a rough estimate because no comprehensive or widely trusted census has been taken since 1931. It is estimated that 80% of the population are rural dwellers and 20 percent urban.

The greatest concentration is in the Irrawaddy delta region, where, along with Arakan and Tenasserim - the Burmese form the majority. The ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council recognizes 135 nationalities. The upland areas are inhabited by hilltribes of which the Karen are the most numerous.

TIME

Myanmar time is GMT plus 6 hours, 30 minutes.

VISAS

A tourist visa is required and must be obtained prior to arrival.

INSURANCE

You should not assume your U.S. or other existing health insurance will cover you in Myanmar. Since the standard of emergency treatment in Myanmar is not as high as in the West, it is advisable in addition to normal medical insurance. We advise travelers to take out a policy which covers evacuation to either Singapore or Bangkok.

HISTORY

The name "Burma" is derived from the Burmese word "Bamar", which in turn is the colloquial form of Myanmar which historically revered to the majority Burmese. In 1989 the military government officially changed the English translations of many colonial-era names, including the name of the country to "Myanmar".

Surrounded by towering mountains walls that encircle the country like an iron horseshoe, Myanmar has always been an isolated and insular region. During the early Christian Era, four separate races migrated down the river valleys from Tibet to settle in different parts of Burma. The first major group were the pyu, a mysterious race that settled in south central Burma near the present-day town of Prome. It is thought that the Pyus practiced a syncretic form of Theravada Buddhism that included Brahmani Hinduism, naga-worship, and animism. Leaving almost no records behind, the Pyus were destroyed in 832 when Chinese from Nanchao plundered the capital and deported 3,000 slaves to Yunan.

The next major group were the Mons, who were firmly entrenched in the Pegu region of Southern Burma prior to the arrival of the Burmese people sometime in the 7th-9th centuries. Other Mon groups scattered over to Thailand and Cambodia and established the earliest empires in these nations.

The Mons were a highly civilized and cultured race of people who had a profound influence on the Burmese people in pagan. The third major group to migrate into Burma were the Burmeses themselves who fled the Tibetan plateau to escape Chinese raids for human sacrifices. The Burmeses settled in the central valley of Upper Burma at Pagan. The last group to emigrate were the Shans (Tai or Thai), who eventually settled in the hills on the Thai-Burma border. From the moment of their arrival these four Mongoloid-Chinese races waged almost continual warfare against each other with brief periods of peace and unity.



THE KINGDOM OF PAGAN (1044-1287)

Burma's first and greatest empire was centered along the banks of the Irrawaddy in the dry and dusty plains of central Burma. Pagan blossomed under the leadership of King Anawrahta, an ambitious leader who conquered the Mons at Thaton and transported the entire Mon court of artists, philosophers, and religious leaders back to his isolated capital. The Mons made profound contributions to Burmese culture. Their craftsmen and architects taught the Burmese their refined skills in which Mon Buddhist leaders spread along with theravadism and the Pali language. Mon architects helped erect thousands of temples and stupas which stand today as the greatest archaeological wonder in Southeast Asia. Pagan remained the region's major cultural and military power until an envious Kublai Khan demanded the tribute and threatened to march his armies on Pagan. Rather than face the wrath of Khan, the city was abandoned.

OTHER KINGDOMS

With the decline of Pagan, Burma split into three different kingdoms whose histories are a dizzying kaleidoscope of constant warfare. The Shans ruled upper Burma from their capital at Ava in the vicinity of Mandalay. The Burmas to the south founded the kingdom of Toungoo in the foothills of central Burma. The Mons established their kingdom at Pegu near modern-day Yangon where they conducted international trade with the Muslim empire at Malacca and constructed impressive temples which still stand today. During the 16th century, the Burmese

conquered the Shans and captured Pegu from the Mons. The capital was moved around the country until a powerful Burmese king named Alaungpaya (Future Buddha) reorganized Burmese forces and destroyed the Mons at Pegu. During his brief but important eight-year rein (1752-1760), Alaungpaya founded the powerful Konbaung dynasty which ruled Burma from Arakan to Tenasserim until the British completed their takeover in 1885.

BRITISH OCCUPATION

Territorial conflicts between the British in India and local Burmese armies led to the first British-Burmese war of 1824. The Burmese provinces of Assam, Rakhine (Arakan), and Tenasserim were annexed by the British, while Burmese-British relations continued to deteriorate under the cruel reign of Pagan Min (1846-1853). After European traders protested the extortionate behavior of Burmese officials in Rangoon, a British force was sent up the Irrawaddy River to depose the religious-minded but temperamental Mindon Min (1853-1878). This led to the expansionist governor-general Lord Dalhousie annexing all of lower Burma, including Rangoon, in 1852. Under British rule, the rich Irrawaddy delta was cleared of its mangrove forests and carved into extensive rice plantations which became one of the world's most productive rice-growing regions. But as in much of colonial Asia, the wealth was absorbed by British business firms and Indian moneylenders while the indigenous people descended into abject poverty. Though King Mindon of Ava attempted to modernize what little remained of his medieval country, upper Burma fell to superior British forces on January 1, 1886. Burma now belonged to the British.

Japanese forced entered Burma in December 1941, accompanied by the Thakins who were given token control of the country. Though initially welcomed by the Burmese, the Japanese quickly alienated the local population with their insulating behavior and sadistic treatment. Political leaders were manipulated and thousands of innocent civilians were murdered by the dreaded kempatai. Casualties were enormous; the Rangoon Cemetery holds over 27,000 soldiers and civilians killed by the Japanese through forced labor, torture, and starvation.



Eventually the war turned against the Japanese. When all seemed lost, Burmese patriots made overtures to underground British forces who later granted immunity from postwar prosecution.

INDEPENDENCE

Independence was granted to the Burmese at exactly 4:40 a.m. on January 4, 1948 - an auspicious hour chosen by Burmese astrologers. It was a painful and chaotic birth. The charismatic Ang San quickly took control by eliminating his rivals and expelling communists from the Executive Council. He was then murdered by gunmen hired by a Burmese right-wing politician. Shocked and in disarray, the Burmese government named U Nu as his successor. What followed was near-complete economic and political collapse. The countryside erupted into warfare as the communists, Karens, and dissident followers of Aung San declared war against the newly formed Burmese government. In an attempt to appease the warring ethnic groups pressing for independence, U Nu established separate and semi-autonomous states for the various minorities. But warfare and banditry continued.

In 1962 General Ne Win led a coup d'etat against the democratic government of U Nu. Ne Win's military dictatorship succeeded in slowing the open revolution but at a high cost. The constitution was suspended, censorship was imposed, and all industry was nationalized. Ne Win harbored some bizarre beliefs and his superstitious convictions were legendary. He believed in yeedaya chay, the old Burmese theory that fate can be outwitted by prompt action. On one occasion, he ordered the introduction of bank notes in denominations of 45 and 90 kyat on the grounds that they were divisible by 9, and therefore were his lucky numbers. When his chief astrologer pronounced that the left side was unlucky and that he should "move the country more to the right", he directed that traffic should immediately change to driving on the right side of the road.

Myanmar's current prime minister is Than Shwe (October 21, 2010 - Present), a member of Myanmar's Military/Union Solidarity and Development party.



LANGUAGE

Burmese is the national language, which has been influenced by Pali and English. It is a tonal language similar to Thai or Chinese.

COMMON PHRASES in BURMESE

English	Burmese
Hello	Min ga la ba
How are you?	Nei Kaon la?
Thank you	Kyeizu tin ba de
You're welcome	Y aba de
Goodbye	Thwa dau me
Please	Kyeizu pyu yue
I'm sorry	Saw-re-be
What is your name?	Kamya ye na mee ba le?
Yes	Ho de
No	Ma ho bu
My name is ____.	Kya nau na mee __ ba
Where is the toilet?	Ain-ta beh ma leh?
Water	Yei athe

CLIMATE

Myanmar's year is divided into three seasons. The rains begin in May, and are most intense between June and August. This is a time of high humidity - especially intense in the coastal and delta regions during afternoon/evening showers when monsoonal winds carry the moisture in off the Indian Ocean. The central inland is drier than other parts of the country, but is subject to much rain during this time.

The cool season from November through February is the most pleasant time to visit Myanmar. The average mean temperature along the Ayeyarwady plain, from Yangon to Mandalay is between 21C and 28C (70F and 82F).

Myanmar's dry season is between the months of March and April when temperatures in the central Myanmar plain, particularly around Bagan (Pagan), can climb to 45C (113F).

AVERAGE TEMPERATURE & RAINFALL

Yangon	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	0.7	1.5	1.5	3.2	7.7	9.3	12.7	10.9	11.5	10.2	1.7	0.8
Min Temp (F)	55	57	63	70	73	79	79	79	75	72	64	59
Max Temp (F)	68	70	73	82	90	91	91	90	88	84	79	72

Bagan	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	0.2	0.5	0.5	3.6	7.2	11.2	9.5	10.9	11.5	10.2	4.8	1.5
Min Temp (F)	70	72	75	77	77	75	75	75	75	75	73	72
Max Temp (F)	90	91	93	95	91	90	88	90	88	88	88	88

Mandalay	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	2.4	0.9	1.0	1.5	3.3	2.5	2.4	5.3	9.5	20.8	14.7	8.5
Min Temp (F)	66	68	70	74	76	78	78	69	76	74	71	68
Max Temp (F)	77	79	83	88	91	94	93	92	89	85	81	77

Heho/Inle Lake	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	0.1	0.4	0.1	1.3	9.8	7.8	11.3	13	8.5	6.8	1.5	0.6
Min Temp (F)	45	47	52	60	63	64	64	64	63	61	52	47
Max Temp (F)	72	76	81	84	81	77	75	76	76	75	74	71



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THE LAND

Any visitor to Myanmar is likely to be spellbound by its unique ambiance. The varied sights, sounds, and scents give it a truly other worldly feeling that overtakes visitors.

Although the reality of Myanmar is one of traumatic changes throughout its political and social structures, visitors often only see the fairy tale Myanmar of beautiful pagodas and ancient ruins.

On a map, Myanmar is shaped somewhat like a hexagonal kite with a dangling tail, the heartland of Myanmar is a hot dry plain surrounded by rugged mountains on three borders and the Bay of Bengal to the south. This ring of mountains is the most important element affecting the climate, and has also served to keep Myanmar both politically and culturally isolated from the outside world. The central basin is divided into the fertile rice-growing region of lower Myanmar which includes Yangon and the dry, almost desert-like region of upper Myanmar. To the north is a confusing knot of mountains that soar to over 6,000 meters, (19,685 Ft) Mountains on the west run from China down to the southwest corner of Myanmar where they disappear under the sea and reappear as the Andaman Islands. Myanmar's main transportation link is the Irrawaddy (Sanskrit for "River of Refreshment") River, popularized by Kipping as the "Road to Mandalay" and "River of Lost Footsteps".

Rich tropical forests cover over half of Myanmar with rhododendron forests in the far north above 2,000 meters (6,561 Ft.) and monsoon teak at lower elevations. With some 80% of the world's teak reserves, Myanmar is a major exporter of these valuable hardwoods.



THE PEOPLE

Burma has seven minority-dominated states: Rakhine (Arakan), Chin Kachin, Kayin (Kawthule), Kayak, Mon and Shan. There are seven division populated mainly by Bamars (Burmese); Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy), Magway (Magwe), Moosooandalay, Bago (Pegu), Yangon (Rangoon), Sagaing and Tanintharyl.

Burmese Names: Unlike Western culture, there are no family names in Burmese usage. Men and women, parents and children, married couples and single people cannot be differentiated by their names. Women keep their maiden names upon marriage, and a child can have a name which bears no relation whatsoever to his parent's names.

A Burmese has a name of one, two or three syllables, given to him (or her) shortly after birth at a naming ceremony. Parents consult an authority in astrology and supernatural knowledge - perhaps a monk, a soothsayer or a spiritual medium when selecting a name. While this practice does not follow Buddhist doctrine, it is customary throughout the country.

A Burmese can change their name as often as they like. If they feel they can bring success to a new enterprise or change their fortune by doing so, they will change their name. Small children are often given unpleasant names to ward off illness and evil, and when they are grown up, they change their names to something more pleasant. Only through mode of address can one tell the sex or social status of a Burmese.



SAFETY & CRIME

Myanmar generally has a low rate of violent crime, but you should remain aware of your surroundings and exercise appropriate security precautions. The government typically does not allow tourists to travel to areas which they consider militarily insecure. Tourists have rarely been victims of civil crime other than those that have been stung making purchase on the black market.

The most dangerous thing a visitor is likely to encounter is not crime but a Russell's Viper - one of the world's deadliest snakes. It is worth taking particular care in and around old pagodas - Particularly in Pagan, where sun warmed bricks and cool crevices provide perfect living conditions for snakes. Scorpions are also a problem in Myanmar and visitors are advise to shake out their shoes after leaving pagoda complexes and each morning when dressing.



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CURRENCY

Myanmar currency is called Kyat, and comes in notes of 5000, 1000, 500, 200, 100, 50, 20 and 10 Kyat. Items such as meals, bus ticket, trishaw or taxi rides and market items are usually quoted in kyat. Hotels, flights archaeological sites and ferries are paid for in US Dollars. You can change your Dollars all around Myanmar, but you will have a better rate in Yangon.

CHANGING MONEY

Changing money can be a challenge, we therefore advise you to bring US dollars in cash or exchange your money in Yangon. Please note that money changers/shops/restaurants/hotels only accept USD notes which are in good condition and 'new' looking. Notes with torn off corners, rips or scrawls are not accepted. Money changers prefer hundred dollar notes and can be exchanged with a higher rate.

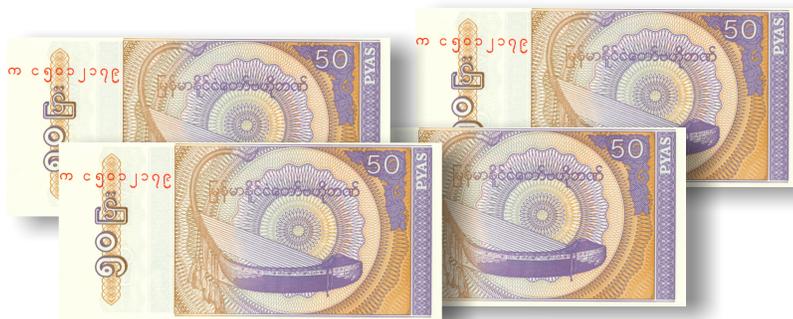
CREDIT CARDS

Other than Yangon, credit cards are not accepted anywhere else in Myanmar. Traveler's checks are also not accepted and ATM's are nonexistent. It is suggested that you bring a sufficient amount of Cash to cover your expenses for the duration of your stay.

WHAT TO PACK

Dress in Myanmar is casual but neat. Unless you are conducting business in Yangon, you won't be expected to wear a tie. Long pants for men and a dress or long skirt for women, lightweight and appropriate prevailing climatic conditions, is the generally accepted mode of dress for Westerners. Quick-drying clothes are a good idea for visits during the rainy season or Thingyan (the "water festival"). There is no law against shorts or mini-skirts, but this type of clothing is not welcomed by the Myanmar people. You should also bring sunglasses, mosquito repellent and a hat to protect you from the sun. Public restrooms in Laos typically do not have toilet tissue so you may want to carry a small amount of tissue with you.

Due to restricted weight limits on all the Domestic flights (20kg or 44 pounds) it is recommended to travel light.



TIPPING

Service charges of 10% are added to bills in most leading hotels and restaurants. Where it is not included, a tip of 10-15% of the bill would be appropriate.

Airport porter/hotel bellboy:

\$1.00 - \$ 2.00 US per bag.

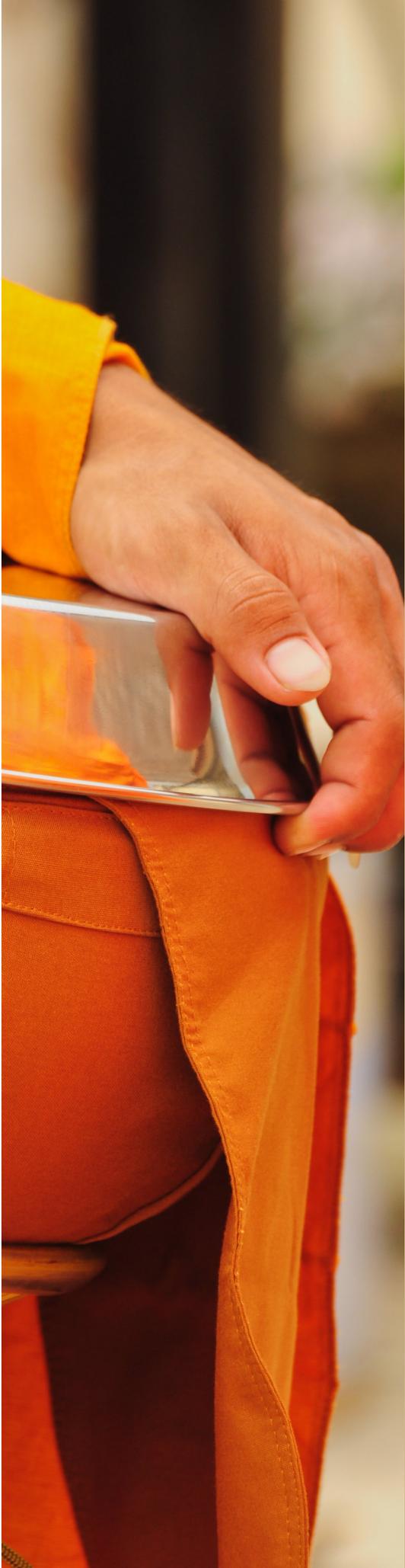
Your tour guide:

\$10.00 - \$ 12.00 US per person per day.

Driver/assistants:

\$ 6.00 - \$ 7.00 US per person per day.

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RELIGION

Buddhism is Myanmar's state religion and about 85% of the population is Buddhist. You will notice that just about every hilltop in the country has a pagoda on it. Buddhism came to Myanmar in several stages. The first Buddhists to arrive were Indian merchants and missionaries who traveled to Myanmar and taught the scriptures. The Moghul emperor Asoka is said to have visited the Shwedagon Pagoda in or around 260 BC. But Theravada Buddhism was only fully established in Burma after King Anawrahta came to the throne at Pagan in 1044 and was converted by a famous Mon monk called Shin Arahan.

The Myanmar brand of Buddhism is unique as it incorporates nat, or spirit worship, similar to the way the early Anglican Church adopted pagan vitality symbols such as holly, ivy and mistletoe. King Anawrahta tolerated spirit-worship in pagoda precincts in an attempt to fuse Buddhism and pre-Buddhist animism. He also decreed that Thagyamin, the king of gods and guardian-spirit of Buddhism, was to be added to the original 36 nats as their leader. After Thagyamin, the celestial lady, Thurhati, guardian of the Buddhist scriptures is the most popular nat. She is believed to be a Burmanization of Surasati, the Hindu goddess.

ETIQUETTE

As a general rule, Southeast Asians admire a calm and considered approach to all aspects of life. Open anger or shows of temper should be avoided. Causing another person to 'lose face' is not recommended and status, particularly in terms of age, should accorded due respect.

Throughout Myanmar, wherever you enter religious grounds, you must remove your shoes (or sandals) and socks. Many shrines will have a sign posted to remind you with "Footwear Prohibited" signs. You will have to plod with naked soles over marble plates scorched by the mid-day sun, up long flights of stairs (the whole of Mandalay Hill, for examples, is sacred ground), or perhaps even over thorn-studded fields if they lie within the enclosure that marks a temple ground.

You can also show your respect for Myanmar religion by wearing proper clothing at a temple, especially, no short skirts for women, and no short pants.

PHOTOGRAPHS

It is polite to ask permission before taking photographs, Some people may take offense.

COMMUNICATIONS

Mobile Phones

Your mobile phone will NOT work in Myanmar as Myanmar currently has no roaming agreement with any country. Prepaid cards in value of USD/FEC 50 (CDMA-450 MHZ) are available for purchase within the country. The USD/FEC 50 card is maximum 90 days validity after activated. These prepaid mobile phone cards are aimed at tourists visiting Myanmar who wish to keep in touch with friends and family.

Internet

Internet access is still in its development stages and not reliable- the connections can be extremely slow at times so patience is required! Internet is also regulated in Myanmar and the access to some websites is filtered or impossible. Many internet cafes, however, can offer a different URL that will allow access to email providers such as gmail and yahoo.

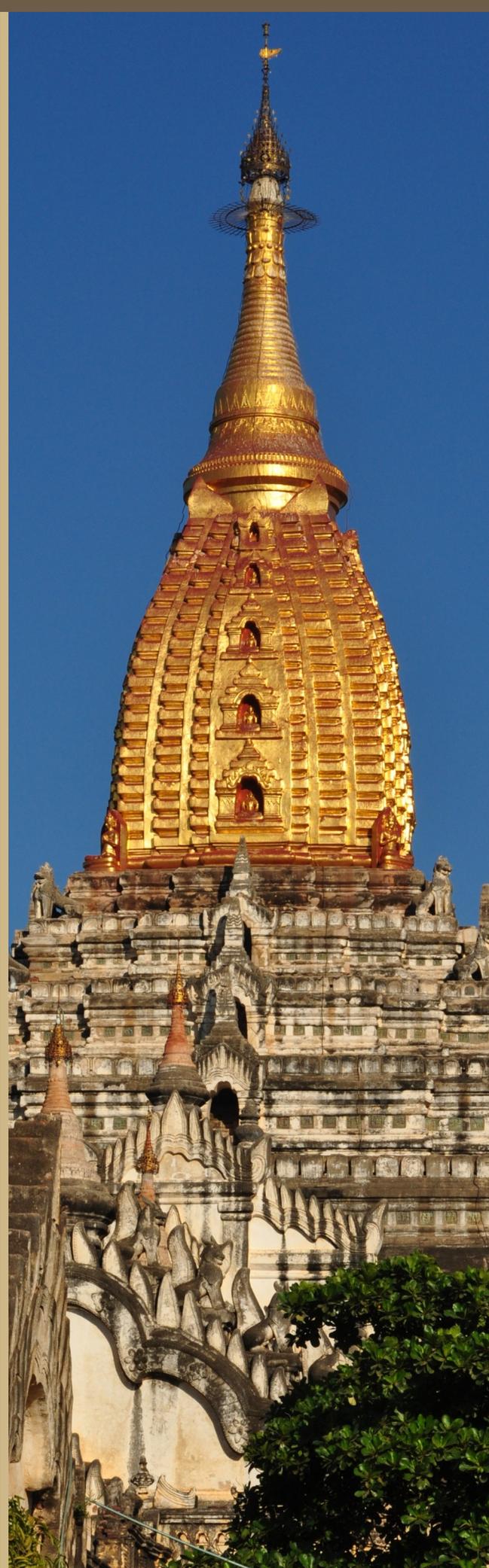
Most of the hotels now have some internet terminals and in cities like Yangon, Mandalay and Nyaung Shwe (Inle Lake), you will find some small internet cafés.

ELECTRICITY

The standard electrical current is 230-volt, 50 hertz. Voltage surges are common.

HEALTH

All visitors to Myanmar should take appropriate anti-malaria precautions before entering the country, and should continue to take medication throughout their stay. The risk is highest at altitudes below 1,000 meters (3,000 ft.) between May and December. Perhaps the two most common hazards to Myanmar visitors are sunburn and "Delhi Belly." (Diarrhea). Health standards in much of Myanmar are still relatively low. You should absolutely avoid drinking any water unless you know it has been boiled or is bottled. All fruit should be carefully peeled before being eaten, and you should avoid eating any raw vegetables, including fresh salads because it is likely they have been rinsed in water.



FOOD

Myanmar food may be a little disappointing when compared to Thai or Vietnamese food, however there are many restaurants to choose from that serve Indian, Chinese or European food. The typical staple of Myanmar food are rice and rice noodles, traditionally served in a large bowl placed in the center of a low table. Myanmar curries, unlike Indian curries, use only a few spices and herbs such as garlic, onions, coriander, ginger, turmeric, salt and hot chili peppers fried in peanut oil. Hin is curry, kyatnarhin is chicken curry, ametha hnat, beef curry and ngathalauk, fish curry. Portions of curries are often small, you are supposed to fill yourself up with rice. A clear soup, or hingho, nearly always accompanies the meal. Food is always served at room temperature. Dishes are usually served with ngapiye, a fermented fish or shrimp paste.

WATER

It is not advisable to drink tap water but bottled mineral water is safe and available everywhere. Ice cubes in drinks is generally OK in good standard hotels and restaurants but it is best to avoid it on street stalls or in country areas.

DRUGS

Prescription drugs - It is recommended to travel with prescriptions for any drugs you are required to travel with for your personal health.

SHOPPING

Myanmar's markets and bazaars are entertaining, and are the most reasonable places to shop for native arts and crafts. Popular items to purchase are: Antiques, Copper and Brassware (A cottage industry in Mandalay), Lacquer ware items, mother-of-pearl inlay, ceramics, colorful embroidery, and silverware. Another popular item is Gems-- Rubies, jade, and sapphires, mostly coming from the northern mines of Magok. Also, aquamarine, topaz, amethysts and lapis lazuli. Gemstones should be bought at government-approved shops only, otherwise you risk having them confiscated when leaving the country.

CUSTOMS

Tourists are authorized to import the following duty free: 400 cigarettes, 100 Cigars, 2 liters of Liquor and personal effects of a reasonable quantity. Customs regulations are strict and we advise that you check with the consulate before you depart.

It is prohibited to bring into Myanmar weapons, explosives, and flammable objects. Also prohibited are narcotics such as opium and cultural material unsuitable to Myanmar society.



CULTURE & THE ARTS

One positive result of Myanmar's international isolation has been the preservation of its varied cultural and artistic traditions. Since its independence, many minority groups have clung to their tribal cultures, thereby preserving them.

Myanmar was once at the confluence of Indian and Chinese cultures, although, ethnically, most of its people are more closely linked to the Chinese than the Indians. Culturally, it is the Indian influence that has predominated. Myanmar adopted Pali, the Indian language of the Theravada Buddhist scriptures, and Buddhism was brought from India. Indian architecture provided the inspiration for most of Myanmar's monumental art and the Indian concept of kingship - rather than the Chinese Confucian bureaucracies was the model for Myanmar's dynasties.

One of the earliest of Myanmar's cultures was that of the Pyu. Early Chinese accounts talk of the wealth of the Pyu civilization and the opulence of court life in Sri Kshetra. The king was carried on a golden litter, women wore silk and both men and women were adorned with jewels. Inscriptions suggest that the Pyu were influenced by Indian cultures. The Pyu left behind bronze and stone sculptures which indicate a high level of craftsmanship. Many pieces are similar in style to the late Gupta or post Gupta style in India, in which Buddha statues are seated with their legs crossed and wearing tight clinging robes.



Embroidery: Centuries of migration led Myanmar's hilltribes to develop portable art forms, and embroidery is one of their specialties. From early childhood a girl learns to sew and her needle-skills play an important role in helping her win a husband.

Weaving: Mandalay and Amarapura are the most important weaving centers and produce *acheik*, a horizontal-weave patterned silk, once popular with royalty. This silk is still highly prized.

Lacquerware: Lacquered receptacles, mainly begging bowls, are used daily by monks in Myanmar and lacquerware was formerly in daily use by royalty too. Pagan is famous for its lacquerware.

Silverware: Silver objects were often put in relic chambers of pagodas and were a measure of wealth.

Some of the best relief work found in Myanmar is on the large gilded sutra chests, which are used to store the manuscripts of the sacred Buddhist texts. They often carry scenes from the Buddha's life. Most of the monumental remains in Myanmar are religious buildings. Buddhists lavish much of their surplus wealth on the construction and upkeep of stupas and temples - the surest way of attaining merit. Burmese architecture, which reached great soaring beauty in the temples at Pagan, is now a lost art.

MUSIC

The music of Myanmar has similarities with and is related to many other musical traditions in the region, including Chinese music, Indian music, and Thai music. Traditional music from Myanmar is melodious, generally without harmony, and usually in 4/4 time, 2/4 time, or 8/16 time. There are segments combined into patterns, combined into verses, combined into songs that make Myanmar music a hierarchical system.... The Musician manipulates the various levels of the hierarchy to create the song.

DRAMA & DANCE

The most popular form of entertainment in Myanmar is the pwe - an all night extravaganza which combines song, dance and theatre. Slapstick comedy and satirical skits are interlaced with religious and historical plays (zats). At temple pwes it is quite usual to see dancers in trance, possessed by the spirits of local nats. Nat dancers can be men or women. Nat pwes are mainly held by rich villagers who can afford to hire the orchestra and dancers. The nats often make outrageous demands for gifts and different nats have different predilections - some go around asking for money, while others seem to prefer rum and whiskey. Although pwes are intensely spiritual, they can also be extremely entertaining as they are a highly charged frenetic occasions with continuous background din from the orchestra. The popularity of the pwe has been key to the preservation of traditional music, dance, and the theater.

Theater is perhaps Myanmar's liveliest art. The classical zat dramas are usually based on the Jataka tales or the Ramayana. A national dance performance in which each ethnic group is represented, is organized each year as a show of Myanmar's unity.

