

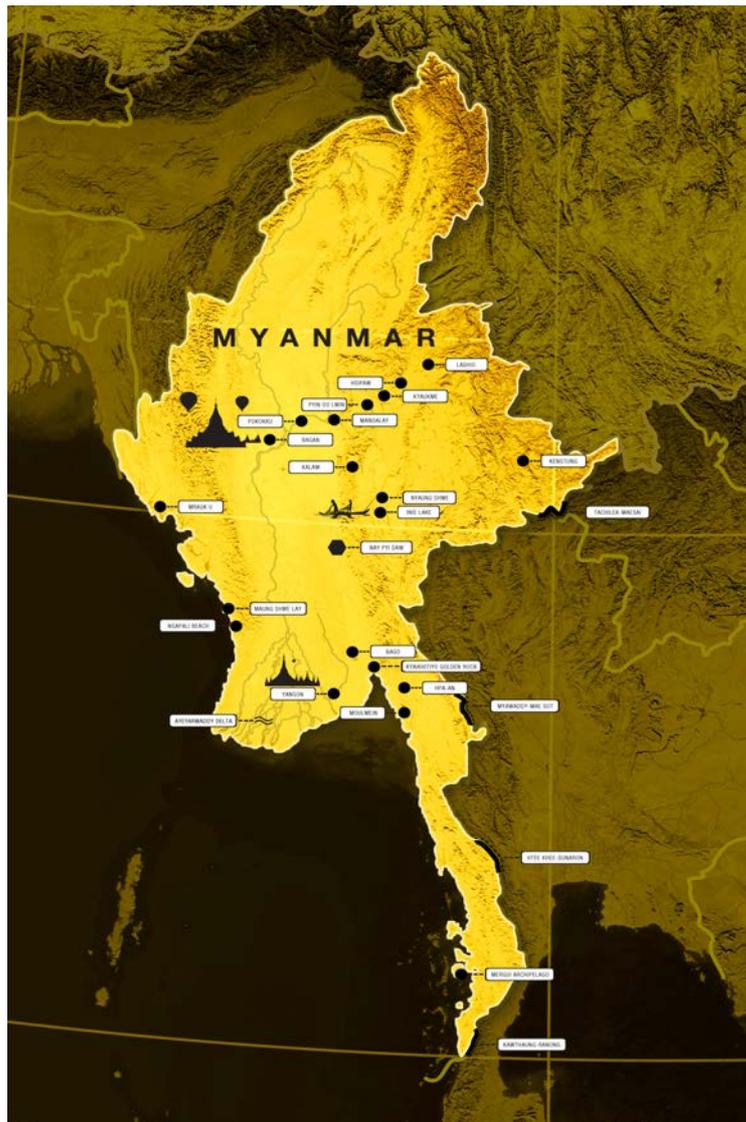


MYANMAR PRACTICAL INFORMATION

We are pleased to offer you herewith some useful tips and practical information on traveling in Myanmar.

COUNTRY PROFILE

Official Name:	Republic of the Union of Myanmar
Population:	55.2 million
Capital City:	Nay Pyi Taw
Area:	676,578 km ²
People:	Bamar (68%), minorities include Shan, Rakhine, Chinese Birmese, Mon and Kachin
Religion:	Buddhism (Theravada)
Language:	Myanmar
Currency:	Kyat
Time Zone:	GMT +6.30 hours
International dialing code:	+95
Electricity:	220V AC 50 Hz
Driving:	Right hand side



BORDER CROSSINGS

This chapter is very vulnerable to changes; over the past years, Myanmar's borders crossings with Thailand and China have been opened and closed again regularly (often without any advance notice). The majority of tourists arrive and leave the country by air at Yangon International airport.

with Thailand:

Mae Sai – Tachileik (friendship bridge)

Visa on arrival (border pass) is only valid for Tachileik and Keng Tung. If you enter the country at Tachileik you can leave from any other border.

Mae Sot – Myawadi

Border is open since 1 September 2013 and people with a valid visa can enter the country here and travel onwards throughout the country.

Phu Nam Ron (1,5 hr from Kanchanaburi) – Htee kee (3,5 hrs from Dawei)

It is possible to travel to Dawei (and onwards to Mawlamyine or Yangon) with a pre-arranged visa and travel onwards throughout the country.

Ranong – Kaw Thauung

Visa on arrival (border pass) is only valid for Kaw Thauung. With a pre-arranged visa it is possible to continue by flight to Myeik, Dawei or Yangon.

with China:

Ruili – Muse

At the moment it is possible to enter Myanmar via this border crossing with pre-arranged visa and pre-arranged travel permission only.

with Bangladesh:

No border crossing open / allowed

with India:

Moreh / Tamu

A special pre-arranged permit is necessary to cross this border

Please remember that border crossing formalities are subject to change. For the latest update please check with the embassy or consulate of Myanmar or check with our office in Yangon.

PASSPORTS & VISAS

Visitors of all nationalities need a visa in order to visit Myanmar. You can apply for this visa at a Myanmar embassy in or near your country. Please contact the embassy for more details. The visa for Myanmar is valid for 28 days and occupies a full page in your passport – the visa expires 90 days after it is issued so don't apply too early. Please make sure you have enough pages in your passport. The passport has to be valid for at least 6 more months.

Different embassies have different rules to apply for a tourist visa. Generally you will need 2 or 3 photos and enough cash to pay for your visa (at most embassies it's 30 USD). Some embassies will ask you to come in person to apply for the visa or they will ask for your CV (to check where you have been working in the past) and they might ask for your planned travel itinerary. It usually takes about 3 days to get your visa.

It is also possible to arrange for an eVisa for Myanmar. The procedure takes at least 5 working days. Travelers show interest for the online visa at the official website of the Ministry of Immigration and Population (<http://evisa.moip.gov.mm/>). NOTE: this only applies for arrivals at Yangon, Nay Pyi Taw and Mandalay airports.



Indeed it can sometimes be a little bit of a hassle to get your visa but once that's done you will be rewarded by visiting a country that is like no other!

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Khiri Travel will do everything possible to ensure clients a safe and enjoyable trip. However, traveling always brings certain possible risks and these risks should be recognized by participants. Thus, we highly recommend the purchase of short-term travel insurance for our adventures. Travel Insurance is a cost effective way to protect yourself and your equipment in the event of problems due to: canceled trips, delays, medical problems, baggage loss or damage.

MONEY

Most important: be aware that there are *ATM machines in Myanmar but they only accept Master card and Visa CREDIT CARDS (no debit cards)*. You will have to bring cash as well. US Dollars, Euro and Thai Baht are easily exchanged into local currency around the country at money exchangers and banks. Make sure the notes look brand new without any writings on them and make sure they are not torn, faded or in anyway not looking brand new, otherwise they won't be accepted.

The Kyat is the official currency of Myanmar and is available in notes of 10,000, 5,000, 1,000, 500 and 200 as well as some smaller denominations, which are often dirty, torn and not worth a lot. The last few years the Kyat has been hovering between 900 to 1200 Kyats to the US Dollar – ask your hotel or your guide about the current exchange rate on arrival and also where to exchange. There are more bank exchange counters opening all over the country, including on arrival at the airport and those counters usually give the best exchange rate.

Generally it's best to pay everywhere in Kyats. Cash USD are only accepted in hotels. The Kyat is not freely convertible, which means that you can't buy any Kyats outside of Myanmar, and so any Kyats you leave with can't be exchanged anywhere else.

The FEC (Foreign Exchange Certificates) are abandoned since 1 April 2013. In theory it is possible to exchange Traveler's Cheques at the National Bank in Yangon, but in practice it is slow and costly.

We advise you to bring cash US Dollars and/or Euros and to change these into Kyats in any main tourist area while traveling through the country. One last remark on the dollar notes: any denomination is OK (50 and 100 USD notes are most popular) – just make sure they look brand new and check the serial number does NOT start with "CB" as these are not accepted either.

HEALTH

Health risks in Myanmar include: cholera, dengue fever, hepatitis, Japanese encephalitis, malaria, rabies and typhoid. We strongly recommend you to visit either your personal physician or a travel health clinic 4-8 weeks before departure. Up-to-date advice should be sought before deciding whether these precautions should include vaccination, as medical opinion is divided over its effectiveness. Malaria risk exists throughout the year in the whole country, except in bigger towns such as Yangon and Mandalay.

Medical facilities with western standards are very limited in Myanmar and practically only exist in Yangon. Many doctors have been educated in Europe (especially in the UK) but have limited access to modern medicines and limited updated knowledge on medicine.





All travelers visiting Myanmar with Khiri Travel must show proof of a health insurance upon arrival in the country so in case of emergency we can assist and make sure you will receive the necessary medical attention in Myanmar or in Bangkok, where the best medical facilities are available.

CLIMATE

Myanmar has 3 different seasons: winter (mid Oct – Feb), summer (March – May) and green season (June – mid Oct). These seasons are very similar to the seasons in Thailand. Every season has its own advantages and disadvantages to travel:

March – May (summer)

The whole country can be hot (especially in the afternoon – around 35 degrees Celsius) so you're advised to plan sightseeing more in the mornings and evenings. Landscapes are a bit dry – excellent time to visit the beaches and to visit higher parts of Myanmar (Shan state for example).

November – February (winter)

The most popular season for tourists to travel because of the lower temperatures (evenings in the mountains can be cold – 10 degrees Celsius) while the chance for rain is less (although November 2013 saw more rainy days than July or August of that year). Daytime temperature is around 30 degrees Celsius. A good time to visit any place in the country but it can be busy at the major tourist locations – if you have the choice we suggest you to avoid the months of November and February when it can be very busy everywhere.

June – mid October (green season)

The temperatures drop (till about 25 - 30 degrees Celsius) and the scenery is green. Sightseeing is not too hot and not too dusty. A perfect period to visit Bagan, Mandalay and Shan states (Hsipaw, Kyaukme, Pyin Oo Lwin, Kalaw, Inle Lake) where it isn't raining a lot (mostly a short shower at the end of the day). Avoid the beaches in this period (it's raining more at the coast and most hotels are closed in this period). Yangon can get quite some rain as well so it is better to spend just 1 or 2 nights here. Sightseeing is great as there aren't many other tourists around yet – it's Myanmar at its best! There are in this period on average less than 10 rainy days a month upcountry: [weather base website - Myanmar](#). This is the period we generally advise our closest friends to come and visit as it's an excellent period to visit Myanmar.

FOOD & DRINK

All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilized. Bottled water is available throughout the country.

Avoid dairy products that are likely to have been made from raw milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Myanmar food is traditionally eaten with steamed rice using either the fingers or spoon and fork (chop sticks are sometimes used for Chinese food or noodles). In the countryside, people will all eat family style; sitting on the floor, sharing a few dishes. Traditional Myanmar food consists out of 1 or 2 curries (not very spicy), a lot of steamed rice and some pickles or salad as well as fish paste. The traditional food out of the centre of Myanmar can be a bit greasy; make sure you also try the food of all the different states like Shan food, Rakhine food or mix with Chinese, Indian or Thai food.





Here are some favorites:

- **Chicken** or **Pork curry**, a traditional Myanmar curry, which comes with a strong curry taste and is very similar to an Indian curry with a layer of oil on top. Mix it with a lot of rice. In Myanmar traditional families the believe is that a guest should be always served the best and richest food hence a bit of extra oil is added!
- **Mohingar** is the national breakfast dish and can be found in the streets and at market stalls as well as some hotels. It is a fish soup with vermicelli mixed with ingredients like lemon, coriander, boiled egg, banana stem or crispy fried beans. Try it – it's delicious!
- **Kya oh** is a kind of noodle soup mixed with vegetables and generally chicken or pork. It is an excellent dish for lunch.
- **Ohno Kaukswe** is one of the favorites in Myanmar and often served for breakfast. It is a thick coconut soup with rice noodles and chicken (as well as onions, rice crackers and a bit of coriander).
- **BBQ** chicken, pork, fish and seafood can be found at many street stalls and are often accompanied with glasses of Myanmar draft beer.
- **Shan noodles**: a delicious dish originally from Shan state (each city in Shan state has it's own taste) but nowadays readily available in the whole country. The bowl of noodles comes with a sauce of meat and vegetable and can be ordered as a salad or as a soup.
- **Let Pet Thoke** (pickled tea leaves salad) is a very popular traditional snack served with sesame, peanuts, dried shrimps, garlic and chili.

TIPPING & TAXES

Tipping in Myanmar is not customary. Amounts are often rounded up due to lack of small nominations notes or you are given a candy, a tissue or even a cigarette as "change". In a relatively poor country like Myanmar, tipping is however highly appreciated. In more upscale restaurants a tip of between 5 and 10% is recommended. In other places leaving the small change or 1 USD is enough. Taxi and trishaw drivers usually don't expect any tip at all.

Guides and drivers of rented vehicles do expect to be tipped. For guides a tip between 2 and 5 USD per person per day is customary, for drivers between 1 and 2 USD per day. Of course tipping is always related to the quality of services rendered.

The departure tax at Yangon International Airport is already included in most international flight tickets while the domestic airport tax is already included in tickets if booked through Khiri.

DONATIONS & GIFT-GIVING

Myanmar is a country where a big percentage of the population is poor and many people have just enough money to pay for daily food (over 90% of GDP is spent on food), education and medical care. Even Myanmar people with just a slightly higher than average income are very generous and a culture of giving to poor, elderly and people in need is deeply rooted in the culture.

It's always better to give donations (money or gifts bought locally as this is better for the Myanmar economy) to adults, teachers or a village head rather than to children. Supporting somebody's small business will also contribute positively so don't feel swindled if your taxi driver asks a price that is 50 cents higher than your guide book indicated; he probably is not a millionaire and can certainly use the money. Also, a rich Burmese would generally also accept paying a higher price than a poor Burmese.

People greatly appreciate if you bring postcards and pictures etc. from your own country to show – always a good ice-breaker to start a conversation.

Gifts for school, orphanages, local hospitals etc. are always greatly appreciated – best is actually to buy gifts locally at the market in Myanmar (cheaper, good fun to do, better for the economy and you can be sure the receiver knows how to use it and it also saves you space in your luggage)

COMMUNICATION

Visiting Myanmar really is a “get-away” – consider yourself incommunicado, as your mobile phone will probably not be working. Myanmar has only a few roaming agreements. Buying a local simcard is getting easier and a temporary telephone number would cost about 2 Usd (MPT, Telenor and Oredoo) and can be bought easily in shops all around the country.

Internet cafes can be found in the bigger cities and most of the hotels around the country offer Wifi. The internet connection is often a bit slower than at home and there might be days that you can't get a connection fast enough to chat online.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Every culture has its unique set of unwritten rules, as does Myanmar. When you visit Myanmar, try to adapt to the culture. Here are some examples of rules visitors should try to obey:

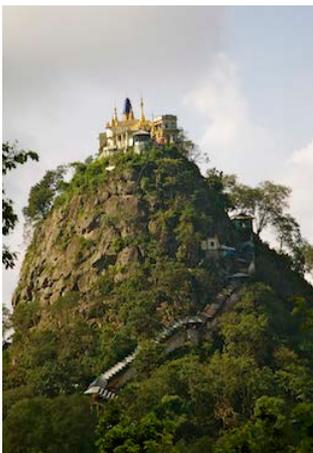
- In Myanmar, **feet** convey messages. Do not point with your feet. Pointing with your feet means disrespect.
- Also, don't stretch out your **legs** when you're sitting. Tuck your feet away. Your feet should certainly never face the Buddha.
- Calling with your **finger** means calling for a challenge. Calling with your fingers down is considered to be polite.
- Never pat a **monk** on the back. You should never touch the robe of a monk. Monks are very revered in Myanmar and they observe many rules, study the Dhamma, practice meditation and they are highly respected in Myanmar society.
- Giving money to **children** is not advisable. Giving money or other things creates children's dependency on tourism. Visitors should consider the saying “Don't give a helpless person a fish, teach them how to catch a fish and they will learn for a lifetime”.
- When in Myanmar, don't touch anyone on the **head**. The head is considered to be the most esteemed part of the body. To be touched on the head is considered aggressive.

For more good cultural tips about how to behave in Myanmar when traveling and to understand some cultural differences, have a look at:

<http://www.dosanddentsfortourists.com/>

SAFETY

Myanmar is a very safe country for traveling. Bag grabbing, assaults, etc. are very rare. Foreign visitors are considered guests and are welcomed by the entire population with respect and curiosity. As a precaution it is of course always better not to leave money or valuable goods laying around in your hotel room or elsewhere but to carry your money with you or to store it in the safe in your hotel. Besides the normal precautions just don't get involved in any political activities in the country.



LINKS & READING

Visa regulations are subject to changes and even the official websites are not always up to date. Please contact our office or contact the nearest Myanmar Embassy for updated information. For the latest updates on current diseases and health issues see the website of the [World Health Organisation](#).

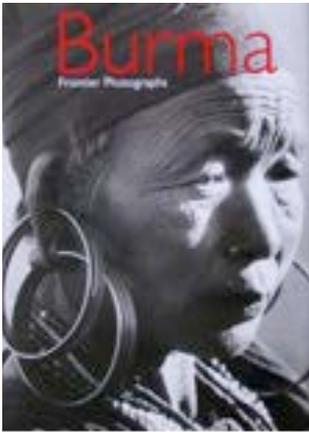
As Myanmar has only limited Internet connectivity, the number of Myanmar websites is limited as well. Some websites that might interest you are:

- The website of the English written private newspaper called "[Myanmar Times](#)", [Eleven media](#), or [Frontier](#) magazine.
- Database of books and articles can be found on www.burmalibrary.org
- For latest news on Myanmar the best way to be updated is to Google "Myanmar" in the news section on www.google.com

Before visiting Myanmar, it is good to read some more about the history, culture and politics of the country. Different authors have different point of views so always keep in mind that any book written about Myanmar always describes the personal opinion of that particular author (whether it is written from inside the country or written by opposition groups living outside the country).

Some recommendations:

- River of Lost Footsteps: Thant Myint U (written by the grand son of the former UN secretary general U Thant – a balanced version of recent Myanmar history).
- Lonely Planet Myanmar: almost a must have when traveling in Myanmar.
- Burmese Design & Architecture (published by Periplus.com): a beautiful coffee table book about Burmese arts and a good introduction to the culture.
- My life as a Shan princess (by Inge Sargent): written by an Austrian lady who became a Shan princess living in Hsipaw – interesting insight in the Shan royal history.
- Burmese Days (George Orwell) is a classic on Myanmar (written during the colonial times by an English officer) and although it can be a bit "slow" to read, it gives an excellent insight into Myanmar psychology, thinking and behaviour of people.
- The Gentleman in the Parlour (William Somerset-Maugham). One of Britain greatest authors made a trip to South-East Asia in the late twenties. Burma was one of the countries Somerset-Maugham visited.
- John Falconer, David Odo and Mandy Sadan, Burma, frontier photographs, 1918-1935, 2000, Brighton. Fantastic book with pictures of James Henry Green. The Burma collections of James Henry Green (1893-1975) have recently been made available to the public through the James Henry Green Charitable Trust. The collections were put together by Green during his career as a recruiting and intelligence officer in Burma during the 1920s and 1930s. It includes over 200 textiles and an outstanding collection of 1600 photographs. Most of the pictures were taken in Northern Burma.
- Burma, Art and Archaeology (edited by Alexandra Green and T. Richard Burton) is a very interesting collection of articles on different subjects from wooden monasteries, bronze sculpture to court dress in Shan State.
- Sylvia Fraser-Lu, Splendour in Wood, The Buddhist Monasteries of Burma, Bangkok, 2001. This is a beautiful book about the wooden monasteries in Myanmar. Very detailed and enriched with drawings and pictures.
- Ma Thanegi, Nor Iron Bars a Cage (or as she calls it herself "my prison book") about the 3 years she spend in Insein Jail as a political prisoner.
- Caroline Courtauld - Myanmar: Burma in Style: An Illustrated History and Guide. It is a great illustrated account of the history, politics and culture of the people and the country.



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LANGUAGE

Burmese language is spoken throughout the country along with over hundred other languages and dialects! Some basic English is spoken by people as some words (like counting) are widely used amongst Burmese people.

Travelers generally don't have too many problems in basic communication, as there is always somebody near who is willing to help (and find somebody who speaks English) or somebody who is eager to meet foreign visitors.