



# ***MINGALABA***

## ***WELCOME TO MYANMAR!***

Myanmar has many different faces and certainly offers something special for any traveler who views traveling as more than just staying at a beach resort – although that's possible as well! It's a country with a very rich culture, unspoiled nature, and it is also a place with genuinely friendly people, who are open-minded, easy-going and keenly interested in learning about and making contact with visitors to their shores.





# GEOGRAPHY

Myanmar is a bit bigger than France and stretches over than 2,000 km from the snow-capped mountains in the north to the pristine islands of the Andaman Sea in the south – an area that is equivalent to the distance from Denmark to the southern-most point of Italy. In between, the country offers a diverse range of habitats from the cool climate in the mountains of Shan or Chin states, to the dry and hot region in the middle of the country (known locally as the 'dry zone'), and the more humid region – especially during the rainy season – on the west coast in Rakhine State. A long coastline means many pristine beaches, although most of them are so isolated that you won't find any accommodation choices, let alone a road to get there. Due to limitations of infrastructure and because authorities are sometimes a bit overly concerned about the safety of foreigners, some areas of the country are out of bounds to foreign tourists. Areas which are not usually accessible to travelers include most northern parts in Kachin State, some areas bordering Thailand and parts of the north bordering India, Bangladesh and China.

# PEOPLE

It's the people that make a country, and that's certainly the case for Myanmar. Hundreds of ethnic tribes have been living in the region for thousands of years and many continue to follow the traditions of their centuries-old way of life. This diversity is generally celebrated (Myanmar has official public holidays for almost every world religion) and sometimes joked about, with some healthy competition among country states over who has the best food, costumes, jewelry, or other cultural attractions. The ethnic Burmese, called 'Bamar', as well as the Chin, Kachin, Kayin, Karen, Mon, Rakhine and the Shan, all share a passion for food and love to try each other's delicacies, for example, Shan and Rakhine food is very popular in the former capital, Yangon. Whenever people travel through the country, they will always bring back food from the area they visited, as a gift to family members and friends. If you want to make friends with the Burmese during your trip to Myanmar, bring some typical food or candies from your hometown! Wherever you visit in Myanmar, you can be sure to find a truly friendly people that are eager to welcome you into their homes.

## FAST FACTS

**OFFICIAL NAME**

Republic of the Union of Myanmar

**CAPITAL CITY**

Nay Pyi Taw

**BOUNDARIES**

Bangladesh, China, India, Laos and Thailand

**CURRENCY**

Kyat

**OFFICIAL LANGUAGE**

Burmese

**POPULATION**

55.2 million

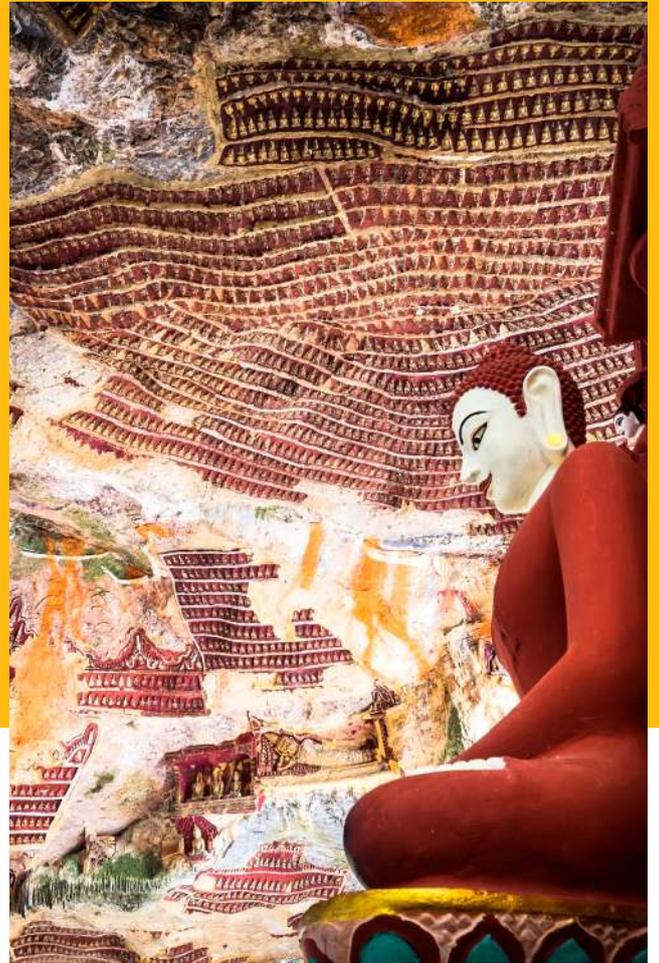
**TOTAL AREA**

676,578 km<sup>2</sup>

# MYANMAR DESTINATIONS

We would love to provide you with information about the entire country, but it would probably fill a large book and be rather impractical, so instead, here is a glimpse of the destinations we deal with – many of which are off the regular tourist trails and provide you with a unique opportunity for adventure and insight into the destination and its people.

If you wish to receive information about a destination not covered here, please contact our office in Yangon and we'll be happy to oblige.



## YANGON

Although border crossings from neighboring countries have increased its popularity in recent years, the main gateway for visitors to Myanmar is the former capital and economic center of the country, Yangon. It's a sprawling city and indeed deserves its epithet 'the garden city' with its tree-lined lanes and parks. The compact downtown area offers a colorful mix of people from all over the country – including those from Indian and Chinese descent – working and living in a setting of colonial buildings mixed with modern architecture. We will take you for a stroll through Pansodan Street with its colonial high court, banks and other grand buildings, dating back to the days of the British Empire. Just around the corner you can find the majestic Strand Hotel, a place not to be missed. When entering the building you can really feel the 'weight' of its history dating back more than 100 years! Many celebrities like George Orwell and Mick Jagger have stayed at The Strand.

One of the highlights of every visit to Yangon is, of course the Shwedagon Pagoda with over 2,000 years of history. This pagoda impresses even the most temple-fatigued tourist, as the atmosphere is somehow mystical, sacred and easy-going, all at the same time. People from all over the country visit the pagoda at least once in their lifetime. In addition to seeing thousands of devotees praying and meditating, you will also see youngsters walking around with their fiancées and families on special outings. A visit to Shwedagon Pagoda can take place at any time of the day, and although most guidebooks suggest visiting at the end of the day, we think the best time to visit is in the early morning before breakfast, or in the evening when it's quieter and more peaceful.



# YANGON SURROUNDING

Yangon also has plenty of other things to offer. Just follow in the footsteps of Aung San, the 'father of the nation' who is adored by every person in the country for his struggle against the British to gain independence. Other options are an active mountain bike tour to the other side of the Yangon River, where fresh air and rural life welcome you for a half-day of soft adventure. A meditation center in the suburbs of Yangon might be an alternative to experience peace of mind and learn about Buddhism. From Yangon you can make great daytrips to the countryside, like picturesque Twante pottery village, or the temples and pagodas in Bago. The birdlife and natural beauty will impress nature lovers on a boat trip through the Moeyungyi Wetlands, only a short drive from Yangon. Khiri

Travel has also developed a special day tour along the old Dhammazedi Road, which brings you by bike, boat, and on foot, to local communities outside the city, where you can enjoy a home-cooked lunch with a local family. From Yangon, several multiple day trips provide you with the chance to explore more of the countryside, or to simply enjoy the beach. A five-hour drive to the west will bring you, via the umbrella making city of Patheingyi, to the beaches in Ngwe Saung with a beautiful long, wide beach with crystal clear waters, offering the ultimate in laidback relaxation. There is a good choice of boutique hotels in different categories and there are plenty of local restaurants in the village.

## MON & KAYIN STATE

These two states remained relatively untouched by tourism and so beautiful that many visitors wonder why they are not more popular. Home to paddy fields; ancient civilizations; the beautiful Thanlwin River; monasteries; and Kayin communities living in forests and limestone mountains, these destinations bordering Thailand have a lot to offer the intrepid traveler. Going east from Yangon by train, bus or private car, you can explore one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Myanmar Buddhists and maybe one of the strangest sites for tourists: Kyaiktiyo Pagoda, also known as Golden Rock. A large gold leaf-covered rock with a small pagoda built on top, is believed to be balanced precariously on a strand of Buddha's hair right on the edge of a mountain and looks as if it could tumble into the ravine below at any moment. The site can be reached by truck, cable car, or by walking all the way to the top, which if completed three times in one's lifetime is supposed to bring good luck.

We continue south from the Golden Rock to arrive in Mawlamyine (Moulmein), the capital of Mon State, a sleepy town where time seems to have stood still. You can visit the colonial area, the beautiful Sein Don Monastery, the Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery and Khiri Travel can arrange a local Mon-style lunch at a local house. Hpa An in Kayin State can be reached by boat from Mawlamyine, a great trip with stops in U Na Auk village to see the impressive temples. The town itself is famous for the caves – a stunning landscape with paddy fields and limestone mountains, where you can do short walks, or paddle leisurely with a kayak through the creeks.



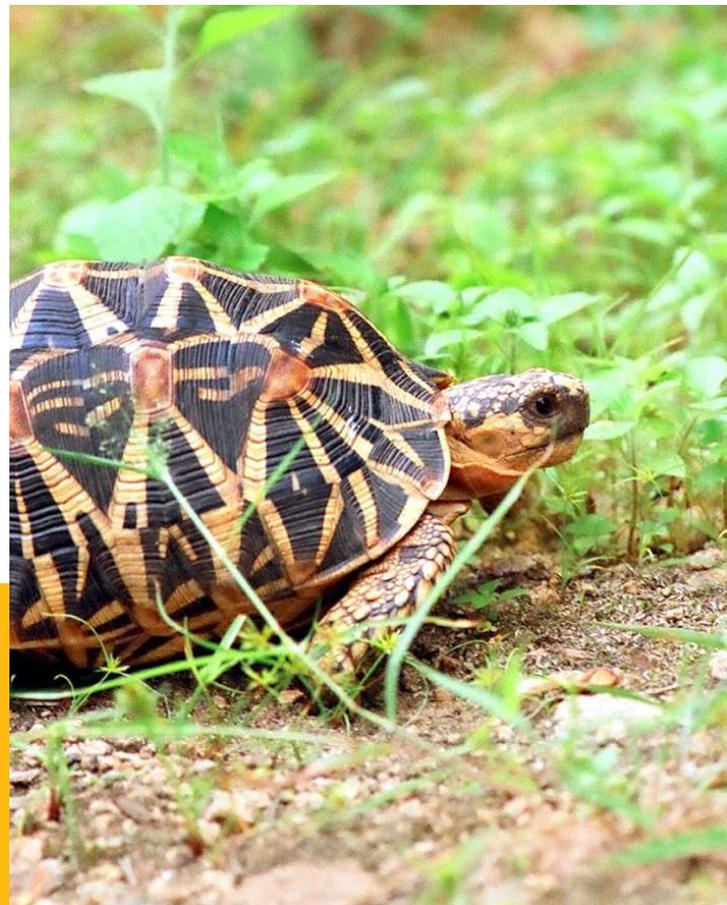
# MANDALAY

We leave Yangon behind us and travel by train, bus or plane to Mandalay, the former royal capital of Myanmar and home to the palace of King Thibaw, the last king of Myanmar. Moving the capital city from one location to another has been a common practice in Myanmar for centuries and still is today. The city Nay Pyi Taw, about a four-hour drive south of Mandalay, was declared the new capital of Myanmar in 2005. While Mandalay city today has lost much of its old charm, the former capital cities surrounding Mandalay are fascinating to visit. In Amarapura, one of our favourite, you can walk over the wooden U Bein Bridge to the other side of the lake, chat with the locals and stroll around the big monastery complex. Sagaing hill is dotted with small stupas and is famous for its silver workshops, while a bit further on is Inwa, also known as Ava, where a horse cart is a great way to discover the ruins of the ancient Ava Kingdom. The ruins at Paleik are worth a visit too, a place very few foreigners ever visit. In fact you sometimes feel like you are the first western person to discover these ancient temple ruins! The best experiences in Mandalay though, are biking through the countryside, or cruising leisurely by private boat down the Irrawaddy River.



# MANDALAY SURROUNDING

If you would like to explore more about the surroundings of Mandalay, a journey south, towards Bagan is a great option to see more of the rural village life. Having the village of Yandabo perfectly located by the Ayarwaddy River, it is a stop worth mentioning for everyone curious about the dry-zone and a possible river cruise combined with a active day exploring a pottery village. Bhamo is a starting point for long and easygoing river cruises down the Irrawaddy River passing traditional villages and towns like Katha where George Orwell and all characters from "Burmese Days" were stationed in the colonial period. Myitkyina is the capital of Kachin state and home of the yearly Kachin New Year festival. About 2 hour's south of Mandalay (in the direction of Bagan) Khiri Travel helped setting up the Burmese star tortoise information centre in a breeding centre in Min Zon Taung national park, the breeding project of this almost extinct and very cute tortoise is one of the most successful in the world and worth visiting.



# EASTERN SHAN STATE

Eastern Shan state has been closed for foreigners till 2013 when Khiri Travel was the first to be granted permission to pass the area with BBC's Top Gear film crew. Since then it is possible to apply for a special travel permit through this truly stunning area with remote hill tribe villages, high mountains and spectacular views. Certainly one of the last frontiers in travel and an trip that will surely yield many fascinating travel stories at the dining table when you're back home. A truly exciting way to travel further east than Inle lake, and emerge with local cultures and enjoy a road trip not many have made.

Daily flights from Heho Airport to Tachileik give you the opportunity to visit Keng Tung (Kyaing Tong), which is a two-hour drive from Tachileik Airport. It is one of the most attractive towns in Shan State with a huge local market and plenty of possibilities to hike to hill tribe villages living around the town. An overland trip through eastern Shan State is also a great new addition.



## BAGAN

An icon of tourism in Myanmar, the temples of Bagan never fail to impress. Over 2,000 temples, most of them around 800 years old, are spread out over an area covering roughly 8 km<sup>2</sup>. It's this landscape that makes the place so special. The best way to explore it is to have your own private transport, so that you can pick and choose where you want to go. Doing this by bicycle, horse and cart, or car, are three of the most popular options. Famous temples like Ananda, Thatbyinnyu, Sulamani and Dhammayangyi are the most architecturally well-preserved, but they are also the most popular with tourists. At other ruins you are more likely to find yourself alone, giving you ample time to peruse and contemplate these ancient structures, without any distractions. Bring a torch and we'll take you to the Minnanthu Temple area, which has some real treasures. In addition to visiting the temple sites, you can also opt for an aerial view of Old Bagan, floating with the wind in a hot air balloon. Alternatively, you could try one of our food adventures with a focus on local cuisine, a bike tour to remote areas, or a jeep safari to rural villages, among other options.



## BAGAN SURROUNDING

West of Bagan on the other side of the Irrawaddy River is where the mountains of Chin State begin. One of the most exciting activities to do in this area is the Khiri Jeep safari, which takes you to traditional villages where tourists hardly ever step foot. It's a great way to observe local life, or to learn more about the water well project Khiri Travel is supporting in this area. A day trip to Pakokku and returning by boat is another leisurely option worth doing, especially if you don't have time to take a cruise all the way from Mandalay to Bagan.

You can enjoy a fantastic trip to Mount Victoria in Chin State. Traditional villages and spectacular views make up for the bumpy roads and dust you will have to endure! Some of the older women in the villages still have their faces tattooed – an old custom in Chin State. From the base camp, we hike to the top of the mountain, which is over 3,000 meters high. Alternatively, if you're into really remote trekking, we can take you for a four-day trek over the southern Chin mountains, finishing up with a boat trip to Mrauk U.

A long road trip, or train ride southwards, will bring you to places like Salay with its historical buildings, Yenangyaung, Pyay and the ruins of the ancient city of Thayekhittaya – also known as Sri Ksetra. From here it's a four-hour drive to Yangon, or an eight-hour drive through the Rakhine Mountains to Ngapali Beach. In some of these hidden destinations you will see temples from the Pagan Kingdom that you won't find in any of the guide books.

# INLE LAKE

One of the highlights while traveling in Myanmar is a visit to Inle Lake in Shan State. Inle Lake is more than 800 meters above sea level and has a pleasant cool climate. A day trip by motorboat on the lake will bring you to villages built on stilts, floating gardens and colorful markets frequented by different ethnic groups living on or around the lake. Many boutique hotels can be found along its shores and in the town of Nyaungshwe, a primary destination for visitors, just north of the lake. To the south in the town of Indein is the Shwe Indein Pagoda, a temple with an impressive collection of stupas that date back to the 12th century. Other possible activities include trekking to traditional Pa'O villages, where you can try their excellent home-cooked vegetarian food; a bike or kayak trip on the lake; or a visit to Nyaungshwe, home to a lively market and the former palace of the last saopha, or Shan prince, of Nyaungshwe.



# KAYAH STATE

Kayah State is Myanmar's smallest state, tucked away between the southern part of Inle Lake and the north of Kayin State. It is a region with diverse ethnic groups, who follow different beliefs and customs, and have lived for centuries in this isolated, mountainous part of Myanmar on the Thai border. Travel by train, car and boat to discover several communities, their customs, beliefs and fascinating stories. The Kayah have many different tribes and one of the most well-known is the 'longneck' women. A recently set-up community program makes it possible to meet the men, women and children living in these communities and ask them directly about why they wear brass coils around their necks; how they feel about this custom, and anything else you would like to know. The best time to visit Kayah State is during the 'green season', from June to September, when the scenery is lush and beautiful.

# INLE LAKE SURROUNDING

There are several interesting places around Inle Lake that are worth visiting. The former British hill station of Kalaw has a British colonial ambience with its old villas, churches and schools. The town is inhabited by Burmese, Nepali and Indians, as well as several hill tribes like the Padaung and the Pa'O. Kalaw is the starting point for rewarding day treks, or longer overnight treks to Inle Lake. It's also a starting point for trips to Pindaya, which is famous for the Pindaya Caves that are filled with almost 8,000 Buddha statues. The Danu trails cover an area west of Pindaya and are an excellent alternative to the busier trekking routes near Kalaw. Most interesting in Kalaw is certainly the elephant conservation camp recently set up to protect elephants and to educate the local population about reforestation. A highlight of your trip to Myanmar could even be washing and feeding the elephants at the camp. South of Inle Lake is the lesser-known, but equally beautiful Samkar Lake, an excellent hideaway for an overnight trip from Inle, or coming from Loikaw.



# MRAUK U

The Kingdom of Arakan, based in Mrauk U, reached its peak during the 15th century. In those days Mrauk U was a busy trading port that was frequently visited by Dutch, Portuguese, Middle Eastern and Asian traders. The capital Mrauk U was one of the richest cities in Asia, comparable to Amsterdam or London. What's left today is a historical site with 700 temples, built in a very different style from the Bagan temples, which look more like forts at first sight. Mrauk U can be reached by car from Sittwe, an adventurous trip with some interesting attractions along the way. You can then return by boat to Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine State and fly from there straight back to Yangon, or to Ngapali Beach. Mrauk U is also a gateway for day trips into Chin State over the Lemro River to see the Chin women with their tattooed faces.

# NGAPALI BEACH

Ngapali Beach is the prime beach destination in Myanmar, boasting pristine white sandy beaches and crystal clear water. It's a beautiful, unspoiled place with friendly locals, excellent seafood restaurants and several quality boutique hotels. What more could you ask for at the end, or perhaps the beginning of your trip to Myanmar? Forget about hordes of tourists, high-rise buildings and noisy entertainment venues, Ngapali is a place to simply relax, swim, snorkel and explore local village communities, such as Maung Shwe Lay, in idyllic St. Andrew's Bay.

Ngapali Beach can be reached by air from Yangon, while more adventurous travelers can book an overland trip from Yangon through southern Rakhine State, enjoying the beautiful scenery and a number of attractions along the way, before arriving at the excellent Arakan Nature Lodge on a beautiful stretch of empty beach, a stone's throw from the Yangon-Gwa-Ngapali main road. It's a part of Myanmar that has hardly been seen by outsiders since colonial times.



## THE SOUTHERN PART OF MYANMAR

The most southern parts of Myanmar offer some beautiful little towns like Dawei and Myeik, where little has changed in a century. Colonial heritage buildings are a reminder of former times when these towns were important trading posts. Further south the Myeik Archipelago is often described as a last frontier when it comes to tourism development – a beautifully pristine region consisting of more than 800 islands, varying in size from very small to hundreds of square kilometres, whose isolation ensures a huge variety of flora and fauna.

Myanmar has many faces and a wide range of destinations that will keep you busy for as long as you are free. Now is the time to visit Myanmar, when economic sanctions have been lifted and democracy is beginning to take a hold – an opportunity for the people of Myanmar to build a future.

You'll be surprised how friendly, welcoming and curious the Burmese are when it comes to meeting foreigners; in Burmese language there is no word for 'tourist', there is only a word for 'guest'.

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