

MYANMAR

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

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



FAST FACTS

OFFICIAL NAME

Republic of the Union of Myanmar

CAPITAL CITY

Nay Pyi Taw

TOTAL AREA

676,578 km²

BOUNDARIES

Bangladesh, China, India, Laos and Thailand

CURRENCY

Kyat

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Myanmar

POPULATION

55.2 million

PEOPLE

Bamar (68%), minorities include Shan, Rakhine, Chinese Burmese, Mon and Kachin

RELIGION

Buddhism (Theravada)

TIME ZONE

GMT +6.30 hours

INTERNATIONAL DIALING CODE

+95

ELECTRICITY

220V AC 50 Hz

DRIVING

Right hand side

BORDER CROSSINGS

This section is very sensitive to change as Myanmar's border crossings with Thailand and China are constantly opening and closing, often without any advance notice. However, the majority of tourists arrive and leave the country by air, via 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 – Myawaddy

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 not possible to enter Myanmar via this border crossing.

WITH BANGLADESH

- No border crossing open / allowed

WITH INDIA

- Moreh / Tamu

It is one of the frequently land border crossing used. A special pre-arranged permit is necessary to cross.

- Rihkhawdar-Zowkhawtar

A special pre-arranged permit is necessary to cross.



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

Obtaining an e-Visa is one of the easiest options for traveling to Myanmar. Officially, the process takes three working days, with urgent approvals ready within 24 hours. However, the procedure is usually much quicker, generally taking less than a day, or just a few hours – except for bank holidays. Please apply for an e-Visa at the official website of the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population: <https://evisa.moip.gov.mm>

You can also apply for a visa at a Myanmar embassy in your own country. Please contact the embassy for more details. Most nationalities can apply for a Tourist Visa for Myanmar that is valid for 28 days and occupies a full page in your passport. Its validity expires 90 days after the visa is issued so don't apply too early. Please make sure you have enough pages in your passport. Your passport must also be valid for a minimum of 6 more months.

Different embassies have different rules to apply for a tourist visa. Generally, you will need two or three photos and enough cash to pay for your visa. Some embassies will ask you to come in person to apply for the visa, or they will ask for your résumé to check where you have been working in the past, and they may even ask for your planned travel itinerary. It usually takes about three working days to get your visa

PLEASE NOTE: The e-Visa is valid for arrivals at Yangon, Nay Pyi Taw and Mandalay airports, as well as three overland borders with Thailand.



TRAVEL INSURANCE

Khiri Travel will do everything possible to ensure that our clients have a safe and enjoyable trip. However, traveling does include a certain amount of risk 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 flights, delays, medical problems, baggage loss or damage.

MONEY

There are ATM machines in Myanmar, but it's important to note that they only accept Mastercard 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 exchange booths and banks. Make sure the banknotes look brand new without anything handwritten on them and ensure they are not torn or faded, otherwise they won't be accepted.

The Kyat is the official currency of Myanmar and is available in denominations of 10,000; 5,000; 1,000; 500; and 200. In the last few years the Kyat has fluctuated considerably against the US Dollar. Check online, or ask your hotel or guide about the current rate and where to exchange. There are bank exchange counters all over the country, as

well as at major airports.

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

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

HEALTH

Health risks in Myanmar include: cholera, dengue fever, hepatitis, Japanese encephalitis, malaria, rabies and typhoid. We strongly recommend you visit either your personal physician or a travel health clinic, four to eight weeks before your departure. Up-to-date professional advice should be sought before deciding how to proceed with vaccinations, as medical opinion is divided over the effectiveness. The risk of malaria exists all year round throughout the country, except in bigger towns such as Yangon and Mandalay.

Medical facilities comparable with western standards are very limited in Myanmar and can only really be found in Yangon and Mandalay. Many doctors have been educated in Europe (especially in the UK) but have limited access to modern medicines or up to date information.

All travelers visiting Myanmar with Khiri Travel must show proof of health insurance upon arrival in the country. This way, if there is an emergency, we can assist and make sure you will receive the necessary medical attention in Myanmar, or in Thailand's capital, Bangkok, where the best medical facilities are available.

CLIMATE

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

March – May (Summer)

The whole country can be hot, especially in the afternoon – around 35 degrees Celsius in the middle of the day – so you are advised to plan sightseeing more in the mornings and evenings. Landscapes are a bit dryer – an excellent time to visit the beaches and higher parts of Myanmar, like for example, Shan State.

November – February (Winter)

This is 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 2016 saw rainier days than July or August of that year. Daytime temperatures are around 30 degrees Celsius. It's a good time to visit any place in the country, but the downside is that it can be busy around 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.

June – mid October (Green Season)

The temperatures drop to about 25 - 30 degrees Celsius, and the scenery is beautifully green. Sightseeing is not too hot and not too dusty. It's a perfect time to visit Bagan, Mandalay and Shan states (Hsipaw, Kyaukme, Pyin Oo Lwin, Kalaw, Inle Lake) where there isn't too much rain – mostly brief showers at the end of the day. Avoid the beaches during this time, as coastal areas are prone to storms and most hotels are closed over this period. Yangon can get quite a lot of rain as well, so it is better just to spend a few nights there. However, sightseeing is great as there aren't many other tourists around in the green season – it's Myanmar at its best! During this period there are on average less than 10 rainy days a month upcountry. The green season is generally when we advise our closest friends to visit as it's an excellent period with some great advantages.



FOOD & DRINK

All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, or making ice should have first been boiled or sterilized. Bottled water is safe to drink and is available throughout the country. Avoid dairy products that are likely to contain unpasteurized milk. Only eat well-cooked meats 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, while chopsticks are often used for Chinese food or noodles. In the countryside, people will eat as a family; sitting on the floor and sharing the various dishes. Traditional Myanmar food consists of one or two curries, not very spicy, a lot of steamed rice and some pickles or salad, as well as fish paste. The traditional food of central Myanmar can be a bit greasy. Make sure you also try the dishes of all the different states, including from Shan and Rakhine states, as well as Chinese, Indian and Thai food.

HERE ARE SOME OF OUR 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 believe a guest should always be served the best and richest food, hence a bit of extra oil is added!

Mohinga is the national breakfast dish and can be found on the street 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 is often accompanied with glasses of Myanmar draft beer.

Shan noodles are a delicious dish originally from Shan State (each city in the state has its own taste), but nowadays readily available throughout 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.

Lah Pet Thoke, pickled tealeaf salad, is a very popular traditional snack served with sesame, peanuts, dried shrimps, garlic and chilli.



TIPPING & TAXIS

Tipping in Myanmar is not customary. Fares are often rounded off due to lack of small currency denominations, or you are given a candy, a tissue or even a cigarette as 'change'. However, in a relatively poor country like Myanmar, tipping is highly appreciated.

In more upscale restaurants a tip of between 5-10 percent is recommended. In other places, leaving small change, or 1 USD is enough. Taxi and trishaw drivers usually don't expect any tip at all.

Guides and drivers of privately rented vehicles do expect to be tipped. For guides a tip of between 3-5 USD per person per day is customary, while for drivers it is between 1-2 USD per day. Of course, tipping is always related to the quality of service rendered.

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 percent of GDP is spent on food), education and medical care. Even Burmese people with a slightly higher-than-average income are very generous and giving to poor, elderly and people-in-need, as this 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 heads, 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 them. This is always a good ice-breaker to start a conversation.

Gifts for schools, orphanages, local hospitals etc. are always greatly appreciated – the best option is actually to buy gifts locally at the market in Myanmar – it's cheaper, good fun, better for the local economy, and you can be sure the receiver knows how to use it. An added bonus is that it saves you space in your luggage!

COMMUNICATION

Communication infrastructure has improved a lot and mobile networks are now fast and cheap in Myanmar. The country has only a few roaming agreements so even if your SIM card does work, it may be very expensive to use. Buying a local SIM card is easy and a temporary telephone number will cost you only about 2 USD (MPT, Telenor and Oredoo) and can be easily bought in shops anywhere in the country, ensuring you have all-day access to the internet.

Most hotels offer free Wi-Fi, though you will have a much faster connection with a local SIM card. For only about 10 USD you can be connected for two to three weeks, this is usually enough to cover most people's vacation.



CULTURE 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 follow:

- In Myanmar, feet convey messages. Do not point with your feet. Pointing with your feet is disrespectful.
- Also, don't stretch out your legs when you're sitting – tuck your feet away or sit cross-legged. Your feet should certainly never face a Buddha image or statue.
- Beckoning someone with your finger is considered an aggressive challenge and not very polite. However, if you beckon someone with all your fingers and your palm faced toward the ground, it is not considered impolite.
- Never pat a monk on the back or touch his robe. Monks are very revered in Myanmar and they observe many rules, study the dharma, practice meditation, and are highly respected in Myanmar society.
- Giving money to children is not advisable, as it helps to create a dependency on tourism. We recommend that you purchase items such as books and writing materials, to give away as gifts or to donate. This will also help support Myanmar's local economy.
- Giving money or other things creates children's dependency on tourism. Visitors should consider the saying: Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.

When in Myanmar, don't touch or pat anyone on the head. The head is considered to be the most esteemed part of the body. Touching someone on the head is considered an aggressive gesture.

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



LANGUAGE

Burmese language is spoken throughout the country along with over a hundred other languages and dialects! Some basic English is spoken, like numbers used for counting, they are widely used among Burmese people.

Travelers generally don't have too many problems in basic communication as there is usually somebody nearby who speaks some English and is willing to help, or is eager to meet foreign visitors.

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 valuables laying around in your hotel room, or elsewhere, but to carry your money with you, or place it in the safe in your hotel. Besides the normal precautions, avoid getting directly involved in any political activities in the country.

LINKS & READING

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

- The website of the private English language newspapers, called Myanmar Times, Eleven Media, or Frontier magazine.
- A database of Burmese-related books and articles can be found on: www.burmalibrary.org
- For the latest news on Myanmar, the best way to be updated is to Google 'Myanmar' in the news section.

Before visiting Myanmar, you may find it helpful or interesting to read about the history, culture and politics of the country. Different authors have different points of view, so always keep this in mind when reading any book about Myanmar, whether it is written by someone in the country, or by opposition groups living outside the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

River of Lost Footsteps: Thant Myint U – written by the grandson of the former UN secretary general U Thant, a balanced version of recent Myanmar history.

Lonely Planet Myanmar – this iconic guidebook is almost a must 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, an interesting insight into Shan royal history.

Burmese Days by George Orwell is a classic on Myanmar. Written during the colonial times, it provides excellent insight into Myanmar psychology, thinking and the behavior of its people.

The Gentleman in the Parlour by William Somerset-Maugham, one of Britain's greatest authors, who made a trip to Southeast Asia in the late twenties. Burma was one of the countries Somerset-Maugham visited.

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 and bronze sculpture to court dress in Shan State.

Splendour in Wood: The Buddhist Monasteries of Burma by Sylvia Fraser-Lu – a beautiful book with very detailed drawings and pictures.

Nor Iron Bars a Cage by Ma Thanegi, or as she calls it, "my prison book", about the three years she spent in Insein Jail as a political prisoner.

Myanmar: Burma in Style: An Illustrated History and Guide by Caroline Courtauld. This is a great illustrated account of the history, politics and culture of the people and the country.

Children of the Revolution by Feroze Dada – a true story about a Burmese freedom fighter, a monk and 600 abandoned children.

Miss Burma by Charmaine Craig – a poignant story of a family during the most violent and turbulent years of world history.

A Burmese Heart by YMV Han and Tinsa Maw-Naing, about the history after WWII – mainly set in Yangon and focusing on those people that brought Myanmar into the modern era.



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