

Myanmar



WARNING: A military coup took place on 1 February 2021, sparking widespread unrest leading to many deaths, injuries and arrests. Explosions and attacks have occurred in Yangon and other parts of the country. There have been widespread detentions, including of foreigners. A nationwide state of emergency remains in force, with nighttime curfews enforced in many cities including Yangon. Avoid facilities and vehicles linked to security forces and military administration, monitor local media closely, and keep in regular contact with your embassy.

On 27 October 2023, ethnic armed organisations launched a large-scale offensive in [Northern](#) and [Eastern Myanmar](#) from the Chinese-Myanmar border. Martial law is imposed in part of Shan State, and border crossings along the Chinese-Myanmar border are suspended. There are reports that price of many necessities is soaring.

Many governments advise against all travel to Myanmar, though the main tourist circuit comprising of [Yangon](#), [Mandalay](#), [Bagan](#) and [Inle Lake](#) is far-removed from the violence and generally safe to visit — corroborated by the UK government's travel advice.

Government travel advisories

Australia (<https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/destinations/asia/myanmar>) • Canada (<https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/myanmar>) • Ireland (<https://www.dfa.ie/travel/travel-advice/a-z-list-of-countries/myanmar-burma>) • New Zealand (<https://www.safetravel.govt.nz/myanmar>) • United Kingdom (<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/myanmar>) • United States (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/burma-travel-advisory.html>) • Singapore (<https://www.mfa.gov.sg/countries-regions/m/myanmar/travel-page>)

(Information last updated 13 Nov 2023)

Myanmar (မြန်မာ *myanma*), or **Burma** is a country in [Southeast Asia](#).

Since the 1960s, the country, which was previously a part of the [British Raj](#), has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. For a considerable period, Myanmar has been afflicted with political instability, sectarian violence, corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and a prolonged history of colonial exploitation that paid scant attention to human development.

Setting aside its challenges, the country features awe-inspiring ancient temples, lively local markets, and captivating landscapes, such as unspoiled beaches, picturesque hills, and verdant forests. The genuine warmth of the Burmese people, combined with delectable cuisine, creates an ideal destination for gastronomes and culture aficionados alike.

Regions

Southern Myanmar
(*Ayeyarwady, Bago, Yangon*)

The lowlands of the Irrawaddy Delta with the largest city and former capital Yangon.

Central Myanmar
(*Magway, Mandalay, Naypyitaw*)

Mandalay, historical and archaeological sites and cool hill towns.

Western Myanmar
(*Rakhine, Chin*)

Remote mountainous regions and some lovely beaches on the Bay of Bengal.

Northern Myanmar
(*Sagaing, Kachin*)

A huge, fractious region including the southern reaches of the Himalayas and many tribes.

Eastern Myanmar
(*Shan, Kayah*)

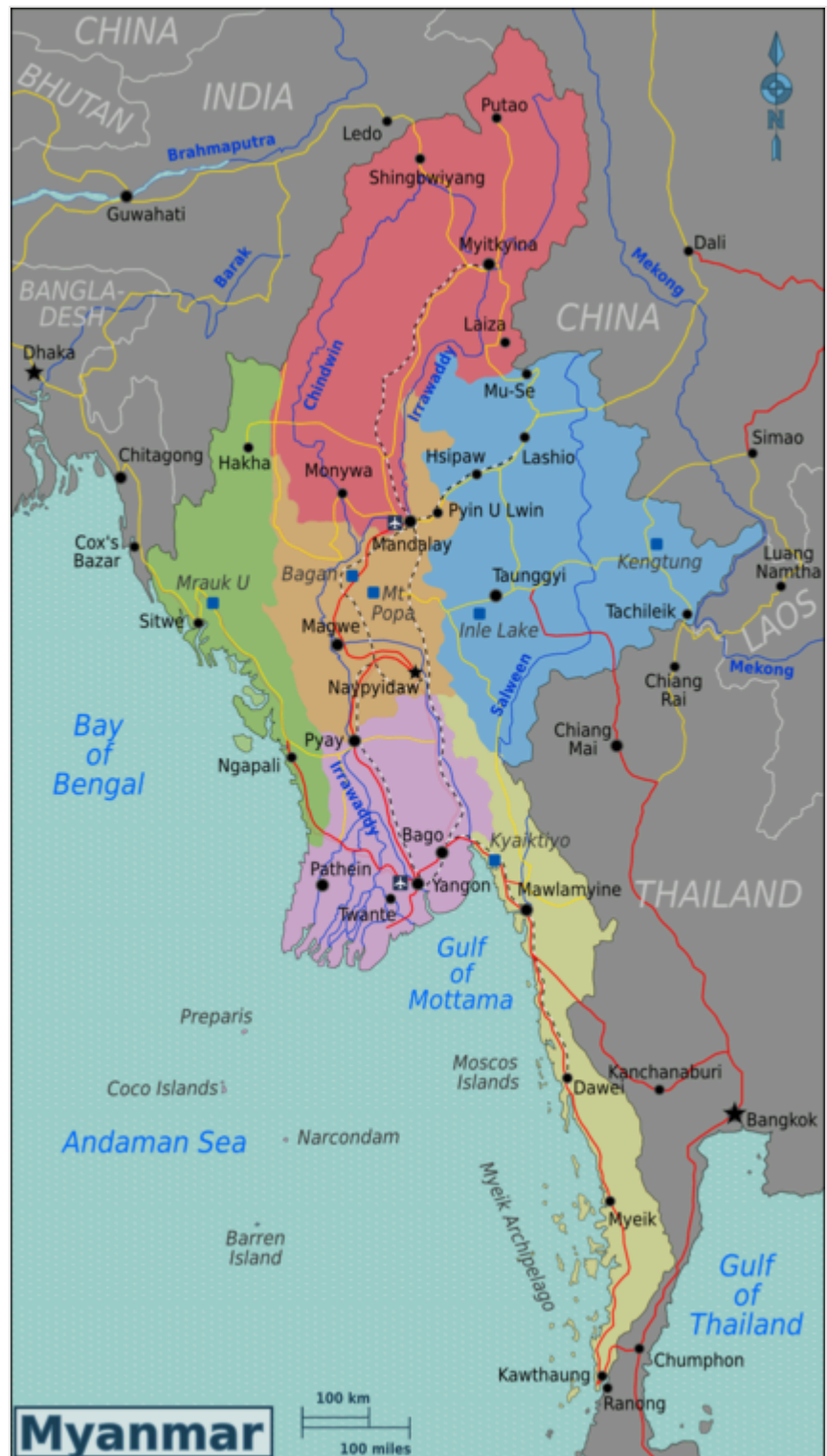
The infamous Golden Triangle and a bewildering number of ethnic groups.

Southeastern Myanmar
(*Tanintharyi, Mon, Kayin*)

The southern coastal stretch bordering Thailand with a vast number of offshore islands.

Cities

- **1 Naypyidaw** (*formerly Pyinmana*) — newly designated capital of the country
- **2 Bago** (*formerly Pegu*) — historic city near Yangon full of Buddhist sights
- **3 Kawthaung** — beach town in the far south which is as much like Thailand as Myanmar gets
- **4 Mandalay** — former capital of the Konbaung Dynasty built around the Mandalay Royal Palace and main commercial centre of Upper Myanmar
- **5 Mawlamyine** (*Moulmein*) — capital of Mon State and the third largest city
- **6 Pyin U Lwin** (*Maymyo*) — a cool town (in both temperature and attractions) which is a former British colonial hill station




Myanmar regions - Color-coded map



- **7 Taunggyi** — capital of Shan State in the heart of the Golden Triangle
- **8 Twante** — a delta town that is famous for pottery
- **9 Yangon** (*formerly Rangoon*) — the economic centre, known for its pagodas and colonial architecture


Other destinations

- **1 Bagan** — an archaeological zone with thousands of ancient pagodas near the banks of the Irrawaddy River, and a  UNESCO World Heritage Site
- **2 Inle Lake** — a large shallow lake famous for boat trips, visiting floating villages inhabited by the Intha people, hiking, and also a source of excellent silk
- **3 Kengtung** — between Mong La (on the border with China) and Tachileik (on the border with Thailand) in the Golden Triangle, known for the *Ann* (black teeth people) and *Akha* tribes and trekking
- **4 Kyaiktiyo** — a gold-gilded rock sitting atop a cliff and a major pilgrimage site
- **5 Mount Popa** — an extinct volcano regarded as the Mount Olympus of Myanmar, a green oasis high above the hot plains and an easy day trip from Bagan
- **6 Mrauk U** — former capital of the Rakhine Kingdom, with many ancient pagodas that serve as a reminder of that era
- **7 Ngapali** — beach resort in western Rakhine State, on the Bay of Bengal
- **8 Ngwe Saung** — longest stretch of beach in Ayeyarwaddy (English: Irrawaddy) Division, white sandy beach and crystal clear water are the features of Ngwe Saung Beach
- **9 Pyay** — a town on the Irrawaddy River midway between Yangon and Bagan, known for its archaeological site *Sri Kittara*, the ancient Pyu capital from 2 to 9 CE
- **10 Patheingyi** — a river town in the Irrawaddy delta, known for manufacture of umbrellas, gateway to Chuang Tha and Ngwe Saung Beaches

Understand

History

Like most of Southeast Asia's countries, Myanmar's people and history is a glorious mishmash of settlers and invaders from all fronts. The Mon and the Pyu are thought to have come from India, while the now dominant Bamar (Burmese) migrated through Tibet and, by 849, had founded a powerful kingdom centred on Bagan. The ethnic diversity of the region, and the dominance of the Bamar people in the central plains, set up the geopolitical struggles between them and the multitude of smaller ethnic groups surrounding, which have continued unabated until the present day. From the 9th century to the 19th century, the Burmese empire grew through conquests of Thailand (Ayutthaya) and India (Manipur), and shrank under attacks from China and internal rebellions.

	
Capital	Naypyidaw
Currency	kyat (MMK)
Population	53.3 million (2017)
Electricity	230 volt / 50 hertz (Europlug, AC power plugs and sockets: British and related types, Schuko, BS 1363)
Country code	+95
Time zone	UTC+06:30, Asia/Yangon
Emergencies	199 (police), 191 (fire department), 192 (emergency medical services)
Driving side	right
edit on Wikidata	

Eventually, Britain conquered Burma over a period of 62 years (1824-1886) and incorporated it into its Indian Empire, and King Thibaw, the last Burmese monarch, was exiled to Ratnagiri in what is today India. Like in their other colonies, the British maintained control partly through a "divide and conquer" strategy, in which they deliberately stoked tensions between different ethnic and religious groups, resulting in ethnic and religious conflicts that have never been resolved. For example, bureaucrats were imported from India, and other government positions tended to be manned by locals from the smaller ethnic groups. Burma was administered as a province of India until 1937 when it became a separate colony. During the Second World War, Burma was a major battleground as the Allies fought the Japanese for dominance over Asia. The Burma Road was built to get supplies to China. The Thailand-Burma railway (the so-called "Death Railway") from Kanchanaburi in Thailand over the River Kwai to Burma was built by the Japanese using forced labour — Allied prisoners-of-war, indentured Thai labourers, Burmese people and other Southeast Asians. They had to work in appalling conditions and a great number of them died (estimated at 80,000) during construction of the railway. Large parts of Western Burma, particularly the hilly areas bordering India and the city of Mandalay, were severely damaged during the war.



Resting Buddha statue in Bago

Burmese independence fighters led by **General Aung San** initially cooperated with the Japanese to oust the British, with the Japanese promising to grant independence to Burma in exchange. However, life under Japanese occupation was even more brutal than life under British colonialism, and many Burmese were killed, such as in the Kalagong massacre. Aung San subsequently switched allegiance and helped the allies win Burma back from the Japanese. Aung San subsequently led negotiations with the British for Burmese independence after the end of World War II, and the British agreed in 1947 to grant independence to Burma the following year, though Aung San himself was assassinated later in 1947 and never lived to see his dream come true. Independence from the British under the name **Union of Burma** was finally attained on 4 January 1948, and General Aung San is regarded by most Burmese people to be their father of independence.

The new union brought together various states defined by ethnic identity, many of whom had centuries-long histories of autonomy from and struggles against each other. In the interest of securing their collective independence from Britain, the tribes reached an agreement to submit to collective governance—with power sharing among the ethnicities and states—for ten years, after which each tribe would be afforded the right to secede from the union. The terms of this "Pinlon Agreement" were enshrined in the 1947/1948 constitution of the new Union of Burma. The new central government of the nation quickly worked to consolidate its power, marginalising and angering tribal leaders and setting off ethnic armed conflict that has continued unabated until the present day. In 1961, more than 200 ethnic leaders from the Shan people, Kachin people, Red Karen, Karen people, Chin peoples, Mon people and Rakhine people met with ethnic Bamar (Burmese) central government authorities to draft a new form of government which would ensure the tribes both autonomy and self-determination within a federal system.

The new government was never formed. Nevertheless, up until Ne Win's coup in 1962, Burma was regarded as one of the most developed and fastest growing economies in Asia, and widely touted as a contender to be the next Japan. Military leader General Ne Win led a coup d'état which ousted the democratically elected government in 1962, and installed himself as leader. General Ne Win dominated

the government from 1962 to 1988, first as military ruler, then as self-appointed president, and later as political kingpin. Under Ne Win's rule, widespread corruption and nepotism led the Burmese economy into a downward spiral from which it has never fully recovered. Pro-democracy demonstrations in 1988 were violently crushed, with general Saw Maung taking over in a coup and installing the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) to rule the country, now renamed **Myanmar**.

Multiparty legislative elections were held in 1990, with the main opposition party - the National League for Democracy (NLD) - winning a landslide victory (392 of 489 seats). But SLORC refused to hand over power, instead placing NLD leader and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi (daughter of national hero Aung San) under house arrest, which she has endured for 14 of the last 20 years.



Aung San Suu Kyi



Today Myanmar, a resource-rich country, suffers from pervasive government controls, inefficient economic policies, and rural poverty. What was once one of the richest and most developed countries in Asia has since slumped into poverty due to widespread corruption. The junta took steps in the early 1990s to liberalise price controls after decades of failure under the "Burmese Way to Socialism," but had to reinstate subsidised prices on staples in the face of food riots, upon which the democracy movement grafted its agenda. The government called out troops and the rioters were defiant until the monks intervened: standing between both sides, they told everyone to go home and they did. The riots caused overseas development assistance to cease and the government subsequently nullified the results of the 1990 legislative elections.

In response to the government's attack in May 2003 on Aung San Suu Kyi and her convoy, the USA imposed new economic sanctions against Myanmar, including bans on imports of products from Myanmar and on provision of financial services by US citizens.

The summer of 2007 was marked by demonstrations against the military government which were again brutally suppressed. The demonstrations started in August, apparently in an uncoordinated manner, as a protest against a stiff hike in the price of petrol, but morphed into a more serious challenge to the government after three monks were beaten at a protest march in the town of Pakokku. The monks demanded an apology but none was forthcoming and soon processions of monks with begging bowls held upside down filled many cities (including Sittwe, Mandalay and Yangon). Yangon, particularly the area around Sule Pagoda in the downtown area, became the centre of these protests. While the monks marched, and many ordinary citizens came out in support of the monks, the world watched as pictures, videos, and blogs flooded the Internet. However, the government soon suppressed the protests by firing on crowds, arresting monks and closing monasteries, and temporarily shut down Internet communications with the rest of the world. This led the US, Australia, Canada and the European Union to impose additional sanctions, some targeting the families and finances of the military leaders.



A National League for
Democracy supporter in Yangon



Following elections in 2010, Burma began a process of liberalisation that has led to a reduction or removal of sanctions by many nations including the United States. In 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi was elected to the Burmese parliament and allowed to travel to Europe and North America. Censorship of foreign and local news was also suspended.



Protesters demonstrating against the 2021 military coup

In November 2015, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in the nationwide legislative elections and Htin Kyaw, a close ally of Aung San Suu Kyi, became president. In April 2016, Aung San Suu Kyi took office as State Counsellor, a post equivalent to prime minister, making her Myanmar's *de facto* head of government.

In February 2021, the military once again took power in a coup after a landslide victory by the NLD. Country-wide mass protests and a civil disobedience movement sprung up in the aftermath; protests were brutally crushed as the army killed hundreds of NLD supporters and democratic activists. Thousands of NLD and other pro-democracy politicians, including Aung San Suu Kyi, and community leaders were arrested. Peaceful protests still occur sporadically while other groups of protesters have taken up arms against the military regime, particularly in the border regions. Western countries have re-imposed economic sanctions on Myanmar as a result of the coup. As of mid-2024, the military regime controls less than half of the area of the country, and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) have been successfully mounting co-ordinated attacks with increasing confidence. However, this brutal civil war still has no end in sight.

Culture

Myanmar's culture is largely a result of Indian influences intertwined with local traditions and Chinese influences. This can be seen in the various stupas and temples throughout the country, which bear a distinct resemblance to those in northern India. As in neighbouring Thailand, Theravada Buddhism is the single largest religion. 88% of the population follows these Buddhist practices, and even some of the most remote villages will have a temple for people to pray at. Other religions which exist in smaller numbers include Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Animism and ancestor worship can also be found around the country, especially in the more distant, hill tribe regions.

One pre-Buddhist tradition that survives in Myanmar is the worship of the **Nats**, or traditional Burmese spirits, and you will see many spirit houses throughout the country dedicated to their worship. Following the spread of Theravada Buddhism, the worship of the Nats was incorporated into Burmese Buddhism, and they are today regarded as subordinates of the Buddha.

People

The dominant ethnic group in Myanmar is known as the Bamar, from which the original English name of the country, Burma, was derived. Besides the Bamar, Myanmar is also home to many minority ethnic groups and nationalities which have their own distinct cultures and languages. In addition to the native ethnic minorities, Myanmar is also home to ethnic Chinese and Indians whose ancestors migrated to Myanmar during the colonial period, most visible in the cities of Yangon and Mandalay. Myanmar is divided into fourteen administrative divisions, seven regions and seven states; generally speaking, the regions are Bamar-dominated, while the states are dominated by the respective ethnic minorities.

The government has been condemned by other nations for violence against the Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State, which borders Bangladesh. The government does not recognise them as citizens of Myanmar, but instead claims they are illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, a narrative embraced by the vast majority of Burmese despite the Rohingya's presence in Rakhine going back generations. Forced to flee to Bangladesh in large numbers, where they are also regarded as foreigners, many have lost their lives trying to seek refuge and work in Malaysia.



Boys in Yangon with thanaka paste on their faces

Generally speaking, most Myanmar people are incredibly friendly and polite, and will do their best to make you feel welcome in their country.

Politics

Myanmar, officially the **Republic of the Union of Myanmar** (ပြည်ထောင်စု သမ္မတ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်), is a presidential republic, with the president, who is appointed by the legislature, serving as both head of state and *de jure* head of government. He and his cabinet form the executive branch. The legislature is composed of the bicameral *Pyidaungsu Hluttaw* (Assembly of the Union), consisting of an upper *Amyotha Hluttaw* (House of Nationalities), and a lower *Pyithu Hluttaw* (House of Representatives). While a majority of the members of the legislature are popularly elected by the people, a quarter the seats are reserved for appointees from the military. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won a majority of seats in the 2015 election. As she is constitutionally barred from the presidency (by virtue of having married a foreigner), she instead served as the *de facto* head of government in the role of State Counsellor. As of February 2021, Myanmar is ruled by a military dictatorship.

Climate

Myanmar is considered to have 3 seasons. The hot season is usually from Mar–Apr. Temperatures then cool off during the rainy season from May–Oct. The peak tourism season is the cool season from Nov–Feb. Temperatures can climb as high as 36°C in Yangon in the hot season while in the cool season, noontime temperatures are usually a more bearable 32°C, with night temperatures falling to around 19°C. Mandalay is slightly cooler in the cool season, with temperatures falling as low as 13°C, while temperatures in the hot season can go as high as 37°C. Generally, Lower Myanmar, the area around Yangon, receives more rainfall than the drier Upper Myanmar (around Mandalay).

In the highlands such as Inle Lake and Pyin U Lwin, winter temperatures can fall below 10°C at night, while daytime temperatures tend to be very pleasant. Even in the summer, temperatures rarely climb above 32°C. Near the Indian border in Kachin State, there are permanently snow-capped mountains.

Read

- *From the Land of the Green Ghosts* by Pascal Khoo Thwe. A Cambridge-educated writer gives a touching account of his growing up as a Paduang-Hilltribe-Guyand in the difficult political environment before becoming a rebel. (ISBN 0007116829)
- *The Glass Palace* by Amitav Ghosh. A novel that spans a century, from British conquest to the modern day. A compelling account of how a family adapted to the changing times; provides much insight into Burmese culture.

- *The River of Lost Footsteps* by Thant Myint-U. Easily the most accessible history of Myanmar available. Read it before you go and you will marvel at how the once great and rich cities (like Martaban, Syriam, and Mrauk-U) have become the dingy and smoky villages of today. (ISBN 0374163421)
- *The Trouser People* by Andrew Marshall. The author follows in the footsteps of Victorian explorer, Sir George Scott. This book looks at lost British heritage as well as the Burmese tragedies occurring in the present. (ISBN 0140294457)
- *Finding George Orwell in Burma* by Emma Larkin. The pseudonymous author, a journalist, posed as a tourist to travel around Myanmar in the early 2000s, before the government opened up the country to the world. She documents a country trapped in the past, attempts to distinguish sympathetic storytellers from police informants, and retraces Orwell's life in Myanmar, who went on to give the world the vocabulary to criticise the repressive police state which the country had since become. (ISBN 1594200521)
- *Burma Chronicles* by Guy Delisle. A whimsical and humorous graphic novel about a family who moves to Yangon on assignment with an NGO in the mid-2000s. The protagonist, a stay-at-home dad, adapts to life in Burma with his infant son while his wife works long hours. An enjoyable and light read, this work does not dwell on human rights under the dictatorship, but rather focusses on the day-to-day life of the protagonist and the characters he meets. (ISBN 9781897299500)



View of Mrauk U

Listen

- *Insight Myanmar* (<https://insightmyanmar.org/>) was formerly a podcast about religion and spirituality, but it pivoted to providing news and interviews with experts following the military coup of February 2021.
- *Myanmar Musings* (<https://www.myanmarmusings.com/>) is the podcast of the Myanmar Research Centre (<https://myanmar.anu.edu.au/>) at the Australian National University, Canberra. While much more academic than *Insight Myanmar*, it still features interviews with a variety of experts on a range of historical and present-day topics relating to research on Myanmar.

Holidays

- 4 January: Independence Day
- January: Kayin New Year Day - 1st waxing of Pyatho
- 12 February: Union Day
- March: Full Moon Day of Tabaung
- 27 March: Armed Forces Day
- April: Thingyan (Burmese New Year) — the most important festival in Myanmar, in which people splash water at each other. Also known as the Water Festival, and similar to Songkran in neighbouring Thailand
- May: Full Moon Day of Kason
- July: Full Moon Day of Waso
- October: Full Moon Day of Thadingyut
- 19 July: Martyrs Day
- November: National Day - 10 st waning of the moon of Tazaungmon

- 25 December: Christmas Day

Units of measure

See also: *Metric and Imperial equivalents*

Since 2013, Myanmar has begun adopting the **metric system** (SI), which is now used for weather reports, petrol prices, and speed limits, and *new* road signs. However, much usage of **imperial system** and the traditional **Burmese units of measurement** persist. Old road signs may use miles and miles per hour, and government websites inconsistently convert Burmese units to metric or Imperial.

Tourist information

- Myanmar Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (<https://tourism.gov.mm/>) website

Talk

See also: *Burmese phrasebook*

The official language of Myanmar is **Burmese** (မြန်မာစကား *mien ma za ga*) (known by the government as Myanmar), a Sino-Tibetan language related to Chinese and hence tonal (word pitch matters) and analytic (most words are one syllable long). It is written using the Burmese script, based on the ancient Pali script. Bilingual signs (English and Burmese) are available in most tourist spots. Numbers often are also written in Burmese script. Much vocabulary is derived from another ancient languages of Pali (at the time of Buddha) and Sanskrit.



Burmese signs at a market

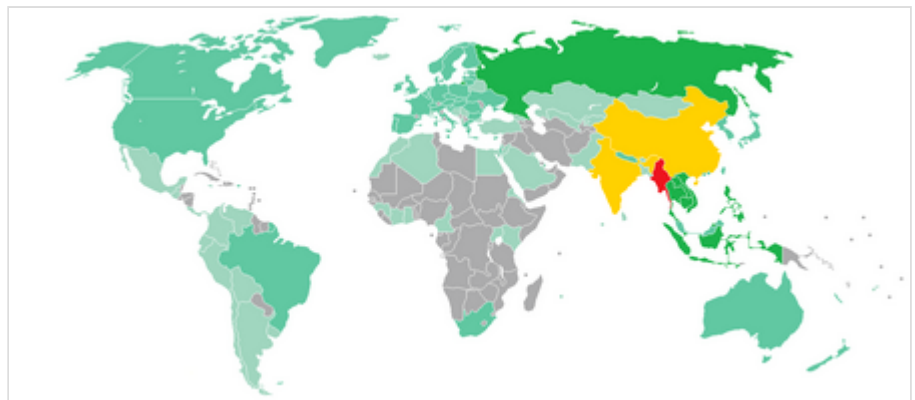
There are also many other ethnic groups in Myanmar such as the Mon, Shan, Pa-O, Rohingya and many others who continue to speak their own languages. While Burmese serves as the lingua franca in government-controlled areas, it may not be spoken at all in some separatist-controlled areas. There is also a sizeable ethnic Chinese community who speak Mandarin and/or various Chinese dialects. In Yangon, most of the Chinese are descendants from migrants from Fujian and Guangdong, and hence speak mainly Hokkien or Taishanese, while in Mandalay, the Chinese are mostly descendants of migrants from Yunnan, and mainly speak the Yunnan dialect of Mandarin. Some areas are also home to various ethnic Indian communities who continue to speak various Indian languages.

Myanmar is a former British colony and many Burmese understand at least some rudimentary English. Most well-educated upper class Burmese speak English fluently, while any educated Burmese will know at least the basics. Hotel and airline staff, as well as people working in the tourism industry generally speak a good level of English.

Get in

Entry requirements

The visa situation in Myanmar is changing quickly and this has caused confusion even among immigration staff, and many guides and official websites are out of date. Check Wikipedia for visa policy (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visa_policy_of_Myanmar).



Visa policy of Myanmar



Visa-free

Citizens of the following countries may visit Myanmar without a visa for tourism provided they enter **by air**, and their stay does not exceed the following number of days:

- 14 days: Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Philippines, Thailand
- 30 days: Russia, Vietnam

Citizens of Singapore may visit Myanmar without a visa for up to 30 days regardless of mode of entry.

These visa exemptions are strictly not extendable. All other travelers are required to apply for a visa in advance.

E-Visa

E-Visa (<http://evisa.moip.gov.mm/>) are available for visitors from many countries, including most Western countries for US\$50/tourist and US\$70/business travelers (as of Jan 2020) through the Myanmar Immigration's web-site (<http://evisa.moip.gov.mm/>), which take 3 days to process. However, there is also an express tourist e-Visa service available on the governments website for US\$56 (rather the standard US\$50) taking 24 hr (though sometimes just a few hours).

Check the e-Visa website for details on which nationalities this is available for. The visa is valid for 28 day for stays beginning up to 90 days from the date of issue, and is single entry only. In order to apply, you will need to upload a passport-sized colour photo, and payment which is only accepted by credit

card. Permitted entry points are: Yangon International Airport, Mandalay International Airport, Nay Pyi Taw International Airport, and the longtail boat crossing from Ranong, Thailand at Kawthaung

Tourist visas are valid for 3 months. The visa is valid for a stay of up to four weeks (from date of entry), although you can overstay if you are willing to pay a US\$3 a day fee upon departure. Employment is *not* allowed on a tourist visa, and working runs you the risk of being arrested and deported. Successful applicants will also be issued an "Arrival Form", which will be stapled into your passport and must be presented on arrival in Myanmar, along with your passport containing the visa sticker.

Visa on arrival

As of October 2019, visas on arrival (<http://www.mip.gov.mm/on-arrival-visa/>) are available for tourist and business visitors of some nationalities at Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyidaw airports. You must bring two passport-sized colour photos, and a letter of invitation from the company sponsoring your visa (for business visas).

There is still some confusion at airports about this because official resources are not being updated to match changes but most tourists are not experiencing difficult- if you experience any insist you are eligible for a visa and ask for a senior staff member.

Note: In August 2022 a directive from Myanmar to airline staff immediately (and inexplicably) suspended the Tourist Visa on Arrival for all nationalities. This has not been updated on government websites. Check well in advance at the check-in counter what the status is, and consider playing it safe with an e-visa.

Visa at an embassy or consulate

You can apply for all kinds of visas in a Myanmar embassy or consulate in many capitals and large cities around the world. See specific details like contacts, hours, etc. there—especially for Bangkok and Chiang Mai in Thailand, Delhi in India, Hong Kong in China, and Washington D.C. in the US.

Generally the visa application requires a completed visa form (available from the Myanmar embassy), a completed arrival form (again, from the embassy), a photocopy of the photo page from your passport, two passport-sized photos, proof of your occupation, and the applicable fee.

By plane

Myanmar's main international airport is located at Yangon, the largest city and main economic centre. There are regular scheduled flights from Yangon to many major Asian cities. For travellers from outside the region, the easiest way to get into Myanmar will be to catch a flight from either Singapore or Bangkok, both of which have large overseas Burmese populations, and are served by several daily flights into Yangon.

Myanmar also has a second international airport at Mandalay, which is served by several flights to the neighbouring countries.

For a current list of airlines and destinations, see Airport of Yangon (<https://www.yangonairport.aero/index.php/en/>). The two main international airlines based out of Yangon are flag carrier **Myanmar National Airlines** (<http://flymna.com/>) and privately owned **Myanmar Airways International** (<http://www.maia>

ir.com/).

By land

Myanmar borders five countries: China, India, Bangladesh, Thailand and Laos. Foreigners are free to travel overland from Thailand into the Burmese heartland provided their Burmese visa is in order. Entering Myanmar from the other land border crossings, though, is a different story. At the very least, you must apply for special permits in advance, and you may need to join a guided tour in order for the permit to be granted.

Thailand

Four border crossings exist between Myanmar and Thailand at Tachileik/Mae Sai, Myawaddy/Mae Sot, Htee Kee/Ban Phunamron and the Three Pagoda Pass. The former three are open to foreigners, and there are no restrictions on foreigners travelling into the Burmese heartland from Myawaddy or Htee Kee. From Tachileik, travel beyond Keng Tung is not possible overland unless you are on a guided tour with a special permit. No visa-on-arrival is available though, so ensure that your Thai (if required) and Burmese visas are in order.

China

Foreigners can enter Myanmar at Muse via Ruili (in Yunnan), although a permit (as well as a visa) and a guide are needed. You will most likely need to join an organized tour. Crossing in the opposite direction is more difficult to arrange and details are uncertain; however, it's possible to fly from Mandalay to Kunming, and there's even a Chinese consulate that issues visas in Mandalay.

India

A land border crossing exists between India and Myanmar at Moreh/Tamu and is open to tourists who have vehicles and who are on foot or who have tours. As of 2023, Myanmar eVisas are *not* valid for entry at this border, so you'll need to get a visa in advance.

This border is in politically unstable territory and there have been protests and two bomb blasts in the Indian town of Moreh (Oct 2019) which briefly closed the border. Tourists are generally advised not to loiter in Moreh, especially late at night- and to stay in Tamu on the Myanmar side if possible.

It is no longer required to have a permit to visit the Indian state of Manipur which borders Myanmar.

Laos

The Myanmar-Laos Friendship Bridge is the sole official border crossing between Myanmar and Laos. The bridge connects Shan State in Myanmar with Luang Namtha Province in Laos, in a *very* remote region for both countries, and information on when (or whether) the crossing is operating is hard to find. As eVisas are not accepted for entry at this crossing, you'll need to get a visa in advance.

Bangladesh

It is not feasible to cross the border between Myanmar and Bangladesh independently. No border crossings exist between the two nations, and the Myanmar army has planted landmines along the frontier to discourage smugglers.

By boat

Small wooden longtail boats shuttle between Ranong, Thailand and Kawthaung, Myanmar. There is no fixed schedule; you just negotiate directly with one of the boat operators, and they will leave once a price is agreed on. Be sure to bargain hard or you might get ripped off. Boat operators may try to hustle you onto their boat before you find the immigration building to get stamped out; be firm and insist on going through immigration, or you will be considered to have left the country illegally. You will need to pay a US\$10 or 500 Thai baht "stamping fee" to Myanmar immigration when entering or leaving via this checkpoint. If choosing to pay by U.S. dollars, be sure your bills are in pristine condition; even slight creases will cause your bills to be rejected.

Get around

Myanmar's infrastructure is in poor shape. Travel to certain regions is prohibited; for others, special permits must be obtained, and a guide/interpreter/minder may be mandatory - although whether these "guides" accompany you to look after you, or to keep you from going to places the government doesn't want you to see, is a question best discussed elsewhere. However, travel between the main tourist sites, namely Mandalay, Bagan, Inle Lake and Yangon, is fairly straightforward.

Restricted areas

Much of Myanmar is closed to foreign travellers, and many land routes to far-flung areas are also closed (for example, to Mrauk U, Kalewa, Putao, Kengtung). Due to longstanding ethnic conflicts, many ethnic minority areas are controlled by armed separatist groups and remain outside the control of the central government. Thus, while tourists can travel freely in the Bamar-majority Burmese heartland, travel tends to be restricted or circumscribed in ethnic minority areas. In theory, any tourist can apply for a permit to visit any restricted area or to travel on any restricted land route. In practice, it is unlikely that any such permit will be issued in a reasonable amount of time, or at all. Permit requests can be made locally in some cases (for example, requests for the land route to Kalewa can be made in Shwebo) but, in most cases, the request has to be made in Yangon. Requests to visit restricted areas must be made at the MTT (Myanmar Travel and Tours) (<http://myanmartravelsandtours.com/>) office in Yangon (Number 77-91, Sule Pagoda Rd, Yangon). Applications for local permits can often be made at a local MTT office or at a police station. Local permits are available only for the following places & routes:

- Kengtung - Tachilek. This used to be straightforward but the availability is now uncertain.
- Mrauk U Chin/Zomi village tours. Easily available in Mrauk U, but must visit with a guide. Your hotel or a local tour company can arrange this for you.
- Myitkyina - Indawgyi Lake. Easily available in Myitkyina but must travel with a guide. Your hotel or a local tour company can arrange this for you.
- Shwebo - Kalewa. A permit is necessary if going by road. It is uncertain whether one is required if going by boat.
- Pa-O Self-Administered Zone in Shan State (including the Kakku Pagodas). Available in Taunggyi, but must be accompanied by a local Pa-O guide. Your hotel or a local tour

company can arrange this.

All other permits must be obtained in Yangon.

Permits for some places, such as Putao, are obtainable but need to be applied for well in advance

Myanmar is not North Korea, and you are free to walk around, go to shops and interact with the locals. However, with many of the more far flung places, and places restricted to foreigners, it is better to arrange your internal visa in advance.



Pa-O women at a restaurant stall 𑌒

Companies that can help with internal visas:

- Mr Myanmar Travel (<http://www.mrmyanmartravel.com>)
- Remote Asia Travel (<http://www.remoteasia.com>)
- Travel Myanmar (<http://www.travelmyanmar.com>)

By plane

The poor state of Myanmar's roads and railways make flying by far the least uncomfortable option when travelling long distances.

Sample fares between important destinations (through local tourist agency)

Flag carrier **Myanmar National Airlines (<https://www.flymna.com/>)** operates a network of domestic flights to many destinations across Myanmar from its hub in Yangon International Airport. Long known for its poor safety record, it has improved dramatically with the purchase of newer aircraft, and these days compares favourably with many of the private airlines in terms of both service and safety.

From	To	Approximate fare
<u>Yangon</u>	<u>Mandalay</u>	US\$95
<u>Yangon</u>	<u>Bagan</u>	US\$85
<u>Bagan</u>	<u>Heho</u>	US\$65
<u>Heho</u>	<u>Yangon</u>	US\$85

There are also several private airlines operating domestic flights from Yangon. The private airline companies are usually on time, and even depart early (10-20 min), so be on time and reconfirm your flight and flight time 1–2 days before departure. Sometimes the itinerary might be altered some days before departure (meaning that you will still fly to your final destination on the scheduled time, but with an added or removed in between stop, e.g., Yangon-Bagan becomes Yangon-Mandalay-Bagan). This usually only affects your arrival time. En route stops have only 10-20 min ground time, and if it is not your final destination, you can stay inside the plane during the stop.

All domestic flight from Yangon depart from Terminal 3, while international flights depart from Terminals 1 & 2. When taking a taxi from downtown to the airport, mention to the driver that you are on a domestic flight so you'll not end up in the wrong terminal.

By train

Myanmar has an extensive rail network, a relic of British rule. Unfortunately, there has been little maintenance or growth since the British left. Trains are slow, noisy, uncomfortable, and prone to delays. Electrical blackouts are becoming rare but nonetheless never assume that air conditioners, fans or the

electrical supply itself will be working throughout the whole journey. Most trains have upper class and ordinary class. Ordinary class has wide open windows, benches and can be packed with locals transporting their goods. Upper class has upholstered chairs, fans and is less crowded. Be careful putting

Train travel times/fares between destinations

From	To	Time	Ordinary	Upper	Sleeper
<u>Yangon</u>	<u>Mandalay</u>	16 hr	4,600 kyat	9,300 kyat	13,000 kyat
<u>Yangon</u>	<u>Kyaiktiyo</u>	6 hr	1,200 kyat	2,500 kyat	None
<u>Mandalay</u>	<u>Pyin U Lwin</u>	4 hr	550 kyat	1,200 kyat	None
<u>Pyin U Lwin</u>	<u>Hsipaw</u>	7 hr	1,200 kyat	2,750 kyat	None
<u>Pyin U Lwin</u>	<u>Lashio</u>	16 hr	1,900 kyat	4,400 kyat	None

your head out of the window as it is likely to be hit by a branch. Vegetation grows so close to the tracks that you can reach out and touch it. Tickets are cheap and tourists pay the same price as locals, but tourists cannot buy tickets on the train. At smaller stations, you may have to seek the stationmaster or use an interpreter to buy a ticket. Your passport is required when purchasing.

A journey on a train is a great way to see the country and meet people. The rail journey from Mandalay, up hairpin bends to Pyin U Lwin, and then across the mountains and the famous bridge at Gokteik, is one of the great railway journeys of the world. Trains in lower Mandalay, Yangon-Pathein and Yangon-Mawlymaing, are little communities of their own with hawkers selling everything imaginable. Sleepers are available on many overnight express trains, although in the high season you may want to reserve a few days in advance. Tickets go on sale three days in advance. At some stations there is a separate counter for advance bookings, or even a separate building (e.g., in Yangon). Food service is available on the express in both directions between Yangon and Mandalay.



The famous Gokteik Viaduct dates from 1899

Except for the new bridge and rail line that connects Mawlamyine to points on the west side of the Salween River, the rail network is exactly the way it was in British times. The most-used line is the 325km line from Yangon to Mandalay with several trains a day. It is the only double line in Myanmar, and also the only one that is competitive in time with buses. The fastest trains take 15 hr for the 385km run, an effective rate of 25km/hour. A second line connects Yangon with Pyay, 9 hr for the 175 km journey, with a branch heading off into the delta region town of Pathein. These tracks, the earliest constructed, are in poor shape. With the construction of the bridge across the Salween, it is now possible to go by train from Yangon to Mawlamyine, 8 hr for the 200km journey, and on to Ye and Dawei. From Mandalay, trains continue on to Myitkyina in Kachin State, 350km in 24 hr, and to Lashio. There are also rail connections between Yangon-Bagan and Mandalay-Bagan, but bus or ferry are better alternatives: the 175km from Mandalay to Bagan takes 10 hours.

There is railway service between Yangon-Bagan. 16 hr, first class US\$30, upper class US\$40, sleeper US\$50. (check new prices)

Train tickets cannot be paid in dollars any more, and the government has abandoned the former dual-pricing structure that saw tourists pay inflated prices.

By boat

There is also a large river ferry network. Both are to a large extent run by the government, although there are now some private ferry services. The trip from Mandalay to Bagan takes the better part of a day, from Bagan to Yangon is several days.

By bus

Buses of all types ply the roads of Myanmar. Luxury (relatively speaking) buses do the Mandalay-Yangon run while lesser vehicles can get travellers to other places. Fares are reasonable and in kyat and buses are faster than the trains. Many long-distance buses assign seats, so it is best to book seats at least a day in advance. Because the roads are bad, avoid the rear of the bus and try to sit as far up front as you can. Long-distance buses also have an extra jump seat that blocks the aisle and, because it is not well secured to the chassis, can be uncomfortable (which also means that there is no such thing as a side seat where taller people can stretch their legs). A window near the front of the bus is always the best option.

Bus travel times/fares between destinations

From	To	Time	Kyat
Yangon	Mandalay	11 hr	10,400
Yangon	Bagan	10 hr	12,000
Yangon	Kyaiktiyo	4 hr	6,000
Mandalay	Pyin U Lwin	2 hr	1,500
Mandalay	Hsipaw	5.5 hr	4,500

Even budget travellers will find themselves buying more tickets via their hotel or an agency rather than going to the bus company to buy it directly. Their offices are often located far from any tourist place and the cost of going there and back will most likely exceed the commission your hotel will get for selling you the ticket. Shop around and compare prices before buying your ticket as some vendors include a free pick-up from your hotel.

A bus ticket scam seems to be popular in Yangon. While many make a stopover in Bago, they are told at their guesthouse or at the bus station it's not possible to buy tickets there in the direction to Mandalay. In a country where everything might be possible when it comes to transport, some people fall for this. Actually, this is not the case and tracking back to Yangon for a bus ticket up north is not necessary at all. Bago has a bus terminal with several bus offices. Buying your ticket at Bago might be slightly cheaper (depending upon your bargaining skills) and gives you more freedom for the rest of your journey.

The adjoining table summarises travel times and approximate fares between important tourist destinations in Myanmar. Most bus fares have gone up with the fuel price rises, so the fares listed are rough estimates.

By pick-up

Old pick-up trucks run everywhere in Myanmar, cheaply ferrying men, women, children, and monks from one place to another. The rear of the truck is converted into a canvas-covered sitting area with three benches, one on each side and one running along the centre of the truck (some smaller trucks have only two rows), and the running board is lowered and fixed into place providing room for six or more people to stand on (holding on to the truck frame). Pick-ups are ubiquitous in Myanmar and every town has a central point somewhere from where they depart to places both near and far. Tourists who go off the beaten track will find them indispensable because often the only alternative is an expensive taxi or private car.

The basics of pickups are fairly straightforward, wait till it is reasonably full before heading out. On well-travelled routes (Mandalay-Pyin U Lwin, for example), they fill up quickly and the journey is quick. On less well-travelled routes (Bhamo-Katha, for example), passengers arrive (early, usually around 06:00), mark their place, and then hang around drinking tea and chatting until the truck fills up. When the pick-up does get moving, it may linger or go out of its way in the hope of picking up more passengers. The inside of a pick-up can be hot and uncomfortable. Passengers, packed in like sardines, face away from the windows (which are tiny) and into the truck. Standing on the running board can be tiring and tough on the arms. The window side seat next to the driver is very comfortable and well-worth the little extra that you have to pay, so it is best to go early and reserve that seat.

By car

You can hire a private car and driver at reasonable rates to tour independently. The licensed guides at Shwedagon Paya in Yangon can arrange to have a driver with a car meet you at your hotel. Another way is to arrange for a car through a travel agency, though it can be quite expensive. You can "test" the driver and the car by driving around the city for 10 or 15 minutes. If you are satisfied, a departure date and time and per diem rates (inclusive of petrol) can be negotiated. Some guides are willing to travel with you to serve as interpreters.



Busy street in Mandalay

Traffic drives on the **right** in Myanmar, but confusingly, Myanmar has a mixture of left- and right-hand-drive cars, with the majority of vehicles being right-hand-drive as a result of being second-hand imports from Japan or Thailand.

Road travel to tourist destinations is generally safe, although some roads may be rough. Highways are often 2-lane, and cars often pass one another recklessly. That being said, driving habits are not quite as aggressive as say, Vietnam. Allow two days to drive from Yangon to Bagan in fair weather. Pyay is a good stopover point. Allow a day to drive from Bagan to Inle Lake.

In cities, it is considered illegal to cross an amber light without stopping. Despite having crossed 3/4 of the way, you will be required to stop in the middle of the road and make your way back in reverse!

Accidents and fatalities are common. Night-time road travel is not recommended, and medical facilities are limited in rural areas. At government hospitals, bribes may be required for services. Make sure needles are new or carry your own. HIV is a major problem in Myanmar.

By taxi

All taxis (and by extension all vehicles for transport of people and goods) have red/white licence plates, while private vehicles have a black/white licence plate. Tourist agency-owned cars have a blue/white licence plate.

By ride-hailing

The main ride hailing app is **Grab** (<https://www.grab.com/mm/en/transport/>), which took over Uber's former South-east Asian operations, including that of Myanmar. Uber's short-lived venture into Myanmar occurred just one year prior to its takeover by Grab. In common with Grab's operations elsewhere in Southeast Asia, cash is not required as you can use the Grab app to pay with your card, though cash remains readily accepted.

By motorbike

In Yangon, riding motorcycles is illegal. Mandalay's streets, on the other hand, are filled with them.

By bicycle

In many places you can easily rent a bicycle for about 1,500 kyat per day to move around in your own pace. Around Inle Lake, cycling is a relaxing way to get to the next village or lake viewpoint. Mandalay is laid out on a grid which makes it very easy to navigate while cycling. Tourists used to pedal bicycles around the sights of Bagan, across difficult sandy paths under the hot sun, however electric bicycles are now the norm. At around ten times the price of a conventional bicycle, they are well worth the money.

On foot

Cars and pedestrians may not follow the established rules, and crossing the road can be difficult. Drivers will almost never yield to pedestrians, even on striped pedestrian crossings.

See

Myanmar has not been a popular destination in Southeast Asia as visitors have been largely deterred by the country's volatile politics and restrictions placed on travel. But the political and travel situation has been improving notably since 2015. The country is a true, unspoiled treasure trove, and should capture the imagination of anyone interested in culture and history. Walking around Yangon brings you back to the time of 19th-century British colonial rule. Sparkling-clean parks and temples stand side by side decayed colonial-style buildings and deep potholes. Its cultural and religious attractions, like the **Shwedagon Pagoda**, add to the city's feel of exoticism, as do the smiles of the locals. Every street corner brings something new—and a short ferry over the river even gives you a glimpse of rural life in the country. Cities of cultural and historical interest close to Yangon are Bago with its Buddhist sights, the delta town of Twante known for its pottery, and the pilgrimage site of Kyaiktiyo with its gold-gilded rock balancing precariously over a cliff.



Leg rowing, Inle Lake



It's definitely worth it to further explore the Bamar heartland. Unfortunately some outer fringes of the country are off-limits to foreigners, but it's always worth checking the latest situation with people on the ground as things move so fast that the Internet rarely if ever has correct information.

The former city of Bagan is a gem, and gives a glimpse of what life in the 11th and 12th centuries here must have been like. Marco Polo described it as the "gilded city alive with tinkling bells and the swishing sounds of monks' robes". It is the largest and densest concentration of Buddhist temples, pagodas, stupas and ruins in the world. Mrauk U is a sleepy village today but its crumbling pagodas and temples remind of the early modern period, when it was the capital city of an empire involved in extensive maritime trade with Portuguese, Dutch, French and Arab traders. Within a daytrip from Mandalay is Inwa, another former capital where ruins remain to remind visitors of its former glory. Also don't miss Pyin U Lwin, a former British hill station with somewhat cooler temperatures.



Pyin U Lwin



The country has its fair share of **natural attractions**. Inle Lake is popular with backpackers, and it is one of the few places that is starting to feel like a tourist trap. Still, a trip to Myanmar is not complete without a boat trip on the lake. It has a unique vibe with tribes living in stilt houses and paddling their traditional wooden boats with one leg. The country's long southwestern coastline also has a few **beaches**, such as Chaung Tha and Ngapali. If you visit outside of the traditional holiday season, you might just have a beautiful white sand beach for yourself.

Myanmar is a country inhabited with dozens of ethnic groups, but sites from the major **independent Burmese kingdoms** dating from the 9th century can be seen in sections of the country.

Do

Myanmar is an excellent country for **trekking**. Kalaw is a centre for trekking, and has miles and miles of trails through mountains and hill tribe villages. Kengtung is also known for its hiking paths to hill tribe villages, while Hsipaw has some great treks to waterfalls. **Birdwatching** can be done around Inle Lake.

Myanmar's national sport is **chinlone**, played with a small rattan ball. The objective of the game is to keep the ball in the air for as long as possible without using one's arms or hands, and to do it as beautifully as possible.



Burmese men playing chinlone



Spectacular **scuba diving** and unspoiled beaches abound in the Mergui Archipelago in southeastern Myanmar.

Buy

Money

Myanmar's currency is the **kyat**, pronounced "chat". Prices may be shown locally using the abbreviation of **K** (singular or plural) or **Ks** (plural) either before or after the amount and

**Exchange rates for Myanmar
kyat**

As of July 2023:

depending very much on who is doing the sign writing. The ISO abbreviation is **MMK**. Wikivoyage articles will use *kyat* to denote the currency. *Pya* are coins, and are rarely seen since their value has become increasingly insignificant with even the largest 50 pya coin worth less than US\$0.001. Banknotes of Myanmar are issued in denominations of 50, 100, 200, 500, 1,000, 5,000, and 10,000 kyats.

You may also come across 20, 10, 5, and 1 *kyat* and 50 *pya* banknotes. They are valid but rarely found and best held onto as souvenirs. Older banknotes in strange denominations are sold to tourists and, while typically genuine, are rarely if ever valuable.

The notes of 50 kyat, 100 kyat, 200 kyat, and 500 kyat are usually in a horrible condition, but are generally accepted when making small purchases. The 1,000 kyat notes are slightly better. 5,000 and 10,000 kyat notes always appear new after exchanging foreign currencies. When exchanging money, check that the banknotes you receive are in a generally good condition. If the exchange gives you kyat notes in horrible condition, you can ask them to exchange them for notes in better condition.

Dispose of remaining kyat before leaving. Outside of Myanmar, kyat is almost worthless but do make nice souvenirs. Kyat cannot be legally exchanged abroad, though some money changers in places with large overseas Burmese populations such as Singapore will exchange anyway, but at terrible rates. Kyat can be exchanged on departure from Yangon Airport at decent rates.

US dollars

Foreigners are no longer required to pay in U.S. dollars for hotels, tourist attractions, rail and air tickets, ferry travel and for bus tickets. As of 2015, foreign currency instability and the weakening kyat means that many venues will state prices in U.S. dollars, even though it is illegal to do so. Expat restaurants still often quote in U.S. dollars despite actions from the Central Bank prohibiting excess dollar usage. It is illegal for a Myanmar citizen to accept (or hold) U.S. dollars without a licence, but this law is mostly ignored and U.S. dollars are generally accepted. Never insist, though, because it may be dangerous for the receiver.

- US\$1 ≈ 2,090 kyat
- €1 ≈ 2,300 kyat
- UK£1 ≈ 2,690 kyat
- Japanese ¥100 ≈ 1,480 kyat
- Chinese ¥1 ≈ 295 kyat
- Indian ₹100 ≈ 25 kyat
- SG\$1 ≈ 1,570 kyat
- Thai ฿10 ≈ 60 kyat

Exchange rates fluctuate. Current rates for these and other currencies are available from (<https://www.xe.com/currency/mmk-burmese-kyat>)

Currency Games

Myanmar is still predominantly a cash economy. However, ATMs are widespread. In a misguided attempt to fight rampant black marketeering, the Myanmar government has a habit of *declaring notes to be worthless*: this happened first in 1964. In 1985, the 20, 50, and 100 kyat notes were withdrawn again and replaced with new kyat notes in the unusual denominations of 25, 35, and 75, possibly chosen because of dictator Ne Win's predilection for numerology; the 75-kyat note was introduced on his 75th birthday.

In 1987, the government demonetized the 25, 35, and 75 kyat notes with no prior warning, rendering some 75% of the country's currency worthless. A new series of 15, 45, and 90-kyat notes was issued, incorporating Ne Win's favourite number 9. The resulting economic disturbances led to serious

Bring very clean, unfolded U.S. dollars (or they will not be accepted by hotels, restaurants and money changers). Even small imperfections can be cause to reject a U.S. banknote. Keep all U.S. dollars in impeccable condition, and do not fold them. If you do end up with a few, try using them for purchases rather than exchange, or try to exchange them in a few different places.

ATMs

There are plenty of ATMs all across the country accepting international Visa and MasterCard. The bigger and more touristic the place the more ATMs it has. Smaller tourist destinations also have ATMs (Bagu, Hpa-An, etc.), but not so many. Make sure to carry a buffer outside of major tourist hotspots.

If an ATM does not work, try the next one. Usual withdrawal limit is 300,000 kyat with a processing fee of 5,000 kyat. In case you run out of money, ask your taxi driver to drive you to the CB Bank ATM.

Note: Your bank may refuse to process ATM transactions with some/all banks in Myanmar, even if the ATM accepts Visa or Mastercard. Check with your bank prior to entering the country.

Credit cards

Upmarket tourist places (hotels, agencies, restaurants) are accepting credit cards (and will surcharge accordingly). So you can even pay with mastercard in a store in the middle of Inle Lake for purchases value more than US\$100. But nonetheless paper money is the only way to pay in most places.

Beside the ATMs, there are places (e.g. hotels in Yangon) where cash can be obtained with a credit card (*cash advance*), but the rates are extremely uncompetitive (with premiums certainly no lower than around 7%, and with quotes of 30% and more frequently reported). Also, they may need to see your passport to process the transaction. For US citizens, it is also possible to receive funds from friends or relatives in an emergencies through the US Embassy.

Money exchange

riots and eventually the 1989 coup by General Saw Maung. The post-coup notes come in more normal denominations from 1–1,000 kyat, and this time the old ones remain legal tender, so far.

Is it safe?

So, you're travelling around carrying hundreds, if not thousands, of U.S. dollars stuffed into your pockets in a country where most people subsist on a few dollars a day. Everyone around you knows that if they could get their hands on the money in your pockets, they will be rich for life. What, you may ask, are the odds that someone will try to relieve you of your money? The answer: almost nil. There have been very few instances of a tourist being mugged and only the rare cases of pilfering. Myanmar is an extremely safe country for travellers. Some say it is because of the nature of the people. Others say it is because the punishment for robbing from a foreigner is draconian, whilst others say it is because of Buddhism, which prohibits people from taking what is not given.

The foreign currency of choice in Myanmar is the US dollar, though you can readily also exchange euros and Singapore dollars in Yangon and Mandalay, but perhaps not beyond. Other options are the Chinese Yuan and Thai Baht. The best rates are in Yangon and Mandalay. Major foreign currencies need to be in good condition—other currencies like rupees and baht are often accepted even if worn out.

The military junta re-imposed currency controls in 2021, once again leading to a yawning gap between the official rate (fixed at 2100 kyat/dollar) and the black market (as high as 5000/dollar as of 2024). Banks and money changers only sell kyat at the official rate. Exchanging on the black market is highly illegal, with sellers risking jail time and the junta periodically cracking down.

Especially on holidays and Sundays, all your necessary money should be changed at the airport as banks in town are closed. Money changers offer significantly lower rates (5-10% lower) for changing US dollars and euros. The most hassle-free option is to change all your required money at the airport, depending on the rate to change it back. Look around different banks for the best exchange rate.

Be sure to bring a mix of foreign denominations when visiting Myanmar because money changers will sometimes not give change and smaller notes (in good condition) are useful for some entry fees and transport. Even though, larger bills give the best exchange rates at banks.

Ensure that foreign notes are:

- Unmarked – No stamps, anti-counterfeit pen, ink or any other mark on them at all. Pencil can be removed with a good eraser, but any permanent marks will greatly decrease a note's value and ability to be exchanged.
- Fresh, crisp and as close to brand new as possible – Moneychangers have been known to reject notes just for being creased and/or lightly worn.
- Undamaged – No tears, missing bits, holes, repairs or anything of that sort.
- Preferably of the new design, with the larger portrait, and the multiple-colour prints. Although, old-style US\$1 are still commonly traded.
- For US\$100 bills, have no serial numbers starting "CB". This is because they are associated with a counterfeit "superbill" which was in circulation some time ago.

Scams:

- There are a number of tricks and scams running around Myanmar trapping tourists who are carrying US dollars. Sometimes, guesthouses or traders will try and pass you damaged or nonexchangeable bills in change. Always inspect all notes when making a purchase and request that the vendor swap any notes you think you will have trouble using down the track—this is perfectly acceptable behaviour for both vendors and customers, so don't be shy.
- Some money changers will also attempt sleight of hand tricks to either swap your good banknotes for damaged, or lower denomination notes. Other reports suggest that the kyats may be counted and then somehow, some disappear from the table during the transaction. For example, after going through an elaborate counting process for piles of ten 1,000 kyat notes, some money changers will pull some notes out as they count the piles of ten.
- When changing money, be sure that, after any money is counted, it is not touched by anyone until the deal is sealed. Also do not allow your dollars to be removed from your sight until all is agreed; in fact, it is not even necessary to pull out your US dollars until you are paying for the kyats you received. It sounds extreme, but ending up in a country where you cannot access whatever savings you have, and having a good portion of your budget rendered useless (until you get to more relaxed changers in Bangkok) can really put a dampener on your plans.

Travellers cheques

Travellers cheques are **not accepted** in Myanmar. The only exception might be some especially shady money changer, but be prepared to pay an astronomical commission (30% is not uncommon).

Shopping

When visiting tourist attractions, you will likely be swarmed by local hawkers, many of them children, trying to sell you souvenirs. Be sure to bargain hard should you decide to buy from them. Owing to decades of repressive military rule, a great many service and travel-oriented companies have strong links to the military. These are vital ways for the military to earn money, particularly foreign currency. If you wish to avoid spending money at military-owned or military-associated businesses, download the Way Way Nay Boycott app (<https://waywaynay.com/>).

Tipping

Tipping is generally not practised by the Burmese themselves. However, given widespread poverty in the country, tips are certainly appreciated if you have been provided with exemplary service. Tips that are charged to a credit card almost never make it to the service staff, so if you wish to tip, make sure you hand it over in cash to the person who served you.

Costs

Despite being less developed, Myanmar is expensive compared to other Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand or Vietnam. This is particularly true of hotel prices in the main tourists areas, as demand far outstrips supply. Similarly, the lack of competition from budget airlines has also made domestic flights rather expensive.

It's not possible to be comfortable on less than US\$25/day (May 2013). Foreigners will likely be charged fees, including video camera, camera, entrance, parking and zone fees. Most managed tourist site charge for carrying cameras of any sort into the area. Double rooms with private bathroom are nearly always more than US\$20, in Yangon a double room without bathroom costs US\$20. Dorm beds are around US\$10 (or US\$8 if you accept to loose a lot of value) (Sep 2015). While you cannot save on accommodation, you can save on food. Street food can get as low as US\$0.30 for 2 small curries with 2 Indian breads, US\$1 for a normal (vegetarian) dish. Even in touristy places like Bagan dishes cost under US\$1 (vegetarian) and US\$2 (meat). A draught Myanmar beer (5%) is around 600 kyat, a bottle of Myanmar beer (650 ml) is around 1,700 kyat, a bottle of Mandalay beer (6.5%, 650 ml) around 1,200 kyat.



Night market in Pyin U Lwin

What to buy

- **Antiques** – Purchasing antiquities and antiques in Myanmar is at best a legal grey area with the 2015 passage of the new Antiquities Law, and often illegal for any item over 100 years old. Penalties include prison and fines. It is recommended to avoid purchasing antiques as a tourist, unless you're willing to get an export permit from the Ministry of Culture on your way out and you have enough knowledge to avoid the fakes. Replicas and fakes are rife in

Bogyoke market and other antique stores frequented by tourists. It is against the law to export religious antiques (manuscripts, Buddhas, etc.)

- **Art** – The Myanmar Art market has exploded, with local artists' works going for good values in Yangon and Mandalay. Visit the numerous galleries in Yangon to get a feel for available works. Art is often related to Buddhism and the difficult socio-political situation, as well as more traditional Victorian-influenced subjects like markets, old women smoking cigars, tribal members, and monks. There is a lot of cheap/mass-painted and derivative works at Bogyoke Market.
- **Gemstones** – Myanmar is best known as for its jade and rubies (the granting of a license to the French over the ruby mines in Mogoke was one of the causes leading to the Third Burmese War), and also produces some really fine sapphires. These can be obtained at a fraction of what it would cost in the West. There are a lot of fakes for sale amid the genuine stuff and, unless you know your gems, buy from an official government store or risk being cheated. Bogyoke Aung San Market and the Myanmar Gems Museum in Yangon has many licensed shops and is generally a safe place for the purchase of these stones. The jade market in Mandalay is also worth a visit, where most of the jade is brought from the mines to be sold to merchants, and you can observe merchants haggling over the prices of both raw jade and various jade items in all stages of the production process. You can also purchase some jade trinkets yourself, but be prepared to haggle, and make sure you do your homework before buying or you risk getting ripped off.
- **Lacquerware** – A popular purchase, which is made into bowls, cups, vases, tables and various items, and is available almost anywhere. The traditional centre of lacquerware production is Bagan in Central Myanmar, and most tours include a stop at one of the local lacquerware factories where you can purchase one of these. Beware of fraudulent lacquerware, though, which is poorly made, but looks authentic. As a guide, the stiffer the lacquer, the poorer the quality; the more you can bend and twist it, the finer the quality.
- **Tapestries** – Known as *kalaga*, or *shwe chi doe*. There is a long tradition of weaving tapestries in Burma. These are decorated with gold and silver thread and sequins and usually depict tales from the Buddhist scriptures (the *jatakas*) or other non-secular objects from Burmese Buddhism (mythical animals, the *hintha*, and the *kalong* are also popular subjects). The tapestry tradition is dying out but many are made for tourists and are available in Mandalay and Yangon. Burmese tapestries don't last long, so be warned if someone tries to sell you an antique *shwe chi doe*!
- **Textiles** – Textiles in Myanmar are stunning. Each region and each ethnic group has its own style. Chin fabrics are particularly stunning. They are handwoven in intricate geometric patterns, often in deep reds and mossy greens and white. They can be quite pricey, perhaps US\$20 for the cloth to make a longyi (sarong).

Eat

Burmese food is influenced by that of India and China, yet unique. Apart from Burmese food, other ethnic traditional foods such as Shan food, Rakhine food, and Myeik food are also distinct. Rice is at the core of Burmese food, and good vegetarian food is widely available. Burmese food is often extremely pungent. Similar to neighbouring Southeast Asian countries, **fish sauce** (ငြိတ်ရည် *ngan bya yay*) is a very popular condiment in Myanmar, and is used to flavour many dishes. Food is inexpensive at most restaurants (priced at 500–3,000 kyat per item at most local restaurants, but can go as high as 8,000 kyat at posh restaurants). There are many up-market restaurants in Yangon and Mandalay.



Outdoor café in Yangon



The majority of low-to-mid-priced restaurants use a cheap blend of palm oil for cooking. This oil may be unhealthy, and common roadside restaurants should be avoided if you are at the slightest risk for hypertension, heart disease, or other fat- or cholesterol-related conditions. Higher class restaurants may use peanut oil instead.

Specific dishes include:

- **Curry** – Burmese people have a very different definition of curry than other countries. It is very spicy compared to Indian and Thai options, and although you may find it served at room temperature in cheaper restaurants, in a typical Burmese home all curry dishes are served hot. Burmese curry does not contain coconut milk, unlike its other SE Asian counterparts, and has a large quantity of onion or tomato depending on region and cook's preference. Myanmar is the highest per-capita consumer of onions in the world. Quite often Burmese curries are cooked with lots of oil, much more than other regional curries.
- **Samosa thoke** (samosa salad) – A popular street dish of chickpeas, potatoes, tomato, cabbage, mint and a smashed samosa.
- **Mohinga** (pronounced *mo-HIN-ga*) – A dish of rice vermicelli with fish chowder, usually accompanied by coriander and chili powder. Its taste can range from sweet to spicy, and is usually eaten at breakfast. It is considered by many to be the national dish, and is widely available throughout the country, albeit in different styles in different regions.
- **Mote lin-mayar** (Couples snacks) – Small tiny pancakes with chives, chickpeas or quail eggs.
- **Sticky rice** – Served plain or with turmeric or black rice
- **Nan Gyi Thoke** (pronounced *nan gyi thou*) – A special dish of rice noodle salad with chicken sauce. It is mostly eaten in mid-Myanmar.
- **Onnokauswe** (pronounced *oun-NO-kao-sui*) – A dish of thicker noodles in a thick soup of coconut milk with chicken. It is served with a variety of condiments accompanying it, ranging from fried fruit fritters to solidified duck blood. "Khao soi" ("noodle" in Shan), often found on the streets of Chiang Mai, is derived from this Burmese counterpart. It is also comparable to the spicier laksa often found in peninsular SE countries like Malaysia and Singapore.
- **Shan food** – The Shan are an ethnic group who inhabit Shan State around Inle lake, near the Thai border. Their food is marvelous. It can be found in Yangon easily.
 - **Shan tofu** – Made with mung beans instead of soya beans these yellow blocks are served fried or in a cold noodle salad.
 - **Laphet thote** (pronounced *la-peh THOU*) – A salad of fermented tea leaves and a variety of fried nuts. It is commonly mixed with sliced lettuce, and is eaten with rice.
- **Chinese food** – Available in most cities and usually authentic, if plain.
- **Kachin food** – Mainly available in Kachin State, though a number of Kachin restaurants can be found in Yangon and Mandalay. Kachin food is less oily and uses less MSG than Burmese food, and you may find it a good alternative if Burmese curries are not to your liking.



Chapati and mutton curry



Drink

Tap water in Myanmar is not safe to drink, however factory-made ice in restaurants and other shops is OK. **Bottled water** is readily available. You can also safely drink from the many clay jars dotted around the country, or find safe drinking water in temples. Just look for the large steel tanks with cups tied to the spigots. Water in the clay jars is filtered and many Myanmar people use them. Owners of the jars fill them up with water as a way to make merit.

Similar to Chinese tea, *Yenwejan* is usually provided free at restaurant tables. While not flavourful, it is boiled water, and so safe to drink (do not drink plain water - even in restaurants - unless it is bottled water). Dried tea leaves similar to Laphet thote's tea leaves (except these are wet) are added to the boiled water to give *Yenwejan*. Be sure to order it with *Laphet thote* (customary/good combination). **Milk tea** (လက်ဖက်ရည် *La-Phet-Yay*) is also popular in Myanmar and widely available in the local markets and teahouses but beware: the Burmese like their milk teas very, very sweet.

Alcohol is frowned upon by conservative Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims, but consumed widely, mostly among men. Myanmar Beer is most popular in the country. Other variants, including Mandalay Beer exist. However, many of such companies are government-owned and/or have links to the drug trade. **Toddy juice** (*ta-YEI*) is popular in central Myanmar, and is made from fermented palm sugar. An alcoholic drink popular in the Shan State is **Shwe le maw**, and is reportedly very strong. It is also possible to buy full strength Beer Chang imported from Thailand; exports to most countries are not nearly as strong.

Beware of alcoholic drinks served in the far northern states. The locals refer to it as **alcohol which does not burn** when lit, and it is widely suspected to be an opiate concoction rather than a fermented beverage.

There are a lot of nightclubs, including those attached to the five star hotels (e.g. Grand Plaza), and also local entertainment centres (e.g. JJs, Asia plaza).

Teahouses

Teahouses are important places of social gathering and popular throughout the country. They look like restaurants but if you watch closely you will notice that people are drinking a lot of Chinese tea (free), light brown tea and are mainly snacking. Some teahouses also offer simple dishes as fried rice or noodles.

Once seated they will expect you to order coffee but that's not what you should go for as it is almost always instant coffee. Order tea, a type of black tea with milk that differ in strength and sweetness:



Tea and snacks at a tea house



- *bone mahn*: balanced
- *cho seh*: sweet
- *kyaw p'daung*: sweeter
- *pan brown*: bitter and sweet
- *jah hseent*: light, with milk, not strong
- *pancho*: strong
- *bow hseent*: less strong
- *noe hseent dee*: milk tea without sugar

You will completely mispronounce the tea names (second and sixth are relatively easy) and people might not get what you want at all since it's rare for foreigners to order these teas. So it's better to ask your hotel or any local speaking English to write down the names in Burmese.

Since you are a foreigner they will assume that you want your tea *sheh* - special - which means it will come with condensed milk. It's also possible to order a *tankie* and so the tea will come in a big pot. A simple cup of tea costs 200-400 kyat. Small snacks like samosas, cakes or sweet balls are readily available at the table. If not, ask. At the end you will only pay for the number of pieces eaten. Foodies should check out the type of snacks before deciding on a teahouse. It is not impolite at all to bring your own food, as long as you order at least *something*.

Sleep

Myanmar has good hotel accommodation, particularly in major cities and the main tourist areas, though prices are substantially higher than in Thailand or Vietnam. Rooms with attached bath are available for under US\$10 everywhere except in Yangon and with shared bath for anywhere from US\$3–6 in most places. Almost every hotel licensed for foreigners has running hot water (though, in remote areas, availability may be restricted to certain hours of the day). Hotels, with a few exceptions, are usually clean. At the budget end, sheets and blankets may be threadbare and the rooms may be poorly ventilated. A few low-end hotels, particularly in Yangon and other large cities, specialize in cubicle rooms, small single rooms with no windows which, while cheap and clean, are not for the claustrophobic. Rates are quoted as single/double, but the rooms are usually the same whether one person or two stay in the room, making good hotels a real bargain if travelling as a couple. Except at the top-end, breakfast is always included in the price of the room.



Night in Yangon

The tourism boom in Myanmar has left its infrastructure struggling to cope with the increased numbers of visitors. Hotel rooms tend to sell out really fast, and those in popular tourist destinations often sell out months in advance. As a result of the lack of supply, prices have also increased substantially. You should make your hotel bookings well in advance of your planned trip to Myanmar in order not to be stranded when you arrive.

Myanmar has a problem providing enough electricity to its people and power supply is severely restricted everywhere. In many places, electricity may be available only for a few hours each evening or, in some cases, only every alternate evening. If you don't want to spend your nights without a fan or air conditioning, ask if the hotel has a generator (most mid-priced hotels do). On generator nights, the air conditioning in your room may not work (the price is usually lower as well). Even if a hotel has a generator, there is no guarantee that it will be used to provide you electricity at the times you require, so be ready for blackouts at any time of day or night. Major tourist hotels in Yangon and Mandalay have near-uninterrupted electricity supply, but can cost anywhere from US\$80–300 per night.

At the top-end, Myanmar has some excellent hotels including one or two great ones (The Strand in Yangon and Kandawgyi Palace Hotel in Yangon). The Myanmar government runs many hotels, including some beautiful colonial era ones (though not the two listed in the previous sentence). A percentage of all

accommodation payments goes to the government, no matter where you choose to stay, and it is not possible to run a successful business in Myanmar without some relationship or payment arrangement with the military.

Work



WARNING: Overseas job scams are rampant in Myanmar, particularly in areas of Northern Myanmar held by the military junta or local organisations aligned with it. People are lured in by offers of a high-paid job with little to no experience or work visa needed, then held hostage under threats of violence and forced to work in call centers, online gambling, etc. See [Human trafficking](#) for details. **Chinese speakers** are most frequently targeted, but others have been trapped as well. If you or somebody you know have been caught in this scam, contact your country's [diplomatic mission](#).

Government travel advisories

Hong Kong (<https://www.sb.gov.hk/eng/ota/info-overseasjobscam.html>)

Work in Myanmar for foreigners is hard to come by. NGOs and other aid groups operate in the capital and remote rural areas but may require specific skill sets to hire you. Another option is European and Asian companies, mostly operating on a small scale. Teaching English is feasible in private schools but many foreigners have reported unreasonable contracts, such as withholding pay and refusing to pay those who resign early. The education ministry only hires citizens with teaching certification. If you would like to work and assist Burmese refugees, certain NGOs work in neighbouring [Thailand](#).

Stay safe

Crime

The government punishes crime, particularly against tourists, severely; as a result, as far as crime and personal safety go, Myanmar is extremely safe for tourists, and it is generally safe to walk on the streets alone at night. In fact, you are less likely to be a victim of crime in Myanmar than in [Thailand](#) or [Malaysia](#). However, as with anywhere else, little crime does not mean no crime and it is still no excuse to ditch your common sense. As a foreigner, the most common crime you should be worried about is petty theft, so keep your belongings secured. Physical and verbal harassment towards foreigners is uncommon, even on urban walks near bars.

Since 2005, Yangon and Mandalay have seen a barely perceptible rise in the very low level of street robberies. There were isolated bombings in 2005 in Mandalay and Yangon, and in 2006 in Bago.

Illegal substances



WARNING: Drug offences are *severely punished* by the Burmese authorities. Convicted offenders can expect to face lengthy prison sentences.

Government travel advisories

Canada (<https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/myanmar>) · United States (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel/International-Travel-Country-Information-Pages/Burma.html>)

Begging

Despite traditional taboos against it, begging has become a major problem in the main tourist areas such as Bago and Bagan. Children and "mothers" carrying babies are often the ones who beg as they are more effective at soliciting pity. Most beggars are part of larger begging syndicates or just after easy money, as tourists are usually seen to be rich. In addition, the poor can always obtain food for free from the nearest monastery if they can't afford to pay for it, so begging is not necessary for their survival. If you choose to give, note that most Burmese earn only US\$40 a month doing manual labour and so giving US\$1 to a beggar is very generous.

Fake monks

Theravada Buddhism is the main religion in Myanmar, and it is customary for monks to go on alms rounds in the morning. Unfortunately, there are also many bogus monks who hang out around the main tourist attractions preying on unsuspecting visitors. Alms rounds are solely for the purpose of collecting food: genuine monks are forbidden from accepting, or even touching money. Monks are forbidden from eating after noon, and are also not allowed to sell items or use high pressure tactics to solicit donations. Authentic monks are often found in single file lines with their alms bowls. If you see a single monk requesting money from foreigners he is a fraud.

Corruption

Myanmar is one of the world's most corrupt countries. Officials and other civil servants may discreetly ask you for a bribe, or invent issues (missing forms, closed offices, etc.) in order to get you to suggest one. Pretending not to understand or asking to speak to a superior may work. However, white visitors are rarely targeted, while those of Asian descent (including South Asians and East Asians) may be forced to give bribes, but the brunt of the problem hits normal Burmese.

Westerners are very rarely asked for bribes, although most bribes are a US dollar or less, and requested by people earning as little as US\$30/month.

Driving conditions

The poor road infrastructure, and a mixture of extremely ancient vehicles on the country's roads are all what best describe the road conditions. However, driving habits are not very aggressive compared to say, Vietnam, which does make the safety of the roads comfortable for almost everyone. Although rare, youths

sometimes compete against each other on the roads, which has led to some casualties over the past few years. Bus drivers are among the worst dangers, although this is somewhat less of an issue since 2010 due to new, very harsh penalties imposed on bus drivers involved in accidents.

Surprisingly, Burma has a mixture of both right-hand and left-hand drive vehicles, with the majority being right-hand drive (used imports from Japan) but driving is generally done on the right side of the roads.

Unless you have experience driving in countries with poorly disciplined drivers and very shabby vehicles, try to avoid driving in Myanmar; alternatively, arrange for a local driver to take you around.

Civil conflict

Various insurgent groups continue to operate in the **Mon, and Chin (Zomi), states** of Myanmar, along the Thai and Chinese borders. Travel to these regions generally requires a government permit. The government also sometimes restricts travel to **Kayah State, Rakhine State, and Kachin State** due to insurgent activity. However travel is entirely unrestricted to the districts of Yangon, Bago, Ayeyarwady, Sagaing, Taninthayi, Mandalay, and Magwe. Some areas that have been reported as closed have become open without notice, and areas previously regarded as open can become closed with no warning. In addition, local immigration offices may have their own interpretations of regulations.

Politics

Myanmar is again under harsh military rule as it was from 1962 - 2012, with a reputation for repressing dissent, as in the case of the house arrest of democracy campaigner Aung San Suu Kyi. There used to be more than 1,500 political prisoners (sentences of 65 years and hard labor in remote camps were given to leaders of the Saffron Revolution), although some have been released. When in Myanmar, abstain from political activities and don't insult the government.

Discuss politics, if you must, with people who have had time to get a feel for you. The danger, however, is primarily posed to those you speak with, so let them lead the conversation. Also, realize that many phone lines are tapped. And if you absolutely must wave a democracy banner on the street, you'll simply find yourself on the next outbound flight.

Between 2012–2020, liberty in general increased under the new government. A few politically critical articles have been published in government newspapers and a satirical film deriding the government's film censorship policy has been released, neither of which would have been possible even in 2010.



One of many right-hand drive vehicles imported from Japan into Myanmar. These cause inherent visibility problems when driving on the right side of the road



"Tatmadaw [Armed Forces] and the people in eternal unity. Anyone attempting to divide them is our enemy."

Returning visitors to Myanmar may find that locals have become ever so slightly more open to discussions regarding politics.

However, under any circumstances avoid doing things that might make the military or police feel uncomfortable, such as taking pictures of police and police buildings or vehicles.

Stay healthy

Hygiene in Myanmar may seem terrible to the average Westerner but it is possible to stay healthy with some basic precautions such as prophylactic medication, care choosing food and water, and antibacterial ointment. **Never drink tap water.** Restaurants are legally required to use ice made and sold by bottled water companies, so ordering ice is usually safe in major places. Always drink bottled water and check that the cap is sealed on, not simply screwed on. Diseases such as dengue fever, Japanese encephalitis and malaria are endemic. Drug-resistant strains of malaria and tuberculosis are common in many areas. Hepatitis vaccinations are highly recommended and the cholera oral vaccine is worthwhile. At the dinner table, Burmese use a spoon and fork, or their fingers when this is more convenient. You might feel better rinsing all of them before meals. Antibacterial wipes or alcohol hand-rub is a good idea at regular intervals.

As in many developing countries: "if you can't fry, roast, peel or boil it - then forget it".

HIV

The rate of HIV infection in Myanmar is high by Western and Asian standards (0.7% of the population in 2019).

Healthcare

Myanmar's healthcare system is poorly funded. If you should fall sick in Myanmar, you can visit the doctor in major cities for minor ailments. However, for more serious medical care, hospital conditions tend to be unsanitary and there is often a shortage of medical supplies. The only hospital that comes close to modern developed standards is Pun Hlaing Hospital, a privately owned hospital which is in a remote township of Yangon called Hlaing Thar Yar, and one should expect very high expenses there. Most of the hospitals are government owned, which means poorly funded. Most of the government officials and rich locals go to Thailand or Singapore for more serious medical treatment and hospitalisation, and you will be better off doing so too. Make sure you get travel insurance as arranging to be airlifted in an emergency is rather costly.

The clinic formerly operated by the Australian Embassy in Yangon closed in 2018. There is a good international medical clinic (<https://myanmarmix.com/en/directory/international-sos-clinic-yangon>) at the Inya Lake Hotel in Yangon for consulting, testing, radiology and minor surgery.

Respect

Naming conventions

Modest clothing is highly appreciated everywhere except nightclubs, and practically required in religious places such as pagodas, temples and monasteries (of which there are thousands). Miniskirts, shorts and sleeveless shirts are not allowed in consecrated areas, where you also have to remove your footwear, so loafers and flip-flops that you can slip on and off at the entrance are preferable. Myanmar has some of the most stunning temples in Asia and you will be tempted to visit more than you think. In Myanmar, you have to remove your footwear before entering the entire temple complex, including in outdoor areas. You might want to bring some wet wipes so you can clean your feet after visiting.

Burmese people generally do not engage in public display of affection, even among married couples, and it is generally considered distasteful and should be avoided.

Both men and women wear a *longyi*, a sort of sarong sold everywhere, and it is not unusual to see Caucasian foreigners walking around in them. They are wrapped in different ways for men and women, so find out how to tie yours. If you turn up at a temple in inappropriate dress, you can always rent a longyi for a pittance.

When giving and receiving **business cards**, always use your right hand, with your left hand supporting your right elbow. As the left hand is traditionally reserved for dirty things, handling business cards with it is considered to be very rude.

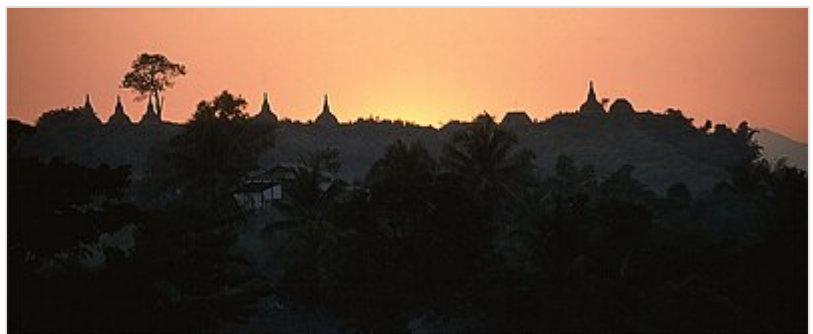
Tourists of Caucasian descent are commonly referred to as *bo*, which translates to "officer", a linguistic relic of colonization. Address elders with *U* (pronounced "oo", as in **soon**) or "Uncle" for men, and *Daw* or "Auntie" for women.

Generally speaking, despite the common negative perception of the government, most ordinary Burmese people are incredibly friendly and polite as long as you respect their local customs. Customer service is in general very good (some say better than in Thailand) but customer service staff are invariably poorly paid, so you might wish to tip service staff generously to ensure your money goes into the right hands.

Politics

Avoid discussing relations with the Rohingya and the ongoing ethnic cleansing as this is a very sensitive and emotive issue that can potentially escalate into a confrontation. The vast majority of Burmese people regard the Rohingya as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh who have no right to be in Myanmar, and

Unlike in many other cultures, there is generally no concept of a family name, patronymic or matronymic in Burmese culture, and most individuals only have a given name. For example, the 8th President, **Htin Kyaw**, only has a given name with no family name, patronymic or matronymic, and would be addressed as Mr Htin Kyaw by most English speakers. Often, a Burmese honorific, usually **U** (ဦး) for men or **Daw** (ဒေါ်) for women, may be added to the beginning of the name, so he may be addressed as *U Htin Kyaw*.



Mrauk U, the old capital of Rakhine in Myanmar



their Muslim religion is seen by many as a threat to Buddhism. Most Burmese people are offended when the Rohingya are referred to as such, and will insist that you use the term "Bengali" to refer to them instead.

Tread carefully when discussing relations with China. Even though both the military junta and Aung San Suu Kyi had developed close ties with China and invited Chinese investment in Myanmar's infrastructure, this is strongly opposed by many pro-democracy activists. While the pro-democracy view on China have largely improved due to alleged Chinese support towards anti-junta ethnic armed organisations, China's policy has equally dissatisfied or even angered pro-junta groups.

Religion

See also: Buddhism#Respect

Buddhism is the largest religion in the country, followed by roughly 80-90% of the population. Many Burmese people are religious and fundamentalist Buddhism has seen growing support in the 21st century.

As in neighbouring Thailand, monks collect alms in the morning and adhere to strict rules such as abstaining from physical contact with women and not touching money. It is customary for Burmese men to spend time living as a monk at least once in their lifetime. Donations to monks should be spontaneous and given in the form of food only, not money; monetary donations should be placed in donation boxes in temples. If you see a monk with money in his alms bowl, he is fake. Monks are not allowed to eat after noon, so if you see a monk going on alms round after noon, he is fake.

Buddhist monks are highly respected, and it is essential to show them respect. Always ask for permission before taking a photograph or touching a monk. It is also important to behave appropriately in their presence. If you are on public transportation, it is customary to give up your seat for them as a sign of respect.

Showing any form of disrespect to Buddhism is taken **very seriously** in Myanmar and you can expect to be treated with **no degree of leniency** if you've been accused of disrespecting Buddhism. Disrespecting Buddhism encompasses things like wearing something with Buddha on it, having a tattoo of Buddha, depicting Buddha in an inappropriate way, and so on. Foreigners have been jailed for disrespecting Buddhism, so be careful about what you say and what you do.

Do not speak negatively about religion; it is illegal, under Burmese law, to "insult" religion. What counts as "insulting" religion is very broadly defined and open to interpretation. Refrain from engaging in religious discussions with the Burmese.

Swastikas are commonly seen in Buddhist temples and **should not** be conflated with anti-Semitism and Nazism.

Connect

Telephone

Country Code: +95 International Call Prefix: 00

Phone numbers in Myanmar have the format +95 1 234-5678 where "95" is the country code for Myanmar, the next one, two, three or four digits are the area code and the remaining 6, 7 or 8 digits are the "local" part of the subscriber number.

You can buy GSM/4G sim cards at International airports or any convenience store. Standard sim card costs around 1500 Ks. Some operators may offer special sim for tourists. There are 4 mobile operators in Myanmar, MPT (Government+KDDI), Telenor, Ooredoo and MyTel (Military+VietTel). MPT is the largest in Myanmar in terms of network coverage and user. Operators offer similar price plans. Generally, standard plan offers voice calls for 20 Ks - 25Ks/min, SMS at 15 Ks - 20 Ks/message. Pay as you go data plan offers around 7 Ks/MB but specific data plan will offer around 1000 Ks/GB or cheaper. Prices for IDD and roaming service vary depending on the operators and destination countries.

If you are going to use in urban area only for local call and data, there is not much difference between operators. If you are going to visit remote area, please check which operator is available at there. If you are going to use IDD or roaming, you may wisely choose by checking offering price at their websites.

Mail

International mail out of Myanmar is reportedly quite efficient, despite what some hotels might tell you. As elsewhere, there is always a risk if you send valuables as ordinary parcels. Use EMS for fast, and relatively cheap international parcels.

Internet

Country's telecommunication sector was revolutionized in 2013 and speed is steadily increasing and price become cheaper. As of 2020, free Wi-fi is available at almost every Hotels. Unlike other countries, Myanmar hugely rely on 4G Internet than cable or Wi-fi. Surprisingly, Yangon has 4th-fastest 4G speeds in East Asia despite the fact that it had slowest speeds in Asia before 2013. Seamless 4G Internet is available in every city, town and along major highway roads. Even a small village is likely to be covered with at least 3G Internet unless it is in highly remote or armed conflict area. Data costs are around 1000 kyat (\$0.8)/GB. There are also cheaper fancy data plans depending on operators. MPT is largest mobile operator and Telenor is second. 4G sim cards are available at International airports and any convenience store.

With the extended coverage of 4G and smart phones, once dominant Internet cafes are getting out of business and turn into gaming stations. In case of you need to access Internet urgently, you can use at those gaming stations but extensive file downloading is not welcome for it can effect their gaming experience. Facebook and Viber are the most used apps and services in Myanmar.

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