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Myanmar Pre-departure Guide

Vietnam | Cambodia | Laos | Myanmar





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## Republic of the Union of Myanmar



**Population:** 55.2 million

**Capital City:** Naypyidaw (Pop: 925.000)

**People:** Bamar 68%, Shan 9%, Karen 7%, Rakhine 4%, Chinese 3%, Indian 2%, Mon 2%, other 5%

**Language:** Myanmar (Bamar)

**Currency:** Kyat (MMK)

**Time Zone:** GMT + 6:30 Hours

**International Dialing Code:** +95

From ancient empires, colonial rule and military regimes, Myanmar is a country with a fascinating history. A melting pot of cultural diversity, where Hindu temples sit alongside mosques, and glittering gold spires of Buddhist pagodas touch the sky. It is a land rich in tradition and steeped in myth, of natural beauty and wonder. But what makes Myanmar magical is the warmth and genuine friendliness of the people.





## ❖History

Formerly ruled by tribal monarchs, Myanmar came under colonial rule by the British Empire in 1824, bringing social, economic, cultural and administrative changes. In 1942 with the onset of WWII, Japan occupied Burma assisted with the help of the Japanese-trained Burma Independence Army, which later transformed into the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) led by General Aung San. In 1945 Britain liberated Burma from the Japanese, aided by General Aung San, who was popular leader among the people was later assassinated by political rivals in 1947. U Nu the former foreign minister took power and in 1948 the nation became an independent republic, named the Union of Burma.

Once free and independent several uprisings occurred, and in 1962 a military dictatorship followed by a socialist regime came into power, isolating the country and closing it off from the world. In 1988 the people rioted against the government led by Aung San Suu Kyi the daughter General Aung San, and the country changed its name from Burma to Myanmar. In the ensuing years the people of Myanmar faced terrible hardships at the hands of the ruling government, and by sanc-

tions and other measures imposed by the international community. Through her tireless efforts to bring democracy and human rights to Myanmar, Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1991 and in 2010 she was finally released from house arrest after spending 15 years in custody. In 2011 political reforms saw the country reopen to foreign trade, investment and tourism.

Myanmar is finally showing signs of positive development and opening up, to show the world just why this beautiful country has been coveted by so many.

## ❖Passport and visa

A passport with at least **six months** validity from the date of entry into Myanmar is required. We recommend you make a photocopy of your passport and keep it somewhere separate, or scan your passport and keep the scan in an accessible email account.

A visa is required for all nationalities and can be obtained via e-Visa or your nearest Myanmar embassy or consulate. Please visit the Myanmar official government website [www.myanmarvisa.gov.mm](http://www.myanmarvisa.gov.mm) for more information.





# General Information



## ❖ Money

The official currency of Myanmar is the Kyat (MMK). While US Dollars are preferred, Euro is becoming widely accepted at most major hotels and larger restaurants that cater to foreign tourists. USD notes should be clean and free from any marks, rips or tears or may not be accepted.

ATMs that accept VISA and MasterCard are available in the main cities of Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay, dispensing money in Kyat. The maximum withdrawal is approximately US\$300. There are few if any ATMs outside of the major cities and credit cards may not be accepted at hotels, so precautions should be taken.

## ❖ Post and telecommunications

Local sim cards are now available to purchase at the airport or local convenience stores for domestic calls only. International roaming is not widely accessible in Myanmar and we suggest you contact your local telco provider for more information. International subscriber dialing is available at all major hotels although very expensive.

Internet access is available in most major tourist areas as well as larger hotels, restaurants and airports. Connections are relatively slow by western standards and can be unstable from time to time.

Myanmar International postal services delivering worldwide, mostly route through Singapore, Bangkok and Seoul. DHL is also available for express deliveries.

## ❖ Transportation

Taxis are the main form of transportation in the major cities with fares within city limits ranging from MMK1000 – 4000. There are no metered taxis in Myanmar and a price needs to be agreed upon with the driver before starting the journey.

## Motorbike taxis

Travel by motorbike in Myanmar is not safe and under no circumstances is this promoted or recommended by Vietnam Great Tours. Please note that travel by motorbike is usually not covered by insurance. Please check the fine print of your travel insurance policy for further information.



## Health and Safety

## ❖ Climate:

Myanmar has a tropical Monsoon climate with three seasons, hot, rainy and cool. The coastal regions have an average temperature of 32 °C and northern region, considered the coolest an average temperature of 21 °C. The central areas are the driest, while Yangon and the coastal areas receive the most rain during the monsoon season. During

the monsoon resorts and hotels at Ngapali Beach are closed.

Mar - May - Hot Season; hot, humid

Jun - Sep - Rainy Season; cloudy, humid

Oct - Feb - Cool Season; mild, sunny

	TEMPERATURE (°C)				RAINFALL Volume (mm)							
CITY	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Yangon	26.8	27.5	29.6	31.17	29.260	28.524	27.492	27.574	28.398	28.208	27.34	26.3
Mandalay	21.4	24.2	28.1	31.38	31.144	30.129	30.78	29.133	29.156	28.185	25.38	22.7
Myeik	26.25	27.51	28.79	28.127	28.434	26.762	26.836	26.762	26.632	27.307	26.97	25.20

**Please note:** *weather can be unpredictable in Asia and we suggest you carry an umbrella or raincoat with you.*

## ❖ Health and wellbeing

Your health can be at risk in Myanmar due to poor sanitation and lack of effective medical facilities. Rural areas may not have pharmacies or hospitals, so make sure you travel with a full supply of any prescribed medicine you take. Every traveller is responsible for their own health. If you have a medical condition or allergy which requires particular attention, carry a doctor's letter with you that describes the nature of the condition and treatment needed. We also recommend you pack a medical kit, including paracetamol and a diarrhea remedy.

We recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for the latest information on travelling in Myanmar and consult with your health provider for any medical issues.

## ❖ Vaccinations

Before travelling, please ensure you have adequate protection against disease. Contact your doctor or health clinic for the latest medical advice on the vaccinations you need, no less than two months before your departure. Malaria is common in SE Asia and is mainly confined to remote and rural areas.

### ❖ Travel insurance (compulsory)

Vietnam Great Tours does everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip. However, travel inevitably involves some risk and this should be recognized by holiday-makers. Travel insurance is a cost effective way of protecting yourself and belongings should any problems occur, such as cancelled trips, delays, medical emergencies, baggage loss or damage. It also gives you peace of mind. Please ensure you have adequate coverage for any adventure related activities..





# Culture & Customs



## ❖Etiquette and cultural differences

Part of traveling to another part of the world is to experience differences in culture and customs. Trying to adapt to local customs is part of being a good guest. The Myanmar people are typically easy going and quite forgiving when travelers are not intimately familiar with their customs.

### Pay attention to:

- Try not to show annoyance or anger by shouting or becoming abusive. It is considered extremely impolite and is unlikely to achieve a positive outcome. In Myanmar people always try to be considerate towards others feelings before taking an action and will always try to avoid making others 'lose face'.
- Avoid touching a person's head or feet, and do not point with your feet to items or people, as it is considered extremely rude.
- It is customary to take off your shoes and socks before entering a person's home, temples and various buildings. If you are unsure, look to see if there are any shoes outside of the door!

- Displays of affection are not common in Myanmar, please remain discreet while in public.

- Myanmar people dress very conservatively and topless or nude sunbathing is not acceptable at any time.

- Myanmar people normally greet each other with "where are you going", however the more formal "mingalabar" is widely used by foreigners and appreciated

## ❖Temple visit etiquette

Myanmar is a predominantly Buddhist country and foreigners are always welcome in pagodas and monasteries. However, it is important that a few simple rules of etiquette are followed:

- Dress appropriately and act with the utmost respect when visiting pagodas or monasteries.
- Do not wear shorts or tank tops. Men and women should make sure their shoulders and knees are covered.



# Culture & Customs



- Remove your hat and leave your shoes at the entrance of any pagoda or monastery grounds.
- When sitting in front of a Buddha, make sure your feet are placed to the side, rather than cross legged.
- Never point your finger or the soles of your feet towards any image of Buddha.
- A woman may accept something from a monk but should never touch or sit next to a monk.
- Giving of alms is deeply rooted tradition and should be done with the utmost respect. Do not give money or cigarettes and be discreet when taking photographs of monks or nuns.
- Show respect and turn off mobile phones, remove headphones, lower your voice and avoid inappropriate conversation.

## ❖ Food and drink

It is not advisable to drink tap water in Myanmar. Bottled water is cheap and widely available. Myanmar food is a mixture of Indian and Chinese cuisine, with curries, soups and rice as staples.

The national dish is Mohinga, a fish broth with rice vermicelli, onion, garlic and lime that is served with fish cakes and fritters usually eaten for breakfast.

## ❖ Public holidays

Myanmar has many public holidays, most of which are related to religious festivals and based upon the lunar calendar. The biggest festival is Thingyan which precedes the Myanmar New Year. The five day celebration takes place during the middle of April and is a time when people return to their villages to celebrate, usually by sprinkling water over each other. Nowadays it is becoming more of a water fight, with buckets and water pistols!





# Helpful tips

## ❖ Donations and gift giving

Myanmar is a very poor country with little in the way of social services and you are likely to see poverty. Please read the following advice about donations and gift giving.

- Do not give money to people begging, especially children. This reinforces the belief that begging is an acceptable way to make a living. If children make money from begging, their parents are less likely to send them to school. Children working on the streets are also vulnerable to abuse.
- Giving money and goods to beggars can accentuate an unequal relationship between locals and visitors, with tourists being seen as purely money givers.
- Avoid giving money to people that look like monks, it is a practice frowned upon by most Myanmar people and is considered to go against their Buddhist principles.
- Do not feel that you necessarily have to give material things. Sometimes, giving your friendship, time and interest to locals can be the best gift of all. For more information go to [www.thinkchildsafe.org](http://www.thinkchildsafe.org) or [www.dosanddontsfortourists.com](http://www.dosanddontsfortourists.com)

## ❖ Tipping

Tipping is a becoming entrenched in Asia although it is not something that is generally done in Myanmar. Waiters, porters, drivers and guides will appreciate a tip for their work. Small gifts are also appreciated. Tips are never expected at smaller restaurants, food stands or by taxi drivers.

As a guideline:

- Tour Guide: US \$5-10 (per day depending on group size)
- Driver: US \$3-5 (per day depending on group size)

- Porter: US \$1 (per two bags)
- Restaurants: 10% of the bill

## ❖ Price guide

While prices vary, most mid range restaurant, bars and cafes charge:

### Restaurants

- Myanmar food: from US \$5
- Chinese, Thai, Indian food: from US \$5
- Western food: from US \$10

### Drinks

- Soft drinks: US \$1
- Bottled water: US \$1
- Juice: US \$1.50
- Local beer: US \$3
- Spirits with mixer: US \$5
- Wine by the glass: US \$5

## ❖ Useful websites

The official tourism website for Myanmar:  
<http://www.myanmar-tourism.org/>

The United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office:  
<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/burma>

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:  
<http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/>





## Pre-departure checklist



- ☐ Travel insurance
- ☐ Passport with at least six months validity from date of entry
- ☐ Photocopy of passport
- ☐ Visa
- ☐ Vaccinations
- ☐ Foreign currency (US\$) and/or ATM card
- ☐ All relevant tickets
- ☐ Reconfirmed flights
- ☐ Lightweight clothing and slippers
- ☐ Raincoat and / or umbrella
- ☐ Long-sleeved shirts and trousers (recommended for evenings)
- ☐ Electric adaptor: 220V, 50Hz; 2 pin plugs
- ☐ A small bag/backpack for day and overnight trips
- ☐ Appropriate shoes for trekking, cycling and walking
- ☐ Insect repellent
- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Medication/first aid kit

**Please note:** Domestic airlines impose baggage weight restrictions of around 20kg maximum, so travel lightly where possible.

Our very best wishes for your journey.

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