

# HIGHLIGHTS TOUR OF BURMA



**COUNTRIES VISITED:** **BURMA**

**TRIP TYPE:** Cultural Tour

**TRIP GRADE:** Easy

**TRIP STYLE:** Hotel

**NAN Based On 0 Reviews**

**KG Carbon Footprint**

**TRIP LEADER:** Local Leader

**GROUP SIZE:** 2 - 10 people

**NEXT DEPARTURE:** 14 Oct 2024

**22 Trees Planted for each Booking**

Our Highlights Tour of Burma is a journey around this fascinating country to see the main "must see" places of Yangon, Bagan, Mandalay and Inle Lake. You will also visit the former British hill station at Kalaw.

With this trip you will have time to explore the most fabled sights of Burma including the thousand temples of Bagan; the former capital of Mandalay and watch the sunset at U-Bein Bridge. At Inle Lake you take a long-tail boat to the hotel and along the way you are likely to see the famous leg-rowing fishermen and the floating gardens. In Yangon you will see the glittering Shwedagon pagoda and the colonial buildings from British times.

Throughout this itinerary you stay at mid-level hotels carefully selected and inspected by us.

We can tailor this trip to suit your specific requirements from hotel accommodation to excursions to length of time available for your holiday. You have the option to join one of our fixed date departures or to have a private tour tailored to dates that suit you.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Internal travel in private car or minibus with driver.

- Private transfers including airport collections.
- Sightseeing with Burmese cultural guides and private vehicle.
- Twin share rooms at all locations.
- Breakfast (B) only at all places on itinerary apart from Breakfast (B) & Lunch (L) on boat ride to Bagan and for day trip to elephant camp from Kalaw.
- Rubberised luggage tags posted to you before departure.
- Full financial protection for all monies paid to us through our membership of Association of Bonded Travel Operators Trust (our ABTOT membership number is 5365) and having an Air Travel Organiser's Licence (our ATOL number is 10921).
- Pre departure support and advice from The Mountain Company by email, phone or face to face meetings in London. After booking with us we will send our comprehensive "Burma Pre Trip Information" notes.

## WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- International flight to/from Yangon and Mandalay.
- Travel insurance.
- Burma visa.
- Lunch and evening meals at all places on itinerary apart from lunch included on boat ride to Bagan and for day trip to elephant camp from Kalaw.
- Balloon ride in Bagan (cost for standard service is US\$295/ GBP245 per person).
- Tips (guidance on amounts included in our "Burma Pre Trip Information" notes).
- Other items not listed in "What is included"

## ITINERARY

### DAY 1: ARRIVE MANDALAY AND TRANSFER TO THE HOTEL. AFTERNOON SIGHTSEEING IN MANDALAY

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Arrive in Mandalay

Sightseeing in Mandalay

No meals

Ayeyarwaddy River View in Deluxe room with River view

A driver will be sent to collect you on arrival at Mandalay airport and to bring you back to the hotel. Please provide travel plans on booking and we will arrange the pick-up and transfer. A tour briefing will be given in the afternoon.

The centre of Mandalay is dominated by the large Fort surrounded by a moat. Mandalay Palace was the primary royal residence of King Mindon and King Thibaw, the last two kings of the country. The complex ceased to be a royal residence and seat of government on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1885 when, during the Third Anglo-Burmese War, troops of the Burma Field Force entered the palace and captured the royal family. The Fort once contained the royal city and fabled Glass Palace however these were destroyed during World War Two.

At sunset you will go to Mandalay Hill where there is a magnificent panorama view of the city, the Irrawaddy, Mingun and pagoda-covered hills of Sagaing. Before dusk you will start to climb through one of the three roofed stairways leading up to the 236 metre high hill with 1,729 steps. Along the way there are shrines and viewing platforms. The walk up should take about 45 minutes however if you are feeling less energetic you can also drive most of the way up instead.

### DAY 2: MANDALAY SIGHTSEEING

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## Sightseeing in Mandalay

### Breakfast

#### Ayeyarwaddy River View in Deluxe room with River view

Today there will be a guided tour around the city of Mandalay where you will see Mahamuni Pagoda; the impressive teak Shwenandaw monastery known as Golden Palace and craft workshops.

Mahamuni Pagoda is one of the three most important shrines in Burma along with Schwedagon in Yangon and the Golden Rock in Kyaiktiyo. Inside Mahamuni Pagoda is the world famous Mahamuni Buddha, this is 3.8m high and its shape is distorted from application of gold leaf over the years by pilgrims.

Shwenandaw is a beautiful teak monastery decorated with exquisite Buddhist carvings of mythical animals and dancing figures. This building is surrounded by teak platform supported on wooden pillars topped with marble lotus flowers. The monastery was originally King Mindon Min's apartment complex and relocated from the Royal Palace in 1878. The building was reconstructed as a monastery dedicated to King Mindon Min's memory on a plot adjoining Atumashi Monastery.

Mandalay is the cultural centre of Burma and has long been known as a centre of skilled craftsman and in former times supplied the royal courts. Whole sections of the city are devoted to production of devotional objects made of wood, jade, bronze and marble. You can visit workshops around the city for wood carving, marble sculpture, bronze casting, weaving and the creation of gold leaf. Your lunch and dinner will be at local restaurants.

## **DAY 3: DRIVE TO AVA, SAGAING AND AMARAPURA FOR U- BEIN BRIDGE**

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## Sightseeing in Ava, Sagaing and Amarapura for U- Bein bridge

### Breakfast

#### Ayeyarwaddy River View in Deluxe room with River view

Around Mandalay there are many interesting remnants of several former Royal capitals dating from different periods in the regions history: Ava (Inwa), Amarapura, Sagaing and Mingun.

In the morning you drive to Ava (Inwa), this was the capital of Burmese kingdom for more than four hundred years until 1841. We take a small boat over to an island on the Irrawaddy river and explore this area by horse drawn cart. There are numerous crumbling pagodas and other remains of a former royal city including the teak monastery of Bagaya Kyaung; Nanmyin Watch Tower known as the leaning tower of Inwa and the Royal monastery temple named Maha Aungmye Bonzan.

After Ava you drive over a bridge on Irrawaddy to visit Sagaing once the capital of an autonomous Shan kingdom during 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Today this is a tranquil place where there are many stupas and pagodas covering these green hills overlooking the Irrawaddy river. This area is widely regarded as one of the main religious centres of Burma and is home to many Buddhist monks

Later in the afternoon we visit one of Burma's most iconic sights, U-Bein bridge, at Amarapura for sunset. This teak bridge is the longest in the world at 1.2 kilometres long and crosses Taungthaman Lake. Amarapura was once known as the City of Immortality and was briefly the capital of Burmese kingdom from 1841 to 1857. After this date King Mindon Min made Mandalay the last capital of the Burmese kings. Amarapura is known today for its traditional silk and cotton weaving and bronze casting.

The best time of day to visit U-Bein bridge is undoubtedly at sunset, with the dipping sun creating a spectacular vista and dramatic view of the wooden bridge. You will board a private local row boat and venture out onto the lake to take in the sunset from one of Mandalay's most scenic locations. As the sun goes down over the horizon you will observe silhouetted locals walking across the iconic bridge.

## DAY 4: DAY BOAT CRUISE ON IRRAWADDY RIVER TO BAGAN

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boat cruise on Irrawaddy river to Bagan

Breakfast and Lunch

Thazin Garden Hotel in Deluxe room

Today we take the boat to Bagan as cruising along the majestic Irrawaddy river is the best method to travel as you get views of the passing countryside and river activities along the way. We will organise your early morning transfer to the jetty to board one of three boats that operate a full day river cruise to Bagan. On board there is inside and outside seating, a small café and toilets. After checking in at the hotel you have the rest of the afternoon to explore this incredible place.

Bagan is truly one of the wonders of the world and a highlight of any trip to Burma. Across a 40 square kilometres area of savannah landscape you will see 2,230 temples and pagodas with their gilded cupolas sparkling in the sun. At sunset we will go one of the pagodas like Bupaya to watch the sun go down over the Irrawaddy river.

## DAY 5: SIGHTSEEING IN BAGAN

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Sightseeing in Bagan

Breakfast

Thazin Garden Hotel in Deluxe room

There is an option this morning to go for a sunrise balloon ride over Bagan (October to March only and must be booked in advance). The flight will last about 50 minutes and the direction is dictated by the wind. From the basket there is a sensational view of the many pagodas and temples scattered over the Bagan plain and the Irrawaddy river as the sun rises in the sky.

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When King Anawrahta ascended the throne in 1044 founding the first Burmese dynasty, Bagan steadily developed into a powerful kingdom. Anawrahta converted to Theravada Buddhism and the 'golden period' of Bagan commenced when many temples were built most notably Schwezigon pagoda. Under King Kyanzittha temple construction continued at a rapid pace with Ananda being one of the most famous.

By 12<sup>th</sup> Century Bagan had a population of half a million although by 13<sup>th</sup> Century the city fell into decline. The old palaces and houses have disappeared as they were made out of wood although a few remnants of old fortifications survive such as 9th Century Tharaba gate. The temples and pagodas were left to the elements and further damage was caused by the earthquake of 1975 that destroyed over half of the remaining religious buildings. What remains today is glimpse of Bagan at its height of power however is a remarkable footprint of glorious period of Burma's history.

After discussion with your guide you can decide which of Bagan's many temples and pagodas to visit. Please note you must remove your shoes before entering any of these religious sites. The most impressive and important temples and pagodas to visit are as follows:

- Shwezigon pagoda built by King Kyansittha. Schwezigon derives its name from Jeyyabhumi 'Golden victory' with its magnificent golden stupa. After Schwezigon we visit some of Bagan's many temples and pagodas by horse drawn cart.

- Gubyaukgyi (Wetkyi Inn) temple has fine 12<sup>th</sup> Century mural paintings, frescoes and base-relief works.
- Htilominlo temple is a massive structure at 150 feet tall with frescoes representing 28 Buddha of the future.
- Ananda temple has the best preserved masterpieces of Mon architecture and nearby brick monastery, is one of the few surviving from Bagan period.
- Gawdawpalin is one of the largest and most impressive monuments in Bagan
- Shwegugyi temple is of transitional in style between the early and late Bagan period.
- Thabyinnyu temple is known as the highest monument of universal science
- Dhammyangyi has a unique of double Image of Buddha. Myingabar Gubyaukgyi, meaning "great painted cave temple" is known for its exquisite mural paintings.

## **DAY 6: FLY TO HEHO, DRIVE TO KALAW (1,400M)**

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Fly to Heho

Drive to Kalaw (2 hours)

Breakfast

Pine Hill Resort in Deluxe rooms

Breakfast at hotel, transfer to Yangon airport to take the flight to Heho airport. From Heho we drive to Kalaw. In villages near Kalaw there are Palaung and other hill tribes who come to the market held every five days in their colourful costumes adding to the quiet attraction of Kalaw.

## **DAY 7: DAY VISIT TO THE ELEPHANT SANCTUARY AT GREEN HILL VALLEY**

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Walk to elephant sanctuary (2 hours)

Breakfast and Lunch

Pine Hill Resort in Deluxe rooms

Green Hill Valley elephant camp is set amongst 150 acres and this is a new initiative set up to focus on protecting the local ecology, elephants and traditions of the local people. The area is also home to a variety of birdlife, butterflies, orchids and bamboo forests. Visitors have the chance to learn about the daily lives of these magnificent gentle giants at the same time as taking in some wonderful Shan countryside away from the busier tourist routes.

You meet the trek guide and walk to the camp through bamboo and teak forests taking about roughly one to two hours. There is also the option to drive to camp with only short 10 minute walk to the activities. On arrival at the camp you will receive some light refreshments and then take a short walk down to the river to join the elephants at bath time - you are able to join in the bathing duties if you would like to. Please note that the owners of the camp are not keen to promote visitors riding the elephants; but depending on the weather and the health of the elephants it may be possible to experience a short ride, please also note that baskets are not used on the elephants. After lunch served at the main camp you are welcome to plant regional trees from the nursery, to help them in their forest recovery efforts.

## **DAY 8: DRIVE TO INLE LAKE AND BOAT TRIP TO HOTEL**

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Drive to Inle Lake (2 hours)

Boat trip to hotel on Inle Lake



## Breakfast

Golden Island Cottages Thale U in Superior room

We drive for two hours to Nyaung Shwe, known as the gateway to Inle Lake, where we stop off at Red Mountain vineyard for a tour and wine tasting. Afterwards we will board a long-tail boat for the transfer to your hotel on Inle Lake, along the way you are likely to see the famous leg-rowing fishermen and the floating gardens. Traveling on the lake is an exhilarating experience and a chance to observe the unique traditions of the Intha people. It is advisable to pack a waterproof jacket and warm clothes as it can be chilly sightseeing around the lake. Your lunch and dinner will be at local restaurants.

## **DAY 9: DAY BOAT TRIP TO SANKAR IN THE FAR SOUTH OF INLE LAKE**

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Boat trip to Sankar

### Breakfast

Golden Island Cottages Thale U in Superior room

This morning we take the long-tail boat to Sankar in the far southern region of Inle Lake. This boat journey will take around 2 ½ hours and is an opportunity to get far away from the more touristy areas. On the boat ride you will see the traditional lifestyle in the small villages and the local people going about their daily business. The villages around Sankar are home to Pa'O, Shan and Inthar people.

When you get to Sankar you will visit the 108 'sunken' stupas from the 16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, these are partially underwater for a few months a year. There is also a local monastery and village that can be visited too. On the way back you can stop off at the village of Thaya Gone known for its production of local rice wine. You can watch the process of distillation and then sample some of the local brew if you wish. You can also make a stop at Sae Khaung Pottery Village to see the making of pots as well as the underground kilns. On the way back along the western shores of the Sankar area we can visit Takhaung Mwetaw pagoda with more than 200 stupas.

## **DAY 10: FLY TO YANGON, AFTERNOON SIGHTSEEING**

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Boat then drive to Heho airport

Fly to Yangon

Sightseeing in Yangon

### Breakfast

Hotel M

We take a final boat trip across the lake this morning to return to Nyaung Shwe. A car will be waiting for you for the transfer back to Heho airport. Fly to Yangon and transfer to your hotel.

In the late afternoon you will visit the famous Shwedagon pagoda. This is the best time of day to come to Shwedagon as much cooler and it is serene place to watch the sun set over Yangon. You will also see Burmese coming to pay their respects at this sacred place after finishing their day's work. Shwedagon shimmers above the city of Yangon and is known not only as the religious centre of Yangon but is also the cultural and spiritual heart of Burma itself. An estimated 60 tonnes of gold adorn the pagoda and at the top of the stupa the hti (umbrella) is believed to contain more than 7,000 diamonds, rubies and sapphires.

## DAY 11: SIGHTSEEING IN YANGON

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Sightseeing in Yangon

Breakfast

Hotel M

This is a day to explore Yangon where we organise a guided sightseeing tour. We stop outside Aung Sang Suu Kyi's gated home and then walk around the Bogyoke Aung San (Scott) market where one can find Burmese handicraft as well as precious stones like rubies and jade. From the market we walk to Sule pagoda and then passing the old British colonial buildings along the way to the riverfront.

## DAY 12: TRANSFER TO AIRPORT FOR FLIGHT BACK HOME

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Fly home

Breakfast

Transfer to airport for flight back home.

## DATES & PRICES

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Kit List

## CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT LIST FOR BURMA TOURS

### Footwear:

- Comfortable shoes i.e trail shoes or trainers.
- Flip flops or sandals for easy removal during temple visits.

### Travel clothes. You will need casual clothing as follows:

- Lightweight waterproof jacket.
- Casual long sleeved shirt.
- T shirts.
- Lightweight trousers.
- Fleece or woolly jumper/sweater (in winter months from December through to March it will get cold during the evenings when in hill stations of Kalaw and Pindaya).
- Socks and underwear etc.

Please carefully read Cultural Consideration paragraph for dress code when visiting religious sites.

### Headwear:

- Sun hat.
- Bandana or scarf. (eg. [Buff Headwear](#) or purchase a [#myTMCbuff](#)).

### Personal Equipment:

- Toiletry bag include toilet paper, soap, towel, toothbrush, etc.
- Headtorch. Useful during power cuts.

- Backpack for day trips. Recommended size is 15 to 20 litres.
- Water bottle.
- Sunscreen and lipsalve with a high SPF.
- Insect repellent.
- Books, phone and cards etc.
- Power adapter.
- Umbrella
- Camera with spare batteries and memory cards.
- Insurance certificate.
- Hand sanitizer. We suggest you keep this in your day pack.
- Duffle bag (or backpack) for your personal gear. Bring a small combination padlock to secure the bag.

**Personal first aid kit:**

Please bring personal medications and other items you might use regularly such as:

- Any personal medications.
- Malaria prophylactic tablets.
- Spray on insect & mosquito repellent.
- Plug in insect & mosquito repellent (for your bedroom at night).
- Plasters and blister treatment (Compeed patches are the best).
- Anti-septic cream.
- Analgesics (paracetamol, ibuprofen and aspirin).
- Throat lozenges.
- Diarrhoea treatment (Immodium) and oral rehydration salts (Dioralyte).
- Antihistamine cream and tablets (Cetirizine or loratidine)

**Internal Flights****INTERNAL FLIGHTS IN BURMA**

All internal flights in Burma are in Economy with 20kg of baggage allowance not including hand luggage. These airlines often operate a circular network which means that depending on your itinerary the flight may go via one or two airports before reaching your final destination.

Please be aware that flight times are not confirmed by the airline until a few months before departure date. We will reconfirm your flights on your arrival to Burma and obtain the latest timings. However even after reconfirmation your flight times may change again without warning therefore a certain degree of flexibility is required for travelling in Burma.

British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) travel advice to Burma includes concerns over the safety standards of some airlines operating in Burma but does not offer any guidance on individual airlines. However the EU does not currently include any Burmese airlines on its list of banned carriers from operating within the EU.

**Cultural information****CULTURAL INFORMATION FOR BURMA TOURS**

For those of you who are visiting Burma for the first time we have provided some cultural information to help you fit in and feel at ease:

- Burma is a conservative and as this country was closed to tourists for so long, it has been influenced less by Western culture than the rest of Southeast Asia. It is best to cover as much of your skin as you can while in public in order to be respectful of the local culture and not to attract too much attention to yourself.
- When visiting religious sites you should wear trousers and long sleeved shirts as shorts and sleeveless tops will cause offence. Ensure your shoulders and knees are covered.
- You should remove shoes and socks before entering a pagoda or monastery.
- When you sit down your legs should not be stretched out and your feet should never face the Buddha.
- When visiting a monastery or gompa it is customary to give a donation for its upkeep.



- At hot springs, rivers and lakes where it is pleasant to take a dip, it is fine for men to go bare-chested while bathing but they should not go nude. Women should try and be as modest as possible in these situations.
- Displaying physical closeness in public places is frowned upon in Burma, never kiss in public.
- Do not purchase antiques although it is always a good idea to buy arts & crafts from local shops around heritage sites.
- Do not give presents (sweets, pens etc) or money to children as this will foster dependence and expectations of gifts from future travellers.

Local customs are well explained on the website [Dos and Don'ts for Tourists](#) run by the Burmese government and Burmese Tourist Federation.

## ACCOMMODATION

### HOTEL M IN YANGON



Hotel M is located only a few kilometres from Lake Inya in an exclusive residential area of Yangon. This hotel has well-appointed 38 rooms with wooden parquet floors and teak wood furniture.

The rooms have en-suite bathroom with shower and facilities such as tea & coffee making, complimentary wifi and safe deposit box. This property has a swimming pool and complimentary membership to their fitness club.

## AYEARWADDY RIVER VIEW IN MANDALAY



Ayeyarwaddy River View has a wonderful location overlooking the Irrawaddy river in Mandalay. We suggest you visit their Sky bar and restaurant on the roof top in the evening for sunset or early morning for sunrise for the view over the Irrawaddy.

Their Cafe Ayar is on the ground floor of the hotel near their swimming pool where they serve traditional Burmese and International food. There is also a spa and fitness centre. Given availability we use Deluxe room with River view, these rooms have air conditioning, safe deposit box, tea & coffee facilities and free wifi.



## THAZIN GARDEN HOTEL IN BAGAN



Thazin Garden Hotel is located in New Bagan and is surrounded by ancient pagodas and ruins. The buildings are built in traditional Myanmar style using teak wood and there is an attractive garden with flowers and palm trees. There is a swimming pool with pool side restaurant.

There are 67 Deluxe Rooms with some rooms having pagoda view and others garden view, all of the rooms have air conditioning and private verandah. The main restaurant serves supper under a flood lit pagoda. Breakfast in the mornings is served at the upper floor dining hall. There is also a spa centre for massage and beauty treatments.

## PINE HILL RESORT IN KALAW



Pine Hill Resort is located on outskirts of Kalaw and is a good base for exploring this area. The reception and lobby is an original colonial building giving a reminder of this bygone era. Surrounding the property is a lovely garden full with plants and flowers.

Pine Hill Resort has 32 rooms in 2 categories: Superior & Deluxe. All rooms are spacious decorated with Burmese wood and en-suite bathroom has bathtub and shower. Room facilities include tea & coffee making and TV. There is a heated swimming pool with jacuzzi, fitness centre and sauna room. The resort also offers complimentary bicycle service.



**GOLDEN ISLAND COTTAGES THALE U AT INLE LAKE**



Golden Island Cottages Thale U is located in a quieter part of Inle Lake on the eastern side near the village of Thale U. This is a floating hotel built on stilts on the lake. The cottages are constructed from bamboo and furnished in a traditional style, they all have a private outdoor deck with scenic views of the lake.

The rooms have en-suite bathroom with shower and bath, tea and coffee facilities and mosquito netting over the bed. Golden Island Cottages are operated by the hospitable Pa O people and revenue is used for community development.

**Notes downloaded on:** 14-10-2024

