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ACCOMMODATION

Outside the touristy destinations – Yangon, Bagan (Pagan), Mandalay, Inle Lake and Ngapali Beach – most accommodation options hover between bare-bones guesthouses with concrete floors and cold-water showers down the hall to Chinese-style hotels with green carpet, minibar, satellite TV, private bathroom with hot water, and some wood carvings perhaps. Some places are quite comfy and well cared for. Joint-venture hotels and a few locally run ones offer high-class comfort and service at prices soaring from US\$100 to US\$500. Nearly all accommodation is privately run. Some top-end

hotels are run as joint ventures with Singapore, Thailand, Japan and other countries.

Prices

Nearly all hotels quote prices in US dollars or the fast-fading Foreign Exchange Certificates (FEC; see p345). If you pay in kyat, the price will be quoted at a slightly

PRACTICALITIES

- When it's working: 230V, 50Hz AC electricity. Most power outlets have two-pronged round or flat sockets.
- Outside Yangon, no-one in Myanmar calls an ambulance in an emergency; they go to the hospital. You could call top-end hotels in a crisis and ask about English-language doctors.
- All guesthouses and hotels wash dirty laundry, starting at K1000 for a small load.
- Yangon publishes two English-language newspapers: *Myanmar Times*, which offers some useful travel and entertainment information, and the serious government mouthpiece *New Light of Myanmar*. Two tourism-related magazines are harder to come by: *Perspectives* and *Enchanting Myanmar*.
- All national radio and TV broadcasts are state controlled. Many locals listen to short-wave radios for BBC and VOA broadcasts. Satellite TV has brought some dramatic changes in recent years, with CNN, MTV Asia, BBC World Service and – *sacre bleu!* – Fashion TV all piping in.
- The standard video system in Myanmar is NTSC, but many people also own PAL models, which are compatible with Thailand, Australia and most of Europe.
- 1 Burmese *viss* or 100 *ticals* = 1.6kg; 1 *gaig* = 91cm; petrol is sold by the gallon; distances are in miles, not kilometres.

LICENSED TO SLEEP?

Foreigners are only allowed to stay at 'licensed' hotels and guesthouses, which means that establishments keep at least five rooms and reach a certain standard. In the past, some owners bent the rules in less visited towns, but that seems to be waning. Staff will often say 'we have no rooms' instead of owning up that they lack the license. Other places post the license clearly – on the door or on the entry wall.

At night, all hotels and other accommodation options must fill in police forms on behalf of all guests, which include the details of your visa and your passport number. Hotels will not have to keep your passport, however.

unfavourable rate (say K1000 for every US\$1 asked for, instead of the exchange rate of K950). Prices quoted at budget and midrange hotels include all taxes; usually top-end hotel prices don't include the 10% government tax and 10% service charge in their quoted prices.

The vast majority of hotels, apart from top-end ones, have a two-tier pricing system (for foreigners or locals) and often two or more types of rooms for each. In some cases shoestringers can insist on staying in a 'local' room, which is often a cubicle wall with a hard mattress, a fan (maybe), and a cold-water shared bathroom. Often there are two 'foreigner' room types too; a few extra dollars gives you air-con instead of a fan, a private bathtub rather than a private (or shared) shower, and satellite TV instead of local TV or no TV at all. Almost all hotels offer a free breakfast of eggs, toast and coffee or tea; occasionally the traditional *mohinga* (noodles with fish or chicken) breakfast is offered – it's definitely worth trying.

It's possible to bargain at most hotels, especially during the low season (March to October). Most people checking in early – say if they're arriving off an overnight bus, which often gets in at around 6am or 7am – are only charged for the following night.

Most hotel staff speak some English and can certainly help you exchange money at good rates, but not always the best. In some cases, staff will charge some commission, often at the same rate you'll find on the street. The staff is also usually well informed about travellers' needs, and can help arrange a taxi, rent a bicycle or (importantly) procure ever-confusing bus or train tickets. In all, their help is invaluable.

Note that a 10% tax (at least) on all hotel payments goes straight to the government.

Staying at cheapie guesthouses means that less money is directed this way. Essentially, no guesthouses in the country have direct government ties.

Government Hotels

The government – the Ministry of Hotels & Tourism (MHT) to be more precise – directly operates a dwindling number of hotels around the country. Travellers keen to minimise the money going into the government's coffers should avoid staying at these hotels, which are often empty and/or poorly cared for. See the boxed text, p332, for more information on this.

Guesthouses

Considering the absence of hostels and camping options, the (usually family-run) guesthouses are the de-facto sleeping option for shoestringers. Rates range from US\$3 to US\$8 or so – a little higher in

TOP CHEAP SLEEPS

Sometimes it's not money that makes a place so homey and right that it feels wrong to leave. Here are three places that we enjoyed.

Mya Yatanar Inn, Pakokku (p280) Crusty, but 'real Myanmar' all the way – more home than guesthouse actually – run by a former boxing coach and his wife; K3500.

Myanmar Beauty Guest House IV, Taungoo (p291) Myanmar's biggest breakfast is served in this teak home amid rice paddies, palms and mountains; from US\$8.

Viewpoint, near Kalaw (p176) While this is more of a place for a curry and to enjoy the views, it makes a good place to spend the night if you can organise it; the Viewpoint is atop a mountain and charges K1500 for bed and curry.

Yangon. Some are lovingly cared for, some aren't. In some towns one guesthouse is the lone option – and you get what you get. For most, variables include concrete or bubbly vinyl floor; private or shared bathroom; hot or cold water; local, satellite or no TV; air-con or fan or *nada*. Usually a mark left by a bumped suitcase on the wall is left there, as are – in the grubbier places – squashed mosquitoes.

Hotels & Resorts

'Hotels' means everything from eight-room guesthouses that strategically use the name to joint-venture hotels with lush gardens surrounding a giant pool. Rates range from US\$8 to well over US\$100.

Many of the midrange hotels are modern, Chinese-style multistorey jobbies. In more touristy locations, some are bungalow-style, with porches and a sitting garden where breakfast is served. Doubles at these range from US\$20 to US\$35.

Those more accustomed to high-end comfort will find escaping the main travel destinations harder to stomach. Upmarket hotels, including some joint-venture, luxury resorts with standards rivalling those in Thailand, are found in Yangon, Bagan, Ngapali Beach and Mt Popa. Slightly less classy options can be found in Mandalay, Inle Lake, Pyin U Lwin, Chaungtha Beach, Ngwe Saung and Kyaiktiyo (the Golden Rock). Most upmarket hotels are in the US\$70 to US\$100 price range, but some reach US\$500 a night.

WHERE DOES THE ACCOMMODATION MONEY GO?

The big question on the minds of travellers keen to avoid government-run businesses – what's government run? – is not always the easiest to answer. In recent years the government has leased some of its deteriorated hotels to foreign businesses in the form of joint ventures, or to private entrepreneurs, who often face insurmountable odds to right the ship. Throughout this book we flag government-run services and hotels (see the tips on p24), or ones recently leased. Note that the situation at each place could change – and, hopefully, will in the case of Pyin U Lwin (Maymyo), where the government runs hotels out of some lovely old British homes.

Joint-venture hotels, often rebuilt from scratch at great expense, generally work on a 30-year lease basis. Big operations do employ many locals, and often at higher wages than elsewhere. However, it's not really known what amount in fees or profit share (beyond the 10% tax) goes to the government. Some claim it's zero, though others dispute this.

It's worth noting that essentially every local has a brother, sister-in-law or uncle that's in either the military or the government.

All this doesn't necessarily mean that profits go into the generals' pockets. It's estimated that over 80% of tourists' expenditure on the ground gets absorbed into local economies.

ACTIVITIES

See p33 for an itinerary in Myanmar that features a number of activities.

Bird-Watching

The nation's best bird-watching is to be found on the hike up Mt Victoria in Chin State, presently accessed only through expensive government-sponsored tours (see p329).

Cycling

Some cycling groups have made it on tours to Myanmar. But you don't have to be on a tour to enjoy cycling here.

The most popular route is between Mandalay and Bagan, via Myingyan. This is a fairly flat route that keeps to the east of the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River. For something more hilly and scenic, go northeast of Mandalay to Pyin U Lwin, Hsipaw and Lashio. Some of that road has dividers, meaning no oncoming traffic swaying into your lane. Another very scenic route starts in Thazi (accessible by train) and runs east through hilly Kalaw and Pindaya to Inle Lake.

Short trips out of Mandalay to Monywa, Sagaing, Inwa (Ava) and Amarapura also make satisfying rides.

See p360 for more on bringing bicycles into the country.

Diving & Snorkelling

The beach resorts of Ngapali Beach (p314) and Chaungtha Beach (p135) offer half-and

RESPONSIBLE DIVING & SNORKELLING

If you want to enjoy Myanmar's underwater realm, remember these simple rules to minimise your impact:

- Don't use anchors on a reef and ask your operators not to either
- Be conscious of your fins or your body dragging across fragile reef ecosystems – both parties in question can be hurt
- Take out all rubbish or litter, including what you find; plastic in particular can wreak havoc on marine life
- Don't feed fish; it disturbs their normal eating habits and can prompt aggressive behaviour
- If you're diving in the Myeik Peninsula, be sure that you possess a current diving certification card
- Be aware that underwater conditions vary significantly from one region to the next – dive only within the limits of your experience

full-day snorkelling trips. It's no Great Barrier Reef, but there are plenty of fish to see swimming around a coral tower or two.

The best diving, by far, is at the Mergui (Myeik) Archipelago in southwestern Myanmar, which apparently received no damage from the 2004 tsunami. Presently trips here can be arranged in advance through Phuket-based operators, some of whom were gearing up to make the trips following the tsunami. A typical trip involves seven nights onboard a boat, and includes meals, equipment and transport from Phuket or Ranong (Thailand). Diving or diving/kayaking trips cost from about US\$1200 to US\$1500; longer ones that take in part of Thailand are pricier. Many of the islands reached are isolated, with good kayaking possibilities. Phuket outfitters must negotiate deals with the Myanmar government, and we hear that sometimes a government official tags along for the ride. Trips run weekly from November to April.

The first trip to the archipelago was in 1996. Some companies work to educate locals regarding the negative impact of dynamite fishing and logging.

Reliable outfitters:

Asian Adventures (www.asian-adventures.com)

Fantasea Divers (www.fantasea.net)

Faraway Sail & Dive (www.far-away.net)

South East Asia Liveaboards Co (<http://seal-asia.com>)

Golf

Golf courses are everywhere – little towns such as Salay (p279) even have rather brown courses. Pyin U Lwin (p204) hosts a tournament in April. Many courses are 'private',

though murmurs of government involvement surround many. In some towns, locals can't be members. Green fees skyrocket above the prices for locals, with some courses charging US\$15 or US\$20 to play. Be aware that some female caddies double as sex workers.

Rafting

Since 2003 **Ultimate Descents** (www.ultimatedescents.com) has enabled paddlers to make the first trips down some key tributaries of the Ayeyarwady in northern Kachin State, at the foothills of the Himalaya. It's best to get in touch with the local contact, **Ayeyarwaddy Expeditions** (in Yangon ☎ 01-652 809; thelisu@myanmar.com.mm; Suite 03-06, Sedona Hotel, Yangon), to set up a trip. Four-day trips (with two days' trekking) on the Nam Lang River start at US\$800 per person (and are run weekly from October to April). The very serious, experienced-only three-week descent of the Mayhka River (Mother River; aka 'the Everest of Rivers') costs US\$10,000 to US\$15,000 per person.

Trekking

Great hiking potential abounds in northern and eastern Myanmar, particularly in Shan State. Here are some popular hikes:

Hsipaw area (p208) Five hours northeast of Mandalay; offering fine DIY day hikes.

Kalaw to Inle Lake (p208) Longhouses and teahouses freckle the mountain tops on this highlight trek.

Kengtung Area (p196) A very remote area (reached by air from central Myanmar) near the Thai border; hikes take in villages of the Wa people (former head-hunters).

Namhsan (p213) North of Hsipaw; guided hikes in a far-flung area.

Pindaya area (p178) Near Inle Lake.

SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR HIKING

We've heard about some travellers finding new paths and staying in the hills for a week or more. Most, however, stick with day trips. Here are a few points to consider before lacing up the boots:

- Hike with at least one companion; in most cases it's best to hire a guide
- Do not venture by foot into areas restricted to foreigners; ask around before taking off
- Camping in the hills is not technically legal, as foreigners must be registered with local authorities by owners of 'licensed accommodation' nightly
- Trail conditions can get slippery and dangerous, especially in the rainy season
- Walk only in regions within your capabilities – you're not going to find a trishaw out there to bring you back

In the past it wasn't feasible to do multiday treks – at least not legally – but the practice is opening up. Generally it's necessary to hire a guide (licensed or otherwise). Rates range from US\$4 to US\$10 per day, and are about US\$25 in more remote Kengtung.

Climbs up Chin State's Mt Victoria (p329) require you to take a costly government-sponsored tour.

BUSINESS HOURS

Most government offices – including post offices and official telephone centres – are open Monday to Friday from 9.30am to 4.30pm. Don't arrive at a government office at 4pm expecting to get anything done, though; most government workers start drifting to the local teashops after 3.30pm.

Private shops are generally open daily from 9am (or 9.30am) to 6pm or later. Most restaurants – even ones without many breakfast visitors – open at 7am or 8am and close late, at 9pm or 10pm. Internet cafés, where they exist, tend to keep shorter hours. Payas (Buddhist monuments), including *pahto* (temples), never close.

CHILDREN

As in many places in Southeast Asia, travelling with children in Myanmar can be very

rewarding as long as you come well prepared with the right attitude, the physical requirements and the usual parental patience. Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children*, by Cathy Lanigan, contains useful advice on how to cope with kids on the road and what to bring along to make things go more smoothly. Special attention is paid to travel in developing countries.

Myanmar people love children – dote on them – and in many instances will shower attention on your offspring, who will find ready playmates among their local counterparts and an impromptu nanny service at practically every stop.

Due to Myanmar's overall low level of public sanitation, parents ought to lay down a few ground rules with regard to maintaining their children's health – such as regular hand-washing – to head off potential medical problems. All the usual health precautions apply (see the Health chapter on p369); children should especially be warned not to play with animals they encounter along the way, as a precaution against rabies.

Nappies (diapers) are hard to come by outside Yangon, but it's wise to bring all the nappies or formula you'll need for the trip from home. Most high-end hotels and restaurants will have high chairs available.

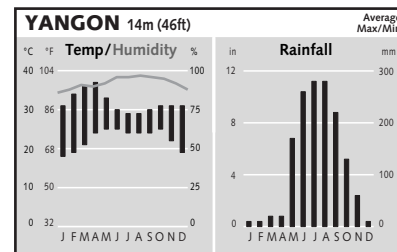
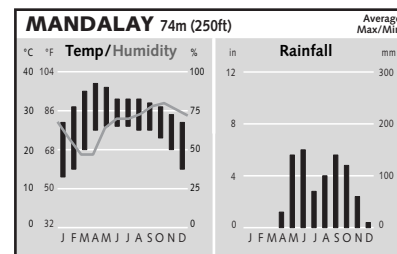
Sights & Activities

Kids, like adults, often get a thrill from little things such as rides on trishaws, motorised canoes and horse carts. While in Bagan, give your driver (if you have one) the day off and take a horse cart around by yourselves (p269). Inle Lake's famous boat trips (p191) are in dugout canoes. The ancient cities outside Mandalay offer fun, brief boat trips. Options include rowing boats in the lake by Amarapura's U Bein's Bridge (p248), a flat-bed ferry and then an ox-cart loop around Inwa (p251), and a boat ride up the Ayeyarwady to Mingun (p254).

Big Buddhist sights and ancient ruins can be good gawking material, including Yangon's Shwedagon Paya (p90), the reclining Buddhas in Bago (Pegu; see p140) or the 10-storey Buddha in Pyay (Promé; see p283). You can climb into the back of the lacquered Buddha image at Nan Paya in Salay (p279). Some kids might dig ruins of old palace walls and moats, which you can see at Bagan and Mrauk U; see p323.

CLIMATE CHARTS

Myanmar has three seasons that follow the classic 'dry and hot, wet and hot, dry and less hot' pattern common to other parts of mainland Southeast Asia. Rain falls mostly from mid-May to October. In most places, temperatures fall from November to February, then rise from March through to May. See p27 for more information on the best times to visit.



COURSES

Meditation

For foreigners interested in meditation, Yangon provides the most opportunities for the study and practice of *satipatthana vipassana*, or insight-awareness meditation. This is based on instructions in the Maha Satipatthana Sutta of the Theravada Buddhist canon, and instruction at most places is in English. Many Westerners have come to Myanmar to practise at the various centres for periods ranging from 10 days to more than a year. Visitors typically attach themselves to a respected *sayadaw* (master teacher) in the Buddhist tradition for the duration.

CONDITIONS

Food and lodging are generally provided at no charge at the centres, but meditators must follow eight precepts, which include abstaining from food after noon and

forgoing music, dancing, jewellery, perfume and high or luxurious beds. Daily schedules are rigorous and may involve nearly continuous practice from 3am till 11pm. Students may be given permission to travel in Myanmar at the end of a long period of study, but this is not automatic. Westerners who have undergone the training say it is not recommended for people with no previous meditation experience.

VISAS

For practice sessions of less than a month, a tourist visa will suffice. To obtain the necessary 'special-entry visa' for a long-term stay of more than a month, applicants must receive a letter of invitation from the centre where they would like to study, which may in turn require a letter of introduction from an affiliated meditation centre abroad. This invitation is then presented to a Myanmar consulate or embassy, which will issue a visa for an initial stay of six to 12 weeks, as recommended by the centre. It takes eight to 10 weeks to be issued, and cannot be issued while you're in Myanmar on a tourist visa. The special-entry visa, however, may be extended in Yangon.

CENTRES IN YANGON

The most famous centre in Yangon is the **Mahasi Meditation Centre** (Map p90; ☎ 01-541 971; 16 Thathana Yeiktha Rd, Bahan Township), founded in 1947 by the late Mahasi Sayadaw, perhaps Myanmar's greatest meditation teacher. The Mahasi Sayadaw technique strives for intensive, moment-to-moment awareness of every physical movement, every mental and physical sensation, and, ultimately, every thought. The centre is off Kaba Aye Paya Rd, north of Kandawgyi, about 10 minutes from the city centre or 20 minutes from the airport. Mahasi is funded by donations.

Two of the Mahasi centre's chief meditation teachers, Sayadaw U Pandita and Sayadaw U Janaka, have established their own highly regarded centres in Yangon: **Panditarama Meditation Centre** (☎ 01-535 448; <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/buddhism/pandita.htm>); 80-A Than Lwin Rd, Bahan Township) and **Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre** (☎ 01-661 479; www.chanmyay.org; 55-A Kaba Aye Paya Rd). Both have second branches. Panditarama's is 3km northeast off the highway to Bago; Chanmyay's branch (☎ 01-620 321), set among gardens in Hmawbi, is a

50-minute drive north of Yangon. Each of these centres represents a slight difference from the Mahasi Sayadaw technique.

Another famous centre is Yangon's **International Meditation Centre** (☎ 01-535 549; 31-A Inya Myaing Rd), founded by the late U Ba Khin. The U Ba Khin technique focuses on a deep appreciation of impermanence and on consciously moving or 'sweeping' one's mental awareness throughout the body. Instruction at all of the above centres is given to foreigners in English.

Another Yangon centre is the **Dhamma Joti Vipassana Centre** (☎ 01-549 290; Nga Htat Gyi Paya Rd, Bahan Township).

For further information on the teachings of Mahasi Sayadaw and U Ba Khin, read *Living Dharma: Teachings of Twelve Buddhist Masters*, edited by Jack Kornfield.

CENTRES OUTSIDE YANGON

Meditation centres can be found outside Yangon, particularly in Sagaing, which is Myanmar's principal monastic centre in terms of numbers of monks, nuns, monasteries and nunneries. In Sagaing, **Kyaswa Kyaung** (☎ 072-21541; ulkyaswa@myanmar.com.mm, mettadana@aol.com) hosts a Mahasi Sayadaw-style retreat oriented towards foreigners, under the direction of Sayadaw U Lakkhana.

Just south of Mawlamyine (Moulmein), Venerable Pak Auk Sayadaw teaches *sati-pathana vipassana* using a penetrative and highly technical approach at **Pa-Auk-Taw-Ya Monastery** (☎ 032-22132; www.paauk.org; c/o Major Kan Saing, 653 Lower Main Rd) in Pa-Auk village. It'll cost you though – about US\$1479 for a month, including lodging and meals.

CUSTOMS

Besides personal effects, visitors are permitted to bring in the following items duty free: two cartons of cigarettes, 100 cigars, 0.67kg of tobacco, 500mL of cologne or perfume and two bottles of liquor. Technically, cameras (including video cameras), radios, cassette players and iPods can be brought into the country, but they're supposed to be declared on arrival and taken out upon departure. In reality no-one ever seems to check, and if you try to declare your cameras on arrival you're usually waved on through. If you're holding a tourist visa, it's possible that a laptop computer may make customs officials suspicious that you are a journalist,

and it will be confiscated. There's no problem if you're on a business visa.

Any foreign currency in excess of US\$2000 must be declared upon entry. We've heard reports of travellers being arrested for bringing in US\$4000 undeclared. It's problem free to declare – just a form to fill out. Mobile phones may be confiscated and held by customs personnel upon when you arrive at Yangon international airport; they'll be returned upon your departure.

See p349 for a list of items that cannot be taken out of the country.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Considering all the bad news that trickles out of Myanmar, it may sound like a rather unsafe country to visit. For the vast majority of visitors, the truth is quite the opposite.

Air Travel

Government-operated Myanma Airways has a sketchy safety record. In 1994 a flight missed the runway at Kawthoung, killing 16; in 1998 it took authorities 24 hours to realise one of its planes had crash-landed near Tachileik, while another flight crashed en route from Thandwe (Sandoway) to Sit-twe, killing 10 passengers.

Bugs, Snakes, Rats & Monkeys

Mosquitoes, if unfended, can have a field day with you. As a Burmese character in George Orwell's *Burmese Days* says: 'At night, master too drunk to notice mosquitoes; in the morning, mosquitoes too drunk to notice master'. As alcohol won't help, bring repellent from home, as the good stuff (other than mosquito coils) is hard to come by here. Also, many guesthouses and hotels don't have mosquito nets. See also entries on malaria (p373) and dengue fever (p372).

Myanmar has one of the highest incidences of death from snakebite in the world. Watch your step in brush, forest and grasses. See p377 for information on what to do if you're bitten.

Rats aren't all that rampant. Family-run guesthouses, like regular homes, might have a rodent or two. Wash your hands before sleeping (we've heard of happy rats licking cake-covered fingers clean at night) and try to keep food out of your room. If you trek in Shan State and stay in local accommodation, you may hear little footsteps at night.

Monkeys, too, can get a little friendly in some places. A guide outside Monywa pointed out natural medicines for 'not shitting', 'shitting' and 'snakebite', but said there's nothing for monkey bites. 'Monkey bite is normal', he said. But we think you should try to minimise your chances of getting rabies (see p374).

Crime

Most travellers' memories of locals grabbing your money are of someone chasing you down because you dropped a K500 note (about US\$0.50) in the street ('you dropped this, sister'). In remote towns such as Shwebo or Monywa, you can feel pretty confident leaving a bag on the ground at a bus station while you go for a quick tea. But don't tempt anyone: inflation is rising in an already poor country (that K500 note is worth at least a half-day's work for many). There has been a smattering of reports of street crime, particularly in Yangon, which include burglaries of some expats' homes. Exercise guarded caution on vulnerable occasions – ie when you're carrying your bags – and when in particularly touristy places.

Electricity, or Lack Thereof

Power outages everywhere – Yangon and Mandalay included – can render your fan useless for hours. Many smaller towns have outright short scheduled periods for electricity, such as a few hours in the afternoon (or in the evening if Myanmar TV is airing a premiership game). Many hotels and shops run generators 24 hours, and won't be affected.

Insurgents & Bombs

Just before this book went to press, Myanmar saw some bombs set off, purportedly placed there by insurgent groups. In May 2005 three bombs at two Yangon shopping centres and a Thai trade expo killed up to 20 people and injured several hundred. (At first, the junta blamed the USA for the incident; no-one has claimed responsibility.) During the previous month a bomb killed at least three at a Mandalay market. In December 2004 a small bomb went off at a central Yangon restaurant, injuring one person. The Vigorous Burmese Student Warriors supposedly claimed responsibility for this act. A few other explosions in

Yangon were reported, without injuries, in mid-2004 and mid-2003. An explosion in May 2003 in a cinema in Pyu, near Bago, killed one and injured 47 people.

Despite treaties between the government and most insurgent groups in the late 1990s that give limited autonomy to many areas, violent incidents on the Myanmar-Thai border could erupt at any time, including several outbursts (and bombs) in and around Tachileik. Land mines are another threat (on the Myanmar side of the border). Most travel advisories warn against travel in this area, most of which is restricted to foreigners. Crossing the border here, though, is likely to be OK, but seek advice first.

In Kayin State, splintered Kayin groups live in a potential battleground between the Karen National Liberation Army and government troops. The Myanmar border in a restricted area of Kayin between Um Phang and Mae Sariang occasionally receives shelling from Myanmar troops in pursuit of Kayin (also known as Karen) or Mon rebels. The risks of catching a piece of shrapnel are substantially lower if you keep several kilometres between yourself and the Thai-Myanmar border in this area – fighting can break out at any time.

The presence of Shan and Wa armies along the Myanmar-Thai border in northern Mae Hong Son makes this area dangerous if you attempt to travel near amphetamine- and opium-trade border crossings (off limits to foreigners); obviously, these aren't signposted, so take care anywhere along the border in this area.

In the past there have been reports of bandits holding up vehicles at night, most commonly in the Tanintharyi (Tenasserim) division in southeastern Myanmar – often in pockets restricted to overland travel for foreigners.

Some 'revolutionaries' maintain the sympathy of most locals. In the aftermath of the 1990 election controversy (see p44), a group of student protestors hijacked a plane from Bangkok to get worldwide attention, and tearfully handed out snacks with apologies to the inconvenienced passengers.

Politics

Talking politics can get not only you but also the locals you're speaking with into trouble. Let them introduce the subject and proceed

to talk with discretion. Human-rights activist James Mawdsley was arrested in 1999 after handing out political leaflets; he was freed after 415 days. (He describes the experience in his 2002 book *The Iron Road: A Stand for Truth and Democracy in Burma*.) Following the 10th anniversary of the 1988 democracy demonstrations, 18 foreigners were arrested for handing out leaflets. In January 2005 another Westerner was arrested for handing out leaflets outside Yangon's City Hall.

Be aware that if you're interested in seeing Aung San Suu Kyi's house in Yangon, or are dropping by an NLD office, you not only risk trouble (possible deportation) but you implicate your taxi or trishaw driver too. Guides, trishaw drivers, vendors and hotel staff are often able to talk at length with foreigners without suspicion due to their day-to-day contact with foreigners. Some can be surprisingly frank in their views. Teahouses carry the reputation as being open-discussion forums for some locals – but not all. Again, let the local lead the conversation that way.

Restricted Roads

Many overland roads are closed to foreigners. However, in places you can enter there are (perhaps) surprising levels of freedom to stop and look around where you want. See the map on p359 to see which areas of Myanmar were closed to travellers at the time of research.

Scams & Hassle

Myanmar touts are pretty minor-league in comparison with those in India or the *tuktuk* drivers in Bangkok. Most hassle is due

to commissions. These small behind-the-scenes payments are made, like it or not, for a taxi or trishaw driver or guide who takes you to a hotel, to buy a puppet or even to eat some rice. Often it doesn't affect the price you pay.

Arriving at a bus station, you're likely to be quickly surrounded by touts, some of whom will try to steer you to a particular hotel that offers them a commission. Be wary if you hear that your chosen place is 'no good', though in some cases we found that trishaw drivers who had warned us 'foreigners can't stay there' ended up being correct. If you know where you want to go (and it's a good idea to pretend to, if you don't), persist and they'll take you.

See p321 for an example of a commissions monopoly, which can apply in many places.

Bus tickets in Yangon are sometimes sold at inflated prices; see p89.

Be wary of offers of fanciful jade or other gems – Myanmar has rich mines for these precious stones – as some are filled with worthless rock or concrete mixture.

Many people may approach to say 'hello' on the street. In some cases, they're just curious or perhaps want to practice some English. In other cases, the conversation switches from 'what country you from?' to 'buy some postcards?' or 'where you need to go?' It's all pretty harmless.

You'll be asked to change money frequently. See p345 for tips on doing so with caution.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

With its lack of paved roads or footpaths (and even when they're present the latter are often uneven) Myanmar presents many physical obstacles for the mobility-impaired. Rarely do public buildings feature ramps or other access points for wheelchairs, and hotels make inconsistent efforts to provide access to the handicapped (exceptions include the Strand Hotel and the Traders Hotel in Yangon; both have some ramping). Hence you're pretty much left to your own resources. Public transport is particularly crowded and difficult, even for the fully mobile.

For wheelchair travellers, any trip to Myanmar will require a good deal of planning. A few useful USA-based organisations you

can contact are **Accessible Journeys** (www.disabilitytravel.com), which includes info on visiting the dodgy border near Tachileik; **Mobility International USA** (www.miusa.org) and the **Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality** (www.sath.org), which publishes the magazine *Open World*.

DISCOUNT CARDS

No can do. However, we've heard some travellers managing to get a discount with an International Student Identity Card (ISIC) at monuments in the past. It's more likely that amused staff wanted to give the travellers what they wanted than any burgeoning policy change. Senior-citizen cards are also unlikely to save any money.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Myanmar Embassies & Consulates

Contact details for some Myanmar embassies and consulates:

Australia (☎ 02-6273 3811; 22 Arkana St, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

Bangladesh (☎ 02-60 1915; 89B, Rd No 4, Banani, Dhaka)

Cambodia (☎ 023-213663; 181 Preah Norodon Blvd, Boeung Keng Kang 1, Phnom Penh)

Canada (☎ 613-232 6434/46; Apt 902-903, 85 Range Rd, The Sandringham, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 8J6)

China (☎ 010-6532 1584/6; 6 Dong Zhi Men Wai St, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100600)

France (☎ 01 42 25 56 95; 60 rue de Courcelles, 75008 Paris)

Germany (☎ 030-206 1570; Zimmerstrasse 56, 10117 Berlin)

India (☎ 011-688 9007/8; No 3/50F Nyaya Marg, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi 110021)

Indonesia (☎ 021-327 684; 109 Jalan Haji Agus Salim, Jakarta Pusat)

Israel (☎ 03-517 0760; 26 Hayarkon St, Tel Aviv 68011)

Italy (☎ 06-854 3974, 06-858 63343; Viale Gioacchino Rossini, 18, Int 2, 00198 Rome)

Japan (☎ 03-3441 9291; 8-26, 4-chome, Kita-Shinagawa, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo 140-0001)

Laos (☎ 021-314910; Thanon Sok Pa Luang, PO Box 11, Vientiane)

Malaysia (☎ 03-4256-0280; 10 Jalan Mengkuang, 55000 Kuala Lumpur)

Nepal (☎ 021-521 788; Chakupat, Patan Gate, Lalitpur, Kathmandu)

Philippines (☎ 02-817 2373; 4th fl, Xanland Center, 152Amorsolo St, Legaspi Village, Makati, Manila)

Singapore (☎ 735-0209; 15 St Martin's Dr, Singapore 257996)

South Korea (☎ 02-792-3341; 723-1/724-1 Hannam-Dong Yongsam-ku, Seoul 140-210)

Switzerland (☎ 022-731 7540; 47 ave Blanc, 1202 Geneva)

Thailand (☎ 02 233-2237; 132 Thanon Sathon Neua, Bangkok 10500)

UK (☎ 020-7499 8841; 19A Charles St, London W1X 5DX)

USA (☎ 202-332-9044/5/6; 2300 S St NW, Washington, DC 20008)

Vietnam (☎ 04-823 2056; Bldg No A-3, Ground fl, Van Phuc Diplomatic Qtrrs, Kim Ma St, Hanoi)

Embassies & Consulates in Myanmar

Yangon can be a good place to get visas for other countries; because it isn't a big tourist stopover, visas are usually issued quickly. However, embassies for neighbouring countries accept only US dollars for payment of visa fees.

Australia (Map p102; ☎ 01-251 810, 01-251 809; fax 01-246 159; 88 Strand Rd)

Bangladesh (☎ 01-515 275; 11B Thanlwin Rd, Kamayut Township)

Cambodia (Map p90; ☎ 01-549 609; 25 New University Ave, B3/4)

Canada Affairs handled by Australian embassy

China (Map p98; ☎ 01-221 281; 1 Pyidaungsu Yeiktha Rd)

France (Map p98; ☎ 01-212 523, 01-212 532; 102 Pyidaungsu Yeiktha Rd)

Germany (Map p90; ☎ 01-548 951; fax 01-548 899; 32 Nat Mauk Rd)

India (Map p102; ☎ 01-282 933; 545-547 Merchant St)

Indonesia (Map p98; ☎ 01-254 465, 01-254 469; 100 Pyidaungsu Yeiktha Rd)

Israel (Map p86; ☎ 01-515 155; fax 01-515 116; 15 Kabaung Rd, Hlaing Township)

Italy (Map p90; ☎ 01-527 100; 3 Inya Myaing Rd)

Japan (Map p90; ☎ 01-549 644; 100 Nat Mauk Rd)

Korea (Map p90; ☎ 01-527 142; 97 University Ave Rd)

Laos (Map p98; ☎ 01-222 482; A1 Diplomatic Quarters, Taw Win St)

Malaysia (Map p98; ☎ 01-222 240; 82 Pyidaungsu Yeiktha Rd)

Nepal (Map p90; ☎ 01-545 880; fax 01-549803; 16 Nat Mauk Rd)

Netherlands Affairs handled by German embassy

New Zealand Affairs handled by UK embassy

Pakistan (Map p98; ☎ 01-222 881; 4A Pyay Rd)

Philippines (Map p86; ☎ 01-558 149; 50 Saya San Rd)

Singapore (☎ 01-559 001; 238 Dhama Zedi Rd)

Sri Lanka (Map p98; ☎ 01-222 812; 34 Taw Win St)

Sweden Affairs handled by UK embassy

Switzerland Affairs handled by German embassy

Thailand (☎ 01-224 550; 73 Manaw Han St)

UK (Map p102; ☎ 01-256 918; fax 01-254 657; 80 Strand Rd)

USA (Map p102; ☎ 01-379 880; fax 01-256 018; 581 Merchant St)

Vietnam (Map p90; ☎ 01-548 905; 36 Wingaba Rd)

ONLINE TRAVEL ADVISORIES

Governments' advisory websites for people travelling to Myanmar:

Australia (www.smarttraveller.gov.au) Click on 'Travel Advisories'.

Canada (www.voyage.gc.ca)

UK (☎ 0870 606 0290; www.fco.gov.uk) The most comprehensive; click on Travel Advice and select Burma.

USA (travel.state.gov) See the Consular Information Sheet for Burma.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Traditionally, Myanmar follows a 12-month lunar calendar, so the dates of old holidays and festivals will vary from year to year (see p351 for a list of the lunar months). Myanmar also has a number of more recently originated holidays whose dates are fixed according to the Gregorian calendar.

Festivals are drawn out, enjoyable affairs in Myanmar. They generally take place or culminate on full-moon days, but the build-up can last for a while. There's often a country-fair atmosphere about these festivals – at some convenient location there will be innumerable stalls and activities that go on all night. *Pwe* (festivals and feasts), music and Myanmar kickboxing bouts will all be part of the colourful scene. The normally calm Myanmar people can get really worked up during these festivals – at a full-moon festival on one of our visits to Yangon the supporters of the defeated favourite in a boxing bout were so enraged that they wrecked the arena, and subsequent bouts had to be cancelled.

See p28 for the top 10 festivals.

January/February

Independence Day (4 January) This major public holiday is marked by a seven-day fair at Yangon's Kandawgyi lake, and nationwide fairs.

THE WATER FESTIVAL

Around the middle of April, the three-day Thingyan (Water Festival) starts the Myanmar New Year. This event occurs at the height of the dry and hot season and, as in Thailand's Songkran, it is celebrated in a most raucous manner – by throwing buckets of cold water at anyone who dares to venture into the streets. Foreigners are not exempt!

In cities, temporary stages called *pandal* (from the Tamil *pendel*) are erected along main thoroughfares. Each *pandal* is sponsored by various groups, the members of which stand next to rows of water barrels and douse every person or vehicle that passes by.

On a spiritual level, Myanmar people believe that during this three-day period the king of the *nat* (spirit beings), Thagyamin, visits the human world to tally his annual record of the good deeds and misdeeds humans have performed. Villagers place flowers and sacred leaves in front of their homes to welcome the *nat*. Thagyamin's departure on the morning of the third day marks the beginning of the new year, when properly brought-up young people wash the hair of their elder kin, Buddha images are ceremonially washed, and *hpongyi* (monks) are offered particularly appetising alms food.

Although the true meaning of the festival is still kept alive by ceremonies such as these, nowadays it's mainly a festival of fun. In between getting soaked, there will be dancing, singing and theatre. And drinking. In theatre, the emphasis is on satire – particularly making fun of the government, the latest female fashions and any other items of everyday interest. Cultural taboos against women acting in a boisterous manner are temporarily lifted, so women can 'kidnap' young men, blacken these men's faces with soot or oil, bind their hands and dunk their heads in buckets of water until they surrender and perform a hilarious monkey dance for the women.

Union Day (12 February) This day marks Bogyoke Aung San's short-lived achievement of unifying Myanmar's disparate ethnic groups. For two weeks preceding Union Day, the national flag is paraded from town to town, and wherever the flag rests there must be a festival. The lunar month of Tabodwe culminates in a rice-harvesting festival on the new-moon day.

February/March

Shwedagon Festival The lunar month of Tabaung brings the annual Shwedagon Festival, the largest *paya pwe* (pagoda festival) in Myanmar. The full-moon day in Tabaung is also an auspicious occasion for the construction of new *paya*, and local *paya pwe*s are held.

Peasants' Day (2 March) Dedicated to the nation's farmers.

Armed Forces (or Resistance) Day (27 March) Armed Forces Day is celebrated with parades and fireworks. Since 1989 the government has made it a tradition to pardon a number of prisoners on this day.

April/May

Buddha's Birthday The full-moon day of Kason is celebrated as the Buddha's birthday, the day of his enlightenment and the day he entered *nibbana* (nirvana). As such, it is known as the 'triple-blessed day'. The holiday is celebrated by the ceremonial watering of the sacred banyan tree. One of the best places to observe this ceremony is at Yangon's Shwedagon Paya, where a procession of girls carries earthen jars to the pagoda's three banyan trees.

Water Festival (or Thingyan) This is the celebration of the Myanmar New Year. See opposite for more details.

Workers' Day (1 May) Although the government renounced socialism in 1989, the country still celebrates May Day as Workers' Day.

June/July

Martyrs' Day (19 July) This date commemorates the assassination of Bogyoke Aung San and his comrades on that day in 1947. Wreaths are laid at Bogyoke Aung San's mausoleum north of the Shwedagon Paya in Yangon.

Start of the Buddhist Rains Retreat The full moon of Waso is the beginning of the three-month Buddhist Rains Retreat (sometimes referred to as 'Buddhist Lent'). Lay people present monasteries with stacks of new robes for resident monks. Ordinary people are also expected to be rather more religious during this time – marriages do not take place, and it is inauspicious to move house. This is also the traditional time for young men to temporarily enter the monasteries.

July/August

Wagaung Festival At the festival during Wagaung, lots are drawn to see who will have to provide monks with their alms. If you're in Mandalay, try to get to Taungbyone, about 20km to the north, where there is a noisy seven-day festival to keep the *nat* happy (see p61 for more on this festival).

September/October

Boat Races This is the height of the wet season, so what better time to hold boat races? They're held in rivers, lakes and even ponds all over Myanmar, but the best place to be is Inle Lake, where the Buddha images at the Phaung Daw Oo Paya are ceremonially toured around the lake in the huge royal barge, the *Karaweik*. The Phaung Daw Oo festival comes just before the festival of Thadingyut (see below) and usually overlaps in late September and early October.

Thadingyut During Thadingyut, the Buddhist Rains Retreat comes to an end and all those couples who had been putting off marriage now rush into each other's arms. Monks are free to travel from *kyaung* (monastery) to *kyaung* or to go on pilgrimages to holy spots such as Kyaiktiyo or Mt Popa. For the three days of the festival all of Myanmar is lit by oil lamps, fire balloons, candles and even mundane electric lamps. Every house has a paper lantern hanging outside. It's a happy time, and is particularly eventful in Mandalay.

October/November

Tazaungmon The full-moon night of Tazaungmon is an occasion for another 'festival of lights', known properly as Tazaungdaing. It's particularly celebrated in Shan State – in Taunggyi there are fire-balloon competitions. In some

areas, and notably at Yangon's Shwedagon Paya, there are also speed-weaving competitions to produce robes for Buddha images between dusk and dawn. The results, finished or not, are donated to the monks.

Kahtein Tazaungmon also brings *kahtein*, a one-month period at the end of the Buddhist Rains Retreat during which new monastic robes and requisites are offered to the monastic community. Many people simply donate cash; *kyat* notes are folded and stapled into floral patterns on wooden 'trees' called *padetha* and offered to the monasteries.

National Day Myanmar's national day falls in late November or early December.

November/December

Nadaw During Nadaw, many *nat pwe* (spirit festivals) are held; Nadaw is spelt with the characters for *nat* and *taw* (a respectful honorific).

Christmas Despite Myanmar's predominantly Buddhist background, Christmas Day is a public holiday in deference to the many Christian Kayin, Kachin and Chin. Many shops sell artificial trees and lights.

December/January

Kayin New Year Held on the first waxing moon of Pyatho, the Kayin New Year is considered a national holiday. Kayin communities throughout Myanmar celebrate by wearing their traditional dress of woven tunics over red *longyi* (sarong-style lower garments) and by hosting folk-dancing and singing performances. The largest celebrations are held in the Kayin suburb of Insein, just north of Yangon, and in Hpa-an, the capital of Kayin State.

Ananda Festival This festival, held at the Ananda Paya in Bagan, also takes place during Pyatho.

Paya Pwe

In addition to these main pan-Myanmar festivals, nearly every active *paya* or *kyaung* community hosts occasional celebrations of its own, often called *paya pwe* or 'pagoda festivals' in Burmese English. Some get quite rollicking – even to the point of novice monks throwing fireworks at the feet of passers-by. The typical *paya pwe* features the same kinds of activities as a major festival – craft and food vendors, music and dance – on a smaller scale. The biggest proliferation of *paya pwe* occurs on full-moon days and nights from January to March, following the main rice harvest, providing local paddy farmers and their families with a good excuse to party. The festivals also offer added market venues for local basket-weavers, potters, woodcarvers, blacksmiths, *longyi*-weavers and other artisans.

Particular *paya pwe* are described in the appropriate destination sections throughout this guidebook.

A few highlights include Nayon (May/June) and Nadaw (November/December) at Mt Popa (p278); Pyatho (December/January) at Bagan's Ananda Pahto (p300) and the biggest, in August, at Taungbyone, north of Mandalay (p61).

FOOD

Most restaurants are quite cheap (around US\$1 or US\$2 per person including beer), so we haven't divided them into budget, mid-range and top-end categories in this book. See p74 for more on the types of cuisine and restaurants you'll find in Myanmar.

A 10% government tax is applied to prices at upmarket restaurants in Yangon and in top-end hotel restaurants.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Most of Myanmar's ethnic groups are very tolerant of homosexuality, both male and female. Generally a local woman walking with a foreign man will raise more eyebrows than two same-sex travellers sharing a room. Muslim and Christian Myanmar communities are the exceptions, but as they form relatively small minorities they rarely foist their world perspectives on people of other faiths.

Public displays of affection – whether heterosexual or homosexual – are frowned upon.

Although it's difficult to tell, given the opaqueness of the current military-directed government – which contains no true judiciary branch – there appear to be no laws that discriminate against homosexuals. Certainly we have never heard of anyone facing prosecution or arrest for homosexual behaviour. In 2001 the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) decriminalised same-sex acts, opening up their prodemocracy movement to gay and lesbian members for the first time.

The gay and lesbian scene around the country is relatively low-key – it's certainly nowhere near as prominent as in neighbouring Thailand. Whether in terms of dress or mannerism, lesbians and gays are generally accepted without comment. Yangon has the biggest active gay scene, particularly at the Silver Oak Café (p118) near

Strand Rd, and at the Patty O'Malleys pub in the Sedona Hotel (p112). On the Chinese border, remote Mong La (p201) is home to a bit of a gay and transvestite scene.

The following websites have information about gay and lesbian travel and rights, though they contain nothing specific to Myanmar:

www.damron.com
www.gay.com
www.igta.com

Track human-rights progress at the website for the **International Gay & Lesbian Human Rights Commission** (www.iglhrc.org) or site for **The Gully** (www.thegully.com).

HOLIDAYS

Major public holidays include Independence Day (January 4), Peasants' Day (March 2), Armed Forces (or Resistance) Day (March 27), Workers' Day (May 1), National Day (late November or early December) and Christmas (December 25). Government offices take just about any excuse for taking the day off, though many private businesses remain open. For a broader list of festivals and events see p340.

INSURANCE

A travel-insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a very wise idea. There is a wide variety of policies, and your travel agent will have recommendations. Check the travel-insurance-policy finder at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services/trvl_trvlinsurance.cfm, which gives sample prices for policies, including those covering emergency evacuation. Also, international travel policies handled by STA Travel and other student-travel organisations are usually good value. Some policies offer lower and higher medical-expenses options, but the higher ones are chiefly for countries that have extremely high medical costs, such as the USA.

See p369 for advice on health insurance.

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet was introduced in 2001, and the first Internet café started operation in 2002. Despite government efforts at restriction, the impact has been huge – and is poised to grow. The costs are prohibitively expensive for many, and possessing

a modem or fax machine without permission is a crime.

Internet access outside Myanmar's belly (roughly from Yangon to Mandalay, including Bagan and Inle Lake) wanes to non-existence. As the Internet is relatively new to Myanmar, the situation is likely to improve over time.

Access is sometimes clunky. In Yangon or Mandalay options abound and access costs about K1000 per hour. In places such as Inle Lake, Bagan, Pyin U Lwin and Ngapali Beach prices rise to K3000 per hour. Even off-the-beaten-track towns such as Shwebo and Sittwe have Internet. Presently you cannot access the Internet from hotel rooms.

Often links are quicker early in the morning or at periods during the day; they can get clunky when residents hit the local chat rooms in the evening, sometimes contacting people overseas.

At the time of research, the government had banned the use of Yahoo and Hotmail in the country, in a rather vain attempt to censor incoming information, but sites for the **BBC** (www.bbc.co.uk) and the **New York Times** (www.nytimes.com) – and even www.espn.com – were available at most Internet cafés. Email accounts that end in something other than '.com' are sometimes easier to access than those that do. Secondary email services, such as www.walla.com, became restricted at the time of research.

There are two ISPs: a dial-up service controlled by the Ministry of Telecommunications and a broadband service called Bagan Cybertech, which was run by former prime minister Khin Nyunt's son until he was ousted (it's now operated by the military, we hear).

Some fine sources of online information can be found on p29.

LEGAL MATTERS

The Myanmar government includes no judiciary branch separate from the executive powers vested – by force of totalitarian rule – in the Tatmadaw (military). So you have absolutely no legal recourse in case of arrest or detainment by the authorities, regardless of the charge. Foreign visitors engaging in political activism (such as James Mawdsley; see p337) risk deportation or imprisonment. However, if you were arrested you

would most likely be permitted to contact your consular agent in Myanmar for possible assistance.

If you purchase gems or jewellery from persons or shops that are not licensed by the government, you run the risk of having the goods confiscated if customs officials find them in your baggage when you're exiting the country. Journalists often claim a different profession in order to get a visa, and they risk deportation if authorities suspect that they're researching a political exposé while in the country.

Drugs are another area where you must be very careful. We know of a French traveller arrested for possession of opium or heroin in Kengtung and held for several weeks before he was able to bribe his way out.

Many foreigners have foolishly entered Myanmar illegally from northern Thailand, but not all have succeeded in avoiding arrest. In late 1998 three Western motorcyclists crossed illegally from Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province into Shan State; they were held for three months before being released and deported.

MAPS Country Maps

If you want a map before you go, the best available is the 1:2,000,000 Periplus Editions *Myanmar Travel Map*, a folded map with plans for Mandalay, Yangon and the Bagan area. The inferior Nelles *Myanmar*, a folded map on coated stock, contains many errors and splits the country in half on either side, but it's also easily available outside Myanmar. Good places to buy maps online include **Travel Maps and Books** (www.itmb.com) and **MapLink** (www.maplink.com).

In Yangon you can pick up the full-colour, folded *Tourist Map of Myanmar*, published on coated stock by Design Printing Services (DPS), from many hotels and bookshops. Sometimes you can grab one free at the Yangon Airport arrival hall; in some places it costs up to K1000.

The Myanmar government's Survey Department publishes a very good paper sheet map of the country, simply entitled *Myanmar*, which has a scale of 1:2,000,000. It's big, and the noncoated paper decays rapidly. You can often find it on sale from vendors on Bogyoke Aung San Rd in Yangon, just east of the market.

Myanmar's Survey Department also publishes a multipage 1997 *Myanmar Atlas*, complete with colour relief but it is labelled in the Bamar language only. This atlas provides the most up-to-date and detailed set of maps available. If you're lucky you may find it for sale among the book vendors in Yangon.

City Maps

DPS publishes very useful and fairly detailed city maps of Yangon Mandalay, and the extremely useful plan for Bagan. As with its *Tourist Map of Myanmar*, these city maps are printed on durable coated stock. They're available from various hotels and bookshops in Yangon, and to a lesser degree in Mandalay and Bagan. They usually cost K500. If you anticipate spending a lot of time in the capital, look for a new DPS bilingual atlas, *The Map of Yangon*, which is a detailed street and place directory.

Myanmar Travels & Tours (MTT) also prints city maps oriented towards tourists, but they tend to be out of date and less detailed. These maps are available from the **MTT office** (Map p102; Sule Paya Rd) in Yangon, or from individual MTT offices in other major towns and cities.

MONEY

Myanmar's national currency, the kyat (pronounced chat, and abbreviated K) is divided into the following banknotes: K1, K5, K10, K15, K20, K45, K50, K90, K100, K200, K500 and K1000. See the inside front cover for exchange rates as this book was going to press. Considering the economy's freefall, and rising inflation, rates are likely to change.

See p27 for details on costs in Myanmar and p24 for tips on spreading your budget through the private sector rather than to the government.

KYAT & DOLLARS

Prices in this book alternate between kyat and US dollars, depending on the currency in which prices are quoted. Be careful to keep some US dollars with you in case you're turned back by a strict and unbending museum cashier who will not take kyat. For more information, see right.

ATMs

Myanmar has no ATMs (automatic teller machines).

Banks

In 2003 Myanmar's 20 private banks collapsed, and economic bans by the EU and the USA sent 38 foreign bank representatives packing, rendering credit cards and travellers cheques useless in the country. The few national banks that remain are of little use to travellers, as official exchange rates massively overvalue the kyat. So there's really no reason to exchange money at a bank.

Cash

Most guesthouses and hotels quote prices in US dollars. These places usually accept kyat, but at a slightly disadvantageous rate (say K1000 to each US\$1, rather than K950). If you're counting pennies, bring lots of small US dollar bills – ones, fives and 10s – and use them to pay for your hotel. Many hotels, shops and government ferry clerks are reluctant to give change in foreign currency and instead offer kyat (you'll lose a little in the conversion).

Government-run services (such as archaeological sites, museums and ferries) and flights are paid for in US dollars or FEC (see opposite) – not euros; in some cases you may be able to beg to pay in kyat (at a slightly worse exchange rate than on the street), but airlines tend to accept dollars only.

Items such as meals, bus tickets, trishaw or taxi rides, bottles of water and market items are usually quoted in kyat.

Credit Cards & Travellers Cheques

At research time, credit cards and travellers cheques were essentially useless in Myanmar. Surprised tourists in Yangon found themselves helpless trying to use them. Depending on how the banking situation and international sanctions develop, this may change. However, a few businesses (including hotels – see below) are able to accept credit cards or cash travellers cheques because of a processing system linked outside the country, usually in Singapore. But it's unwise to count on using credit cards or travellers cheques.

Many travellers pre-book hotels – usually top-end joint-venture ones – using credit cards online.

Some upscale hotels in Yangon can exchange travellers cheques for a 3% to 10% commission. In Mandalay, the Sedona Hotel (p238) accepts credit cards (Visa and Mastercard are your best bets), and a lone shop accepts travellers cheques for a 20% commission.

Moneychangers

You will be asked to 'change money' many times on your trip. Technically, the only reasonable way to exchange currency for kyat is through the 'black market' – meaning from shops, hotels, travel agents, restaurants or less reliable guys on the street. You can change US dollars or euros in Yangon, but generally only US dollars elsewhere. Rest assured; hanging money on the black market is accepted in Myanmar.

Moneychangers accept crisp, clean, uncreased bills. The newer (and the higher in denomination) the better. The US\$100 bill gets a slightly better exchange rate than a US\$50 or US\$20, and so on. Erroneous rumours of some counterfeit notes have meant that many moneychangers won't trade bills that start with the serial numbers 'CB'. Don't expect to change any rumpled, torn bills.

It's safest to change money in hotels or shops, rather than on the street. The moneychangers standing around just east of the Mahabandoola Garden in Yangon have a reputation for short-changing new arrivals for several thousand kyat.

Never hand over your money until you've received the kyat and counted them. Honest moneychangers will expect you do this. Considering that K1000 is the highest note (roughly US\$1), you'll get a lot of notes. Moneychangers give ready-made, rubber-banded stacks of a hundred K1000 bills. It's a good idea to check each note individually. Often you'll find one or two (or more) with a cut corner, or taped together, neither of which anyone will accept. We heard from some travellers that Yangon moneychangers have asked for a 'commission'.

Many travellers do the bulk of their exchanging in Yangon, where you can get about K100 more per dollar than elsewhere, then carry the stacks of kyat for a couple of weeks around the country. Considering the relative safety from theft, it's not a bad idea, but you *can* exchange money elsewhere.

Before handing over, say US\$500, one idea is to change just US\$100 first. Count the notes, and then take them back to your room and re-count. If all's OK, return with more money – even with the caveat that you 'may need to change more later on', to help ensure you'll have good reason to be back.

Nothing spells 'u.n.i.f.o.r.m.e.d.t.o.u.r.i.s.t.' more than changing money at the airport. The airport exchange counter, at research time, gave K450 for US\$1, while the worst black-market exchange rate around the country was about K925. If you've just arrived, you can use a few US dollars to pay for your taxi to the centre, then find a better rate in town.

FECs

Previously, all travellers entering the country had to exchange US\$200 into FEC (Foreign Exchange Certificates), the government's primary way of acquiring dollars from tourists. This requirement was suspended indefinitely in August 2003 (though word hasn't spread to everyone in the country yet). Some government businesses – such as Myanma Airways and museums – may still quote prices in FEC, and technically they can still be used anywhere. Most private shops prefer foreign currency. One FEC is equal to US\$1.

Tipping, Donations & Bribes

Tipping as known in the West is not customary in Myanmar, though little extra 'presents' are sometimes expected (even if they're not asked for) in exchange for a service (such as unlocking a locked temple at Bagan, helping move a bag at the airport, showing you around the 'sights' of a village).

Almost all paya, *pahto* and *kyauing* are free to enter. It's a good idea to keep some small notes (K50, K100, K200) when visiting *kyauing*, as donations may be asked for. Also, you may wish to leave a donation.

In the past, many travellers have offered a little 'tea money' to officials in order to help expedite bureaucratic services such as visa extensions or getting a seat on a 'sold out' flight. You shouldn't have to do this. If you overstay your visa, you'll often pay a US\$3 'fee' for the paperwork, in addition to the (actual) US\$3 penalty per day. See p352 for more details. At the time of research, an

author was asked pay an extra few thousand kyat to board a perfectly legal bus!

Drivers of pick-ups charge a little extra to sit in the front seat, but they do that for locals too.

See also p338 for details on the 'commissions' paid to guides and drivers.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

Some Internet cafés can burn digital photos onto a CD for about K1000, but you should have your own adapter. Colour film – Fuji and Kodak – is widely available in Yangon and Mandalay, a bit less so in smaller towns. Photo-supply shops don't often sell cameras, but they can develop film. Usually it's about K200 to develop a roll, then K50 per photo printed. Avoid taking photographs of military facilities, uniformed individuals, road blocks and bridges. Aung Sang Suu Kyi's home is absolutely off limits to all photographers. We've heard of travellers who took photos of the house having their film confiscated. Most locals are not at all unhappy about being photographed, but please ask first. If you have a digital camera with a display screen, some locals (kids, monks, anyone) will be overjoyed to see their image.

Some sights, including some payas and other religious sites, charge a camera fee of K100 or so. Usually a video camera fee is a little more.

For tips on how to shoot photos, pick up Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography: A Guide to Taking Better Pictures*.

POST

Most mail out of Myanmar seems to get to its destination quite efficiently, though occasionally we hear reports of something never arriving.

International-postage rates are a bargain at least. A postcard, including registration, is K75; a letter K80. If you're blind, you can send mail for free! There's a free post-restante service on the 2nd floor of Yangon's **main post office** (Map p102; Strand Rd; ☎ 7.30am–6pm Mon–Fri).

Officially, post offices all over Myanmar are supposed to be open from 9.30am to 3.30pm or 4pm Monday to Friday, but in reality the staff open and close the office when they feel like it.

DHL Worldwide Express (in Yangon ☎ 01-664 423, in Mandalay ☎ 02-39274; 7A Kaba Aye Pagoda Rd, Yangon)

is a more reliable way of sending out bigger packages – though you can only send documents to the USA, because of the sanctions; you can't even send postcards. Rates to send a 0.5/1kg package to Europe are US\$65/76, Australia US\$50/56 and Canada US\$65/77 (not including an 8% 'security charge'). There's also a useful DHL branch at the Traders Hotel in Yangon (p110).

For larger air- or sea-freight shipments, **Express Air & Sea Transportation Co** (EAST; ☎ 01-667 057; 14A A1 Lane, 9 Mile, A1 Compound, Yangon) is recommended.

SHOPPING

There are some good bargains to be had in Myanmar, particularly for textiles and handicrafts. It's a good idea to seek out local artisans and buy handicrafts directly from them, rather than directing profits towards government-owned shops. See p28 for a list of top souvenirs.

In larger towns and cities, bargains are usually found in the public markets, called *zei*, or *zay*, in Burmese. The main central market is often called *zeigyo* (also spelt *zei-gyo* or *zay-cho*); other markets will be named after the district or township where they're found.

Though the Bogyoke Aung San Market in Yangon (p121) and the *zeigyo* in Mandalay (p242) offer many arts and crafts from around the country, it's not a bad idea to buy items where they are made. Some regional specialties are not widespread (egg cotton and silk shirts at Inle Lake, best-quality parasols at Pindaya and Patheingyi, regional *longyi* styles, and Bagan's lacquerware selection).

The big hotel shops, the large air-con handicrafts emporiums and the shops in the departure lounge at Yangon airport are very expensive.

Outside the hotel shops, haggling is generally in full force, and very few things have marked prices. Often the acceptable selling price is about half of what is originally offered; cheaper items, such as T-shirts, are less likely to drop that much.

Antiques

Although they're not all as ancient as they're made out to be, *a-le* (opium weights) are popular things to collect. These are the little animal shapes in descending sizes that

are traditionally used for weighing opium, gems and other precious goods.

The older system of scales used a series of nine weights; the newer system uses six weights. Production of the traditional zoomorphic weights came to a halt once the British colonial administration standardised the system of weights and measures in 1885. The pre-1885 weights were made of bronze; reproductions made for the tourist trade are usually brass. The most common animal figures are *to-aung* (a creature that looks like a cross between a bull and a lion), *hintha* (a swan-like bird) and *karaweik* (the Myanmar crane). Folding scales in carved wooden boxes go with the weights. If you can, check prices in shops in Bangkok before blithely looking for bargains in Myanmar.

KAMMAWA & PARABAIK

Kammawa (from the Pali *kammavacha*) are narrow, rectangular slats painted with extracts from the Pali Vinaya – the Pitaka – concerned with monastic discipline; specifically, extracts to do with clerical affairs. The core of a *kammawa* page may be a thin slat of wood, lacquered cloth, thatched cane or thin brass, which is then layered with red, black and gold lacquer to form the script and decorations.

The *parabaik* (Buddhist palm-leaf manuscript) is a similarly horizontal 'book', this time folded accordion-style, like a road map. The pages are made of heavy paper covered with black ink on which the letters are engraved; some *parabaik* may feature gouache illustrations, and some can be erased and written over again. Typical *parabaik* contain Jataka (stories from the Buddha's past lives) or royal chronicles.

Both *kammawa* and *parabaik* are among the items prohibited for export – though it's difficult to say how well this is enforced. Plenty are for sale in high-end shops in Bangkok and Chiang Mai.

Books

Bookshops are plentiful, but for English-language books (and those in some other foreign languages), Yangon's Bagan Bookshop (p87) is by far the best place to dig up old Myanmar-related books. Here you may find many regional-based books – such as for Mrauk U – that are *not* available elsewhere. Yangon is also the best place to pick

up English-language magazines such as *Newsweek* and *Time*.

Clothing & Shoes

LONGYIS

Myanmar is the only country in Southeast Asia where the majority of the population wear non-Western clothes as part of their everyday dress. Native fabrics are for the most part limited to the *longyi*.

Men wear ankle-length patterns of checks, plaids or stripes. To tie them they gather the front of the *longyi* to create two short lengths of material, then twist them into a half-knot, tucking one end in at the waist while allowing the other to protrude from the knot. Any kind of shirt, from a T-shirt to the formal mandarin-collar *eingyi*, may be worn with a man's *longyi*. On very formal occasions such as weddings, the *gaung-baung* (Bamar turban) is added to the outfit.

Burmese women favour calf-length *longyi* in solid colours, stripes or flower prints, topped off by a form-fitting, waist-length blouse. A black waistband is stitched along the waist end, which is folded in front to form a wide pleat, then tucked behind the waistband to one side. The most expensive designs tend to feature wavy or zigzag *acheiq* patterns, the rarest of which are woven using a hundred or more spools of thread and called *lun-taya* (hundred-spool) *acheiq*.

OTHER ITEMS

Simple flip-flops with leather soles and velvet thongs are the most common footwear for both men and women. If you need them big, some shops can have them tailor-made for you in about three days.

Tailoring in Myanmar is very inexpensive compared with just about anywhere else in the world. Many of the textiles seen in tailors' shops are imported synthetics. So, if you want, say, a shirt made from pure cotton, consider buying a *longyi* and having the tailor cut and sew from that.

Trousers, of the same cut as those sold in Thailand as 'fisherman's pants', can be found in Shan State, particularly around Inle Lake but also in Hsipaw. Unlike the Thai variety, those sold in Myanmar are made of thicker, hand-woven cotton and use natural dyes.

You can also get high-quality jeans (fake Levis etc) for about US\$14 in some Yangon malls.

Jewellery & Precious Stones

Myanmar generates a considerable income from the mining of precious stones, mostly in the north. Be very wary of people who come to you with stories of large profits to be had by taking Myanmar gemstones to sell in Western countries.

Precious stones are supposed to be a government monopoly, and the government is very unhappy about visitors buying stones from anywhere other than licensed retail shops. If *any* stones are found when your baggage is checked on departure, they may be confiscated unless you can present a receipt showing that they were purchased from a government-licensed dealer.

The finer imperial-jade or pigeon-blood rubies can only be purchased at exclusive special dealer sessions during the government-sponsored Myanmar Gems, Jade & Pearl Emporium held each year in October, December and February in Yangon.

Still, many visitors manage to buy stones from unlicensed dealers, who far outnumber those who are licensed. The government turns a blind eye to most domestic trade; Mandalay's jade market (p242) is an example.

Black-market prices are considerably lower than prices found in licensed retail shops, but of course the risk of being conned is far greater as well. The best place to buy unlicensed stones is at the source, where fakes are much less common. The catch is that, of the main mines – Mogok (Sagaing Division), Pyinlon (Shan State), Maingshu (Shan State), Myadung (Kayah State) and parts of Kachin State – only Mogok can be visited, and this can be done only on expensive government-sponsored tours (see p229).

Lacquerware

Probably the most popular purchase in Myanmar is lacquerware – you'll find bowls, trays, boxes, containers, cups, vases and other everyday items (including tables!) on sale in the main markets of Yangon and Mandalay; in the entrance walks to Mahamuni Paya in Mandalay; and most particularly in Bagan, where most of the lacquerware is made.

If you purchase large lacquerware items, most shops will wrap and crate them for you for easier shipping.

HISTORY

The earliest lacquerware found in Myanmar can be dated to the 11th century and sported a very Chinese style. The techniques used today are known as *yun*, the old Bamar word for the people of Chiang Mai, where the techniques were imported from (along with some captured artisans) in the 16th century by King Bayinnaung. An older style of applying gold or silver to a black background dates back to, perhaps, the Pyay era (5th to 9th centuries) and is kept alive by artisans in Kyaukka (p260), near Monywa.

HOW ITS MADE & WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Many lacquerware shops – in Kyaukka (p260), Myinkaba (p275) and New Bagan (Bagan Myothit; p277) – include active workshops, where you can see the long-winded process involved in making the bowls, trays and other objects. The crafts-person first weaves a frame (the best-quality wares have a bamboo frame tied together with horse or donkey hairs; lesser pieces are made wholly from bamboo). The lacquer is then coated over the framework and allowed to dry. After several days it is sanded down with ash from rice husks, and another coating of lacquer is applied. A high-quality item may have seven to 15 layers altogether.

The lacquerware is engraved and painted, then polished to remove the paint from everywhere except from within the engravings. Multicoloured lacquerware is produced by repeated engraving, painting and polishing. From start to finish it can take up to five or six months to produce a high-quality piece of lacquerware, which may have as many as five colours. A top-quality bowl can have its rim squeezed together until the sides meet without suffering any damage or permanent distortion.

Parasols

The graceful and beautifully painted little parasols you see around Myanmar are cheap and a product of the port of Patheingyi (p134) – in fact they're known in Myanmar as *Patheingyi hti* (Patheingyi umbrellas). Everyday parasols have wooden handles, and the more ceremonial ones have handles of silver. The Bogyoke Aung San Market in Yangon is another place to look.

Tapestries

Along with lacquerware, tapestries (*kalaga*) are one of the better bargains in Myanmar. They consist of pieces of coloured cloth of various sizes heavily embroidered with silver- or gold-coloured thread, metal sequins and glass beads, and feature mythological Myanmar figures in padded relief. The greatest variety is found in Mandalay, where most tapestries are produced, but the mark-up can be high because of touts taking you there. Try to locate shops on your own – and go by bike – and bargain for the best prices. You can also purchase tapestries in Yangon at craft shops in the Bogyoke Aung San Market (p121).

Good-quality *kalaga* are tightly woven and don't skimp on sequins, which may be sewn in overlapping lines, rather than spaced side by side, as a sign of embroidery skill. The metals used should shine, even in older pieces; tarnishing means lower-quality materials. Age is not necessarily a factor in the item's value except when related to better-quality work. Prices vary according to size and quality; they range from US\$5 to US\$10 for smaller squares to US\$65 for larger ones.

Woodcarving & Puppets

You can still find some pleasantly carved new Buddha images and other items from workshops in Mandalay or in the corridors leading to Shwedagon Paya in Yangon, but in general you won't see much woodcarving on sale.

Older items from the Amarapura, Yadanapon and Mandalay periods are plentiful, but you can't be sure that Myanmar customs will allow them out of the country (and it's not a good idea to remove historical items for your personal use elsewhere anyway). Again, the high-end antique shops of Bangkok and Chiang Mai seem to have an endless supply of pieces that once graced Burmese *kyaung*.

Wooden puppets, old and new (cheapies go for as little as US\$2 or US\$3 in Mandalay and Yangon), are other popular items.

Export Restrictions

The following items cannot legally be taken out of the country: prehistoric implements and artefacts; fossils; old coins; bronze or brass weights (including opium weights);

bronze or clay pipes; *kammawa* or *parabaik*; inscribed stones; inscribed gold or silver; historical documents; religious images; sculptures or carvings in bronze, stone, stucco or wood; frescoes (even fragments); pottery; and national regalia and paraphernalia.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

For some travellers, the already hospitable locals are even more so if you're travelling alone. Solo travellers will likely attract more questions on the matter. Nearly all accommodation options have reduced rates for single rooms. However, some side trips (which require you to hire a boat, taxi or big horse cart) will mean extra expenses that could otherwise be shared. Generally, outside budget guesthouses in bigger destinations, the easiest way to meet fellow travellers is on transport where you can roam a bit, such as boat rides.

TELEPHONE

Approach the telephone with a prayer.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Most business cards in Myanmar purposely list a couple of phone numbers, and a mobile (cell) phone number, as lines frequently go dead and calls just don't go through. Many streetside stands have phones that can be used to make local calls in town or around the country for a couple of hundred kyat; you can also make calls from many shops (look for a drawing of a phone hanging outside).

Official telephone (call) centres are sometimes the only way to call overseas, though sometimes this can be done on the street too. Generally, it costs about US\$4 or US\$5 per minute to call Australia or Europe and US\$5 or US\$6 per minute to phone North America. Often you'll be asked to pay in US dollars, but many government phone centres will accept kyat after a moment of hesitation.

Like electronic devices, all mobile phones must be declared upon arrival; these don't work here – only satellite phones do, but this type of phone is trickier to get past immigration. Mobile-phone numbers in Myanmar begin with 09.

A useful resource is the **Myanmar Yellow Pages** (www.myanmaryellowpages.biz).

CALLING MYANMAR

To call Myanmar from abroad, dial your country's international access code, then ☎ 95 (Myanmar's country code), the area code (minus the '0') and the five- or six-digit number. To dial long distance within Myanmar, dial the area code (including the '0') and the number. Area codes for selected towns and cities:

Aungban	☎ 069
Bagan	☎ 02 & ☎ 061
Bago	☎ 052
Chauk	☎ 061
Dawei (Tavoy)	☎ 036
Heho	☎ 059
Hinthada	☎ 044
Hpa-an	☎ 058
Inle Lake	
see Nyaungshwe	
Kalaw	☎ 081
Kyaukse	☎ 066
Lashio	☎ 082
Loikaw	☎ 083
Magwe	☎ 063
Mandalay	☎ 02
Mawlamyine	☎ 057
Meiktila	☎ 064
Minbu	☎ 065
Monywa	☎ 071
Myeik	☎ 059
Myingyan	☎ 066
Myitkyina	☎ 074
Ngapali Beach	☎ 043
Nyaungshwe (Yaungshwe)	☎ 081
Pakokku	☎ 062
Patheingyi	☎ 042
Pyay	☎ 053
Pyin U Lwin	☎ 085
Pyinmana	☎ 067
Sagaing	☎ 072
Sittwe	☎ 043
Taunggyi	☎ 081
Taungoo	☎ 054
Thanlyin (Syriam)	☎ 065
Yangon	☎ 01

TIME

The local Myanmar Standard Time (MST) is 6½ hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT/UTC). When coming in from Thailand, turn your watch back half an hour; coming from India, put your watch forward an hour. The 24-hour clock is often used for

train times (eg 16.00 instead of 4pm). For an idea of comparative times around the world, see the map on p392.

TOILETS

Toilets, when you need them most (at bus stops, off the highway), are often at their worst. Outside most guesthouses, hotels and upscale restaurants, squat toilets are the norm. Most squat toilets are located down a dirt path behind a house. Usually next to the toilet is a cement reservoir filled with water, and a plastic bowl lying nearby. This has two functions: as a flush and for people to clean their nether regions while still squatting over the toilet. Toilet paper is available at shops all over the country, but not often at toilets. Some places charge a nominal fee to use the toilet.

Note that the plumbing in flush, sit-down toilets is generally not equipped to flush paper. Usually there's a small waste basket nearby to deposit used toilet paper.

It's perfectly acceptable for men (less so for women) to go behind a tree or bush (or at the roadside) when nature calls.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Government-operated **Myanmar Travels & Tours** (MTT; www.myanmar.net/mtt) is part of the Ministry of Hotels & Tourism and the main 'tourist information' service in the country. Those who want to avoid using government services should avoid the tours and services offered here, including buying train or plane tickets. MTT offices are located in Yangon (p89), Mandalay (p229), New Bagan (p275), and Inle Lake (p183). Other than at Yangon, these offices are pretty quiet. The staff is friendly and speaks English, however, so you could easily drop by for free information – though details of open/restricted areas aren't always reliable.

There are no MTT offices abroad. Try www.myanmar.com for (often useful) travel information provided by the government.

Much of the tourist industry in Myanmar is now privatised. Travellers who want to arrange a driver, or have hotel reservations awaiting them, would do well to arrange a trip with the help of private travel agents in Yangon (p89). Many 'travel agents' outside Yangon only sell air tickets.

LIVING ON MYANMAR TIME

That bus may roll in late, but much of Myanmar actually does work on a different time system. Most Myanmar Buddhists use an eight-day week in which Thursday to Tuesday conform to the Western calendar but Wednesday is divided into two 12-hour days. Midnight to noon is 'Bohdahu' (the day Buddha was born), while noon to midnight is 'Yahu' (Rahu, a Hindu god/planet). It's rare that the week's unique structure causes any communication problems, however.

The traditional Myanmar calendar features 12 28-day lunar months that run out of sync with the months of the solar Gregorian calendar. To stay in sync with the solar year, Myanmar inserts a second Waso lunar month every few years – somewhat like the leap-year day added to the Gregorian February. The lunar months of Myanmar:

Tagu March/April	Thadingyut September/October
Kason April/May	Tazaungmon October/November
Nayon May/June	Nadaw November/December
Waso June/July	Pyatho December/January
Wagaung July/August	Tabodwe January/February
Tawthalin August/September	Tabaung February/March

Most traditional festivals take place according to the lunar calendar, making it difficult to calculate festival dates using the fixed-date Gregorian calendar. Ask most Buddhist villagers when a *pwe* is scheduled and you may hear something like, 'It's on Pyatho, 8th day of the waning moon'. OK, see you there!

Traditionally, Burmese kings subscribed to various year counts. The main one in current use, the *thekkyait*, begins in April and is 638 years behind the Christian year count. Therefore, the Christian year of 2005 is equivalent to the *thekkyait* of 1367. If an ancient temple you see sounds way too old, it may be because locals are using the *thekkyait*.

Another calendar in use follows the Buddhist era (BE), as used in Thailand, which counts from 543 BC, the date that Buddha achieved *nibbana*. Hence AD 2005 is 2548 BE.

VISAS

Passport holders from Asean countries, China, Bangladesh and Russia do not need to apply for visas to visit Myanmar. All other nationalities do. A tourist visa's validity expires 90 days after issue and only allows a 28-day, single-entry visit. It costs US\$20. You'll need three passport-sized photos for the process.

There are also 28-day business visas (US\$30) and 28-day special visas (US\$30) for former Myanmar citizens (these visas can be extended for three to six months once in Yangon, for US\$36). A multiple-entry business visa is US\$150. There is also a meditation visa (US\$30), which requires an invitation from a monastery; those seeking to enter Myanmar on this type of visa must do an autobiographical 'sketch' as part of the process.

It may be possible to apply for an e-visa online at www.visa.gov.mm, though the site was suspended at the time of research. E-visas previously cost US\$30. If you're planning to enter the country overland, however,

you must first get a visa directly through a Myanmar consular service.

At research time, Bangkok travel agents, particularly on Khao San Rd, specialised in getting quick tourist visas for Myanmar. Rates depended on turnaround times, which aren't always met: a visa in one day costs B1800, in two days B1600 and in three days B1100. The process at the Myanmar embassy in Bangkok (see p339) takes at least a day. Show up early.

See p357 for more information on entering Myanmar overland from Thailand or China, which includes details of short-term visas (with very limited access to Myanmar) available at the borders.

Applications

Myanmar's embassies and consulates abroad are scrupulous in checking out the backgrounds of anyone applying for a tourist visa. In particular, writers and journalists may have a difficult time obtaining visas. Therefore, it's probably not a good idea to list your occupation as any of the

following: journalist, photographer, editor, publisher, motion-picture director or producer, cameraperson, videographer, or writer. Of course, plenty of journalists and photographers do get into the country – by declaring a different profession on the visa application.

Myanmar foreign missions may also be suspicious of anyone whose passport shows two or more previous visits to Myanmar in a five-year period. Obviously the government can't believe anyone would want to visit Myanmar more than once or twice! In cases such as these you'll need more of a reason than simply 'tourism' for receiving another visa. Be creative.

Extensions

At research time, it was possible to extend a tourist visa by an additional 14 days beyond its original 28-day validity in Yangon only. The extension costs US\$36 and usually takes about three days to issue. A travel agent can help sort through the bureaucracy, or you can drop by the MTT office, which charges an extra US\$2 for the service. You'll need two copies of your passport details and visa, two passport-sized photographs, and a letter of recommendation from your hotel. The process cannot be started in advance or from elsewhere in Myanmar apart from Yangon.

Overstaying Your Visa

Another option, if you want just a couple more days, is overstaying your visa. Many travellers have overstayed up to seven days without incident. Check with a Yangon travel agent before your visa's up, but at research time there was generally little hassle if you overstayed *if* you were leaving from the Yangon or Mandalay airports. Be prepared to spend at least 20 minutes doing some paperwork, and pay US\$3 per day, plus a US\$3 'registration fee'. Have correct change, as immigration will likely not be able to change your US\$100 bill.

If you're leaving overland to Thailand on an expired visa, it's best to enlist help from a travel agency before popping up at the border. In one case an extra US\$35 fee was slung onto the US\$3-per-day penalty to cross to Ranong, Thailand. It's likely not an official fee, but it seems to be regularly applied.

VOLUNTEERING

Some foreigners have been able to volunteer as English teachers at monasteries. In November 2004, seven foreigners doing so at Mandalay's Phaungdaw Kyaung were deported, though this is likely to have been a repercussion of the monastery's connection with ousted prime minister Khin Nyunt.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

In Myanmar no Myanmar woman would even consider travelling without at least one female companion, so women travelling alone are regarded as slightly peculiar by the locals. Women travelling alone and being seen off on boats and trains by local friends may find the latter trying to find a suitably responsible older woman to keep them company on the trip.

As in most Buddhist countries, foreign women travelling in Myanmar are rarely hassled on the road as they might be in, for example, India, Malaysia or Indonesia. However, we have received a few reports of foreign women being harassed while travelling in Myanmar. Dressing modestly should help to reduce the risk of sexual harassment. Wear a local *longyi* instead of a skirt above the knee, and any old T-shirt instead of a spaghetti-strap top.

If you didn't bring tampons, they're available at Yangon's City Mart Supermarket (p88).

Women travelling in Myanmar during the April Water Festival (Thingyan) should take extra precautions. As in neighbouring Thailand, drunkenness and an 'anything goes' atmosphere, combined with Western women in tight, wet T-shirts, is apparently too much for some Myanmar men to bear – we've heard of women being groped during the festival. Again, dressing modestly should help to prevent such incidents.

'Ladies' (per the posted signs in certain areas) cannot go up some altars or onto decks around stupas, including the one affording a close-up look at the famous Golden Rock at Kyaiktiyo (p149). Most locals tend to visit teashops, restaurants or shops with members of the same sex.

Asian women, even from other countries, travelling with a Western man may encounter rude comments. In one case a local explained to the heckler that they were not a couple, and the comments ceased.

In some cases it can be considered an insult for a woman to be on the roof of a small vehicle or boat when male passengers are below; ask first. Also, monks are not supposed to touch or be touched by women. If

you're handing something to a monk (and you're a woman), place the object within reach of him, not directly into his hands.

See p61 for background on the role of local women in society.

Transport

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GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

If you're arriving by air, and have your visa ready (see p351) and your valid passport in hand (see following), you should have no trouble entering Myanmar. Arriving so by land is less predictable. Presently you can cross at three places – from Ruili (China) to Mu-se; from Mae Sai (Thailand) to Tachileik; and from Ranong (Thailand)

WARNING – THINGS CHANGE

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change: prices for international travel are volatile, routes are introduced and cancelled, schedules change, special deals come and go, and rules and visa requirements are amended. Airlines and governments seem to take a perverse pleasure in making price structures and regulations as complicated as possible. You should check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works. In addition, the travel industry is highly competitive, and there are many lurks and perks.

The upshot of this is that you should get opinions, quotes and advice from as many airlines and travel agents as possible before you part with your hard-earned cash. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

to Kawthoung (see p357 for more details on these). There is no way that foreigners can reach Myanmar by land or sea from Bangladesh, India or Laos. At the time of research, a road link between Bangladesh and Myanmar – strategically linking Myanmar with India – was under construction, though it is unlikely that this route will be made open for foreigners to use.

There is no requirement for you to show an onward ticket out of the country to enter Myanmar.

Passport

You will need to have a passport that has at least six months of validity from the time of entry.

AIR Airports & Airlines

All international flights arrive at Yangon (Rangoon) airport (RGN), except flights originating from Chiang Mai (Thailand) that go directly to Mandalay airport (MDL). Both airports can land DC10s, but only Mandalay's airport (far more modern and impressive than Yangon's) can land Boeing 747s.

The most common route to Yangon is via Bangkok, though flights also connect Yangon with Calcutta and Delhi (in India), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Kunming (China) and Singapore.

Airlines with offices in Yangon and regular international links with Myanmar:

Air China (☎ 01-505 024; www.airchina.com; airline code CA; B13/23 Narnattaw Rd, Kamayut Township) Flies to/from Kunming.

Air Mandalay (Map p90; ☎ 01-525 488; www.airmandalay.com; airline code 6T; 146 Dhamma Zedi Rd) Connects Mandalay with Chiang Mai.

Biman Bangladesh Airlines (☎ 01-275 882, 01-240 922; www.bimanair.com; airline code BG; 106-108 Pansodan St) Flies to/from Bangkok and Dhaka.

Indian Airlines Limited (Map p102; ☎ 01-253 598; http://indian-airlines.nic.in; airline code IC; 127 Sule Paya Rd) Flies to/from Bangkok and Calcutta.

Malaysia Airlines (Map p102; ☎ 01-241 007; www.malaysianair.com; airline code MH; 335 Bogyoke Aung San Rd) Flies to/from Kuala Lumpur.

Myanmar Airways International (MAI; Map p102; ☎ 01-255 260; www.maiair.com; airline code 8M; 123 Sule Paya Rd) Flies to/from Bangkok, Delhi, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

Silk Air (Map p102; ☎ 01-255 287; www.silkair.com; airline code MI; 339 Bogyoke Aung San Rd) Flies to/from Singapore.

Thai Airways International (Thai; Map p102; ☎ 01-255 499; www.thaiair.com; airline code TG; 1st fl, 339 Bogyoke Aung San Rd) Flies to/from Bangkok and Chiang Mai.

The following are airlines with representatives in Yangon, despite not offering direct services to Myanmar:

Air France (Map p102; ☎ 01-255 430; www.airfrance.fr, in French; airline code AF; 339 Bogyoke Aung San Rd)

All Nippon Airways (ANA; Map p102; ☎ 01-248 901, 01-255 412; www.ana.co.jp/eng; airline code NH; 339 Bogyoke Aung San Rd, Sakura Tower)

China Airlines (☎ 01-245 484; www.china-airlines.com; airline code CI; 353 Bo Aung Gyaw St)

EVA Air (☎ 01-298 001; www.evaair.com; airline code BR; 94 Bogyalay Zay St)

Japan Airlines (JAL; Map p102; ☎ 01-240 400; www.jal.co.jp; airline code JL; FMI Bldg, 380 Bogyoke Aung San Rd)

KLM-Royal Dutch Airlines (Map p102; ☎ 01-274 466; www.klm.com; airline code KL; c/o Myanma Airways, 104 Strand Rd)

Korean Air (☎ 01-661 524; www.koreanair.com; airline code KE; 2nd fl, 112 Pyay Rd, 8 Mile Junction)

See p358 for a list of domestic carriers.

Tickets

Because most flights to Myanmar will involve changes of planes, possibly to a different airline, in Bangkok, it's occasionally possible to save money (up to US\$1000!) by taking a cheapie flight to Bangkok and then

picking up a one-way ticket to Yangon for US\$90 or US\$100 from there. If you're getting quoted obscene fares to Yangon – say US\$2500 or the equivalent from London or Los Angeles – look into getting tickets to Bangkok.

Once in Myanmar you can only buy international tickets from travel agents or airline offices in Yangon.

AIR PASSES

If you're coming from the USA, Malaysia Airlines' Access Asia Pass allows flights around 25 cities (including Yangon) over a 21-day period within Southeast Asia (covering all countries except Laos), and also Pakistan, Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Taiwan and – gulp – Sweden.

INTERCONTINENTAL (RTW) TICKETS

The following online ticket agencies arrange RTW tickets (which will get you to Bangkok):

- www.airbrokers.com
- www.airstop.com
- www.airtreks.com
- www.aroundtheworlds.com

Reconfirming Tickets

It's important to reconfirm your outgoing tickets from Myanmar a few days in advance for all airlines other than Thai Airways and Silk Air. If you've forgotten what time your flight is, the inside back page of the *Myanmar Times* lists the weeks' international flight schedule.

Asia

STA Travel (www.statravel.com) often has good deals. It has branches in China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand. Some other locally based agents that can help with tickets:

China China International Travel Service/FIT Office (in Kunming ☎ 0871 313 8888; King World Hotel) One-way fares from Kunming to Mandalay or Yangon are about Y1500.

DEPARTURE TAX

The international departure tax of US\$10 is not included with your air ticket. Have the US dollars in hand when leaving the country. Kyat is not accepted.

Hong Kong Hong Kong Student Travel (☎ 2730 2800; www.hkst.com.hk, in Cantonese only)

India STIC Travels (in Delhi ☎ 011-2335 7468; www.stictravel.com) Dozens of branches. It offers a R7700/13,500 one-way/return fare from Calcutta; return from Delhi is about R11,500 on Myanma Airways.

Japan No 1 Travel (in Tokyo ☎ 03-3205 6073; www.no1-travel.com) No direct flights, but you can change in Bangkok.

Thailand Pilot Purely Tour Ltd (in Bangkok ☎ 02-281-8565; wongakrakul@yahoo.com; 139 Khao San Rd, Banglamphu) Long-time resident company on Khao San Rd; sells one-way/return tickets to Yangon for B4400/7200.

You can often get pan-Asian fares cheaper in Asia than from elsewhere. However, here are some sample one-way fares for online tickets purchased outside Asia: from Bangkok (US\$165), Chiang Mai (US\$165), Delhi (US\$470), Hong Kong (US\$470), Kuala Lumpur (US\$460) and Singapore (US\$560).

Flights from Chaing Mai to Mandalay on Air Mandalay cost about B5000 (about US\$130) one way.

Australia & New Zealand

In Australia, **STA Travel** (☎ 1300 733 035; www.sta.travel.com.au) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; www.flightcentre.com.au) have offices throughout Australia. An online booking agent is www.travel.com.au. Sample return fares from Sydney to Yangon range from about A\$1000 to A\$1300, including tax.

In New Zealand, **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz) have many branches. The site www.travel.co.nz is good for online bookings.

Canada

Travel Cuts (☎ 800 667-2887; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student-travel agency. For online bookings, try www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca. It may be cheaper to buy separate tickets – to Bangkok, then to Yangon. There are far cheaper fares from New York than from Toronto or Montreal; one sample fare from Toronto to Yangon was C\$3200, while from New York the cost was US\$1250.

Continental Europe

FRANCE

Gulf Air and Emirates Air often have bargain flights from Paris to Bangkok. Tickets

for flights between Paris and Yangon could be bought for €860. Recommended travel agencies:

Anyway (☎ 08 92 89 38 92; www.anyway.fr, in French)
Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr, in French)

OTU Voyages (www.otu.fr, in French) Student oriented.
Voyageurs du Monde (☎ 01 40 15 11 15; www.vdm.com)

GERMANY

Find fares at these online agencies:

Expedia (www.expedia.de, in German)
Just Travel (☎ 089 747 3330; www.justtravel.de)
Last Minute (☎ 01805 284 366; www.lastminute.de)
STA Travel (☎ 01805 456 422; www.statravel.de)

OTHER COUNTRIES

Airfair (☎ 020-620 5121; www.airfair.nl, in Dutch) A recommended agency in the Netherlands.

CTS Viaggi (☎ 06-462 0431; www.cts.it, in Italian) A student-oriented agent in Italy.

UK & Ireland

Look for advertisements in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and the the Web-based **TNT Magazine Online** (www.tntmagazine.com). Geared towards students or travellers under 26 (but helpful to all), popular **STA Travel** (☎ 0870 160 0599; www.statravel.co.uk) has many branches around the UK.

Recommended travel agencies:

Bridge the World (☎ 0870 444 7474; www.b-t-w.co.uk)
Flight Centre (☎ 0870 890 8099; www.flightcentre.co.uk)
Flightbookers (☎ 0870 010 7000; www.ebookers.com)
North-South Travel (☎ 01245-608 291; www.northsouthtravel.co.uk) Part of the company's profits goes to projects in the developing world.
Quest Travel (☎ 0870 442 3542; www.questtravel.com)
Trailfinders (www.trailfinders.co.uk)
Travel Bag (☎ 0870 890 1456; www.travelbag.co.uk)

We found sample return fares from London to Yangon from £650 to £1000 – often £500 more if starting from Belfast, so consider getting a cheap fare to London and leaving from there. A one-way ticket is usually only slightly cheaper than a return ticket.

USA

Discount travel agents in the USA are known as consolidators (although you won't see a sign on the door saying 'Consolidator'). San Francisco is the ticket consolidator capital of America, although some good deals can be

found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities.

One of the most reliable discounters is **Avia Travel** (☎ 800 950-2842, 510-558-2150; www.aviatravel.com), which specialises in custom-designed round-the-world fares. Travellers aged under 26, including students, should check with **STA Travel** (☎ 800 781-4040; www.sta.travel.com) for discount fares.

Agencies recommended for making online bookings:

- www.cheaptickets.com
- www.expedia.com
- www.itn.net
- www.lowestfare.com
- www.orbitz.com
- www.travelocity.com

If the fares quoted to you are high, considering buying two individual tickets – one to Bangkok, then another to Yangon. Generally, flights to Bangkok are about US\$200 cheaper from the west coast than from the east coast (it's about US\$750 from Los Angeles in the high season, not including Christmas). It's possible to book a return Bangkok to Yangon flight online for about US\$300, which is about US\$100 more than the cost of the day-in-advance return tickets easily bought in Bangkok. An early high-season sample fare for a return trip to Yangon was US\$1250 from New York; curiously, it was much more from LA (about US\$2000).

LAND

Border Crossings

There are presently only three places to cross into Myanmar overland. No bus or train service connects Myanmar with another country, nor can you travel by car or motorcycle across the border – you must walk across. Have your visa before you get to the border (see p351).

Note that both border crossings with Thailand involve reaching closed-off areas of Myanmar, from where you will have to fly to reach the other parts of the country (including Yangon or Mandalay). The majority of travellers crossing the border at these places are making day trips – or are seeking to renew a Thai visa.

TO/FROM MAE SAI, THAILAND

North of Chiang Rai it's possible to cross to dreary Tachileik (p202). Travellers already

possessing a 28-day visa (obtained from Bangkok or elsewhere) are permitted to enter Myanmar here and travel to the rest of the country. If you don't have a visa, a US\$5 day pass (paid to Myanmar immigration on the spot) allows travel only within 5km of town; a US\$10 14-day pass, also obtainable at the border, allows travel to Kengtung and Mong La.

It's not a problem to leave Myanmar here, as long as your visa hasn't expired. See p352 for more on this.

TO/FROM RANONG, THAILAND

Travel agents in Ranong help arrange 28-day visas allowing you to cross into Kawthoung (p169) and travel to the rest of Myanmar. You can also enter the country for two days by purchasing a US\$5 'day pass', which doesn't subject you to the same 5km restriction.

Travellers can exit Myanmar here too. Presently immigration charges US\$25 for you to do so; this is likely not an official fee but seems to be pretty standard.

TO/FROM RUILI, CHINA

At the time of research, you could come into Myanmar from China, but not enter China, at this border. You can arrange a regular 28-day tourist visa in a day or two in Kunming at the **Myanmar Consulate** (☎ 0871-371 6609; fax 0871-317 6309; Camellia Hotel, Bldg No 3; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri), in Yunnan Province. The cost is Y185 to Y285, depending on how quickly you need it.

To cross overland at Ruili it's necessary to book a multiday 'visa-and-package trip' – you can't go on your own – to go across the border at Mu-Se and on to Lashio. This package costs about Y1400, generally about the same as a one-way flight to Mandalay from Kunming. We've heard it can take more than a week to arrange, or as little as two days. The package, which includes basic transport and a 'guide' to ensure all goes OK, doesn't include food or accommodation. The border, at Ruili, is 20 hours by road from Kunming. The drive from Mu-Se (just across the border) to Lashio is on a good portion of the old Burma Rd and takes about five hours.

The China International Travel Service in Kunming (see p355 for details) can arrange this package.

RIVER & SEA

It is not possible for foreigners to go to/from Myanmar by sea or river.

TOURS

Many foreign-run companies book package tours to Myanmar. We're not recommending them as, in most instances, more money will reach the local people if you travel on your own or arrange a driver and guide from a locally based agent. See p26 for tips on arranging your own tour in Yangon.

Travel agents along Bangkok's Khao San Rd offer a host of short-term package trips to Myanmar, some of which are geared more to midrange locally run hotels than top-end joint-venture hotels. Four-night trips to Yangon, Mandalay and Bagan (Pagan) start at US\$329 to US\$399, including hotels and flight.

GETTING AROUND

Much of Myanmar is off limits to foreigners or can only be accessed after getting permission or by taking an expensive tour organised by the government's Myanmar Travels & Tours (MTT). But in the places where you are able to go there's surprising freedom to stop and roam where you want. See the map on p359 for transport routes that were open at research time. Some isolated towns such as Kengtung, Sittwe and Kawthoung require jumps by air or bus to reach.

It's worth adding that the government is very happy about their (literal, not political) bridge building, capped by the country's largest in Mawlamyine (Moulmein); this 3km bridge over the Thanlwin (Salween) River was completed in 2004. See the list of bridges at www.myanmar.com/build/bridge.

AIR

Myanmar has 66 (and counting) airstrips around the country, of which 20 are served by regular flights. Many are located 20 or 30 minutes by car outside town. In many towns you'll note new, spotless, largely empty airports serving, well, no flights. One Magwe resident said: 'Our airport? It's for show. We don't get flights here'. As with international flights, domestic flights involve immigration and customs checks.

In the wake of Visit Myanmar Year in 1996, forced labour was reportedly used to ready new airstrips. Many travellers avoid air travel, as taking a flight means that more money goes to the government.

Airlines in Myanmar

Four airlines – three private ones and the government-run Myanmar Airways (MA) – serve Myanmar's domestic skyways. Most routes connect the big four: Yangon, Bagan (Nyaung U), Mandalay and Heho (Inle Lake). Daily flights also connect Yangon with Ngapali Beach (Thandwe). Even more far-flung airports, such as the ones at Myitkyina, Kengtung and Sittwe, see regular flights during the week. Following is the contact information for the offices in Yangon for the four airlines; the regional offices are listed in the respective chapters.

Air Bagan (☎ 01-514 741, 01-513 322; www.airbagan.com; airline code AB; 56 Shwe Taung Gyar St, Bahan) New privately run carrier that started up in 2004.

Air Mandalay (Map p90; ☎ 01-525 488; www.airmandalay.com; airline code 6T; 146 Dhamma Zedi Rd) Running since 1994, this is a Singapore/Malaysia joint venture.

Myanma Airways (MA; Map p102; ☎ 01-374 874, 01-277 013; fax 01-373 828; 104 Strand Rd) Government airline.

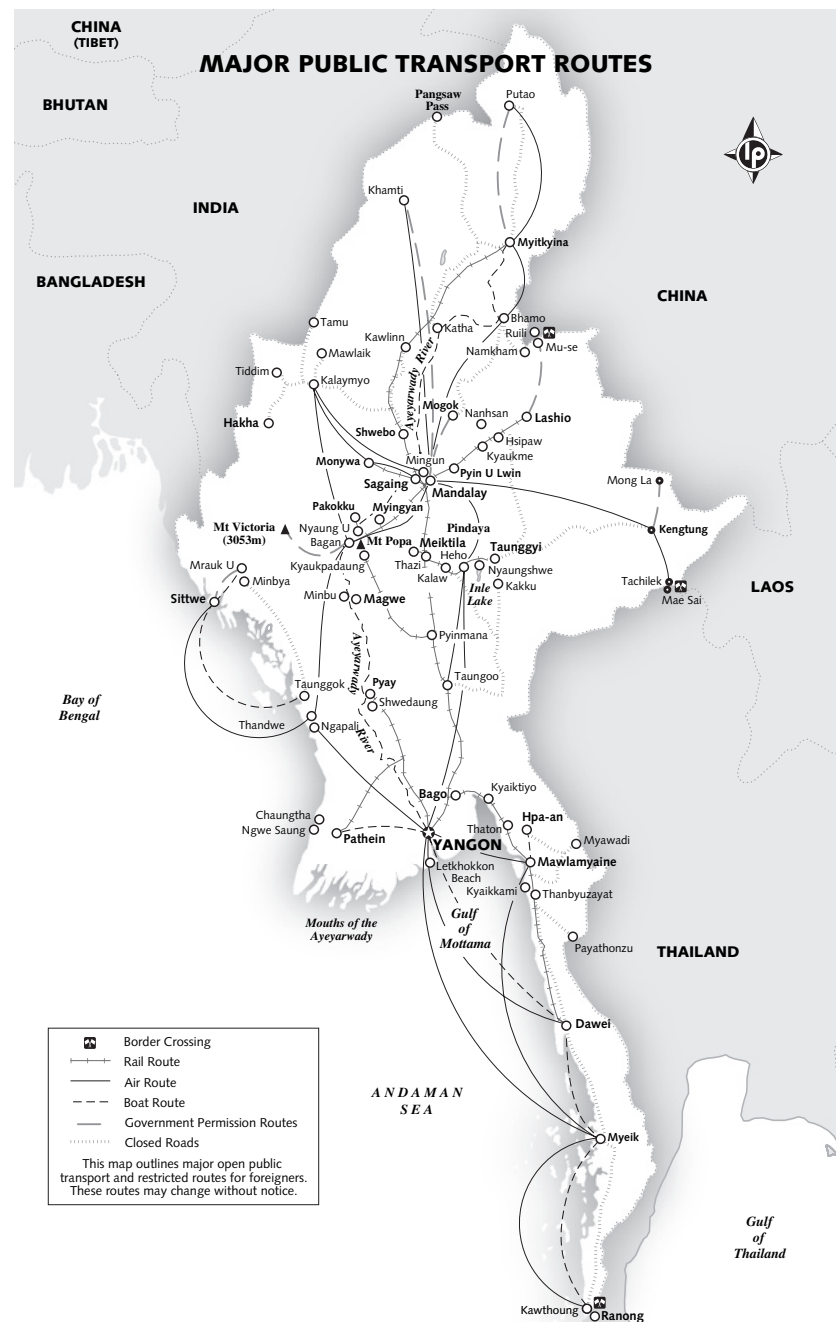
Yangon Airways (Map p102; ☎ 01-383 106; www.yangonair.com; airline code HK; MMB Tower, Level 5, 166 Upper Pansodan Rd) Thai joint venture operating since 1996, with a cute flying-elephant logo; their slogan 'you're safe with us' is a poke at government-run Myanmar Airways' safety record.

Schedules

Air routes change in the air; that's how domestic we are.

Yangon travel agent

The agent is not joking. These comments are particularly true of MA flights, where dates and departure times are often not written on your ticket, so the airline doesn't have to honour the days and hours for which reservations were originally made. (In some cases, if officials are flying somewhere – say to Lashio – seats may open to the public.) Schedules are more reliable on the other three airlines, and between main destinations during the high season. Sometimes 'direct' flights from, say, Bagan to Thandwe (Sandoway) stop in Yangon.



AIRPORT CODES

Many posted flight schedules around the country only use domestic airport codes.

Bhamo	BMO
Dawei (Tavoy)	TVY
Heho (Inle Lake)	HEH
Kawthoung	KAW
Kengtung	KET
Mandalay	MDL
Myeik	MGZ
Myitkyina	MYT
Nyaung U (Bagan)	NYU
Sittwe	AKY
Tachileik	THL
Thandwe (Ngapali Beach)	SNY
Yangon	RGN

You can find some schedule information on the airline websites and at www.myanmar.com/information/flight.htm.

Tickets

One-way fares are half a return fare, and can usually be bought a day in advance. To buy a ticket, you'll need to pay with US dollars or FEC (see p345), and bring your passport to the travel agent or airline office. It's sometimes difficult to buy a ticket that departs from a town other than the one you are in.

You can usually get discounts (maybe US\$10 per ticket) by buying from an independent travel agent.

MA tickets are generally a bit cheaper than the other airlines'. But that discount comes with a ride on the government's dated fleet of Fokker F-28 jets and F-27 turboprops, and their iffy safety record (see p336 for details). Rumours persist that safety procedures haven't been updated since the 1950s. It's also worth noting that some intelligence officials, arrested in October 2004 (when prime minister Khin Nyit was ousted), flew MA to their new homes in up-country prisons. You have to go to MA or the government's MTT office to purchase tickets on that airline.

All prices for airline tickets should include US\$3 for 'insurance'. There is no domestic departure tax.

BICYCLE

You'll sure see a lot: bicycles are clearly the number one means for locals to get around.

Bikes can easily be hired around the country, but they're best for getting around a town rather than for use on long-haul trips.

Around Town

In places such as Mandalay, Bagan and Inle Lake you'll see 'bike rental' signs; rates start at K500 to K1000 per day. Most guesthouses in such places keep a few bikes on hand; if not, staff can usually track one down. More expensive hotels and secondary towns such as Sittwe tend to charge K1000 or K2000 more. Note the condition of the bike before hiring; check the brakes and pedals in particular. Many rental bikes have baskets or bells.

If renting doesn't appeal and you plan to ride a fair bit, you can buy sturdy utilitarian bikes made in India, China or Thailand from about US\$75. Someone may be able to help you track down a second-hand bike for less.

Apart from in Yangon and Mandalay, vehicular traffic is quite light.

Long-Distance

A few visitors bring their own touring bikes into Myanmar; there doesn't seem to be any problem with customs as long as you make the proper declarations upon entering the country. Gradients in most parts of Myanmar open to tourism are moderate. Frontier regions, on the other hand – particularly Shan, Kayin, Kayah and Chin States – tend to be mountainous. You'll find plenty of opportunity everywhere for dirt-road and off-road pedalling. Especially in the north, where main roads can resemble secondary roads elsewhere, a sturdy mountain bike would make a good alternative to a touring rig.

Some routes are listed below. More detail about these routes is provided on p332.

- Thazi to Inle Lake via Kalaw
- Pyin U Lwin (Maymyo) to Lashio via Hsipaw
- Mandalay to Bagan via Myingyan
- Mandalay to either Monywa, Pyin U Lwin, Sagaing, Inwa (Ava) or Amarapura

November to February is the best time to cycle in terms of the weather.

If you're bringing your bike, bring the spare parts you need. There are (at least) basic bicycle shops in most towns, but they

usually have only locally or Chinese-made parts to equip single-speed bikes. You can also buy lower-quality motorcycle helmets here; many are disturbingly adorned with swastikas – a fad, not a political alliance. Bring reflective clothing and plenty of insurance. Don't ride at night.

Travellers on a bike will need to sleep in towns few travellers make it to, and a lack of licensed accommodation may be an issue. Technically, you will need permission from local immigration to stay at such places. Be patient. Most cyclists get permission from local authorities to stay one night, but the paperwork (coming with some frowns) may take an hour to arrange.

It's possible to store your bicycle in the undercarriage storage on buses. You may have to pay a little extra, though. On smaller buses you may need to buy a 'seat' for your bike.

Check the Myanmar webpage on www.cyclingaroundtheworld.com to read a detailed route, with tips, from a 1998 trip around Bagan and central Myanmar. A few cycling groups (eg www.spiceroads.com/burma) offer guided tours; most are for about two weeks and take in much of the same ground covered in the 1998 trip. Prices for tours run at about US\$1750, and include bike and accommodation but not airfare.

BOAT

A huge fleet of riverboats, remnants of the old Irrawaddy Flotilla Company (IFC), still ply Myanmar's major rivers, where the bulk of traveller-oriented boat travel gets done. Some boats are ramshackle (but certainly lively) government ferries, some date from the British era and others are old-style IFC liners that run luxury cruises. River ferry is, without doubt, one of the most enjoyable ways to cover long distances in Myanmar. See p32 for an itinerary suggestion that goes down the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River. The main drawback is speed; a boat typically takes three to four times as long as road travel along the same route.

There are 8000km of navigable river in Myanmar, with the most important river being the Ayeyarwady. Even in the dry season, boats can travel from the delta region (dodging exposed sandbars) all the way north to Bhamo, and in the wet they

can reach Myitkyina. Other important rivers include the Twante Chaung (Twante Chanel), which links the Ayeyarwady to Yangon, and the Chindwin River, which joins the Ayeyarwady a little above Bagan. The Thanlwin River in the east is only navigable for about 200km from its mouth at Mawlamyine, though the five-hour trip to Hpa-an is one of the country's most scenic waterway journeys (see p157).

It takes great expertise to navigate Myanmar's waterways. Rapidly changing sandbanks and shallow water during the dry season mean the captains and pilots have to keep in constant touch with the changing pattern of the river flows. For example, seven pilots are used on the stretch from Mandalay to Pyay (Prome). Each is an expert on his own particular segment of the river.

In addition to the rivers, it's possible to travel along the Bay of Bengal between Sittwe and Taunggok (north of Ngapali Beach); see p318.

Note that higher-priced cruises are either privately run boats on lease from the government or a joint-venture operation.

Cargo Ships

Although the obstacles standing in your way are daunting, it may be possible to travel along Myanmar's coastline via **Myanmar Five Star Line** (MFSL; in Yangon ☎ 01-295 279; fax 01-295 174; 132/136 Theinbyu St), the country's government-owned ocean transport enterprise. MFSL maintains just 21 craft, which sail north and south from Yangon about twice a month. Only eight vessels sometimes offer passenger service: MV *Taunggyi*, MV *Hakha*, MV *Myitkyina*, MV *Loikaw*, MV *Lashio*, MV *Bagan*, MV *Hpa-an* and MV *Htonywa*.

Southbound MFSL ships from Yangon sail regularly to Kawthoung, a two-day and two-night voyage (at least), to pick up goods shipped through Thailand's Ranong Province, with stops at Dawei and Myeik (Mergui).

Northbound ships call at Thandwe (a full day from Yangon), Taunggok and Kyaukpyu (one night ashore) before docking in Sittwe (five hours later) for cargo from India and Bangladesh.

Schedules can be irregular. If you're bent on trying for a ticket, it would be best to have a local make inquiries on your behalf.

Private Ferries

A thousand or so private cargo and passenger boats travel the waterways of Myanmar. That is just a pale shadow of the former glory of the original Glasgow-owned IFC, which ceased operations in 1948. We have tried to give preference to private ferries throughout this book.

Government Ferries

Inland Water Transport (IWT; Map p98; in Yangon ☎ 01-284 055; Strand St) is the government-owned water-transport corporation. It has over 500 boats totalling nearly 1.5 million tonnes and carrying at least 14 million passengers annually.

Today most of the IWT boats are rather run down and ramshackle. Many of the passengers on the long-distance ferries are traders who make stops along the way to pick up or deliver goods. Along the heavily travelled 423km-long Yangon–Pyay–Mandalay route, there are 28 ferry landings, where merchants can ply their trade.

Only a few riverboat routes are regularly used by visitors. New ‘tourist boats’ carry foreigners on the upper deck and locals on the lower. Key routes:

- Mandalay to Bagan (see p243)
- Mandalay to Myitkyina via Katha and Bhamo (see p219 and p221)
- Mawlamyine to Hpa-an (see p157)
- Sittwe to Mrauk U (Myohaung; see p322)
- Yangon to Patheingyi (Bassein; see p122)

There is no direct service between Yangon and Mandalay – to do the trip, you’ll need to change boats in Pyay, a two-day trip south of Bagan and two days north of Yangon.

IWT offices are usually near the jetty. They can offer information, schedules and fare details, and usually tickets. IWT offices, officially, accept US dollars and FEC only.

Luxury Boats

Be aware that the higher-priced cruises are either privately run boats on lease from the government or a joint-venture operation. You can book services with travel agents in Yangon, but keep in mind that many trips are booked out by tour groups.

Several luxury ferries travel the upper and lower reaches of the Ayeyarwady River. One Orient Express Cruises (E&O, London) liner, the joint-venture **Road to Mandalay**

(www.orient-express.com/tplanner/rtm/index.html) offers three-, four-, seven-, nine- and 11-day trips (ranging from US\$1950 to US\$4200 per person) that centre on Mandalay. The most popular connect Mandalay with Bagan. The three-day trip downriver from Mandalay leaves on Wednesday (weekly from October to April, monthly July to September), and the four-day return trip from Bagan goes on Saturday (weekly from October to April, monthly July to September). Longer trips venture further north, up the Ayeyarwady to Bhamo, or up the Chindwin past Kalaymyo. Yangon travel agents can help arrange this, but ships are often booked in advance.

A locally run operation is **Pandaw Cruises** (☎ 02-44256; www.pandaw.com; 13/14 Strand Rd, btwn 35th & 37th Sts, Mandalay), which offers three 12-day trips in ships done up like the original teak-and-brass IFC fleet. The Golden Land trip goes from Pyay to Mandalay via Bagan; prices run from US\$3150 to US\$3450, and ships depart weekly from early November to March. The Upper Ayeyarwady trip, heading north of Mandalay to Bhamo, is US\$3450 to US\$3950; ships depart weekly from mid-September to early November. A lone September trip up the Chindwin River for 12 days is cheap, at US\$1950. At the time of research, Pandaw Cruises’ permit to operate was up in the air, but apparently things are being worked out.

HELP WITH TRANSPORT

Your guesthouse or hotel can help you considerably by getting whatever tickets you need (air, bus, boat, train) or by finding a long-distance taxi – or even by finding shifting bus stations! Sometimes the price quoted by the guesthouse owner, particularly for taxis, will fluctuate depending on how much your bed costs. Often, though, you’ll only pay what you’d pay if you traipsed across town to do it yourself. Some may charge extra for a commission; it’s not a bad idea to ask around the street to gauge the prices.

Usually the MTT office offers taxi service for only slightly more than the going fare – use their quote only as a gauge, if you’re keen to spend dollars that don’t reach the government sector.

Similar trips are offered by **Pandaw 1947** (☎ 01-376 109; www.pandaw1947.com), apparently run by a Yangon travel agency.

A far cheaper option (US\$170 per person), yet retaining a little luxury and going where fewer tourists go, is available aboard the privately run **Delta Queen** (☎ 01-246 752; www.myanmar-rivercruises.com), which travels between Yangon and Patheingyi in about 20 hours (p134).

BUS

Almost always faster than trains, Myanmar buses come in different sizes. Options include luxury air-con express buses, less luxurious but nice buses (without air con), local buses, and mini 32-seaters. Most are operated by private companies, but some – particularly on shorter routes that are geared more to locals bringing home rice – are still run by the government.

See Pick-up Trucks, p366 for other transport options.

Classes & Conditions

Many long-haul trips, such as from Yangon to Mandalay, allow the greatest comfort, with new(ish) air-con express buses – some of which are quite nice. A lot of bus activity happens at night, with buses leaving from 3pm to 6pm or later, and arriving at the final destination in the wee hours (often 5am or 6am).

If you want extra air-con comfort but don’t want to go the whole way on one of these routes, you usually have to pay the full fare (eg going from Mandalay to Taunggyi you pay the full fare to Yangon) and will have to deal with a 3am arrival time. Similarly, by paying the full fare for the

route, you can jump on a bus at a stop along the way, eg catch the Mandalay to Yangon bus at Meiktila. Staff at your guesthouse or hotel should be able to help with this.

A bottle of water is often handed out on better-quality buses. There are no bathrooms on the bus, but frequent toilet-and-soup stops perforate the night – frustrating if you’ve just got to sleep and the bus stops at 3am for ‘breakfast’. Often TVs blare for much of the trip – usually sticking with Myanmar-made movies detailing things such as, oh, protagonists dying bloody deaths in car crashes, but the occasional *Raiders of the Lost Ark* slips in.

Be aware that temperatures can drop substantially at night. Take a jacket or blanket (preferably both) on air-con buses in particular, which can get quite bone-chillingly cold.

Similar sized but older buses, with no air con, make shorter-haul trips, such as direct links from Yangon to Pyay or Pinyinmana to Yangon.

Local buses, or 32-seat minibuses, bounce along the highways too. These tend to use the aisles, if not for blokes, for bags of rice, veggies or (worst) dried fish. Sometimes the floor in front of you is filled too, so you’ll find your knees to your chin for some bouncy hours. Getting up to stretch your legs while moving just isn’t an option. (Try to sit in the front couple of rows, which sometimes have fewer bags stored, and better visibility.)

Trips durations for all forms of public road transportation are very elastic. We hear of travellers on the nicest buses who were stopped for hours on the Yangon–Mandalay highway. (The LP authors on this book had no such troubles, however.) Myanmar

ITINERARIES & OVERNIGHTERS

There’s not one obvious way to travel by bus between Myanmar’s big four – Yangon, Bagan, Inle Lake and Mandalay. Some of these places have far fewer connections than others. Most trips are at night, which can take a day or two to recover from – depending on your inner shocks from the bus bumps. Catching a bus from Yangon on the 12- to 15-hour trip to Mandalay is a breeze, but only one or two services regularly connect to Inle Lake or Bagan – and all of these are overnighters. Trips between Bagan, Inle and Mandalay can be done by day (though only one or two run daily, and seats fill a couple of days in advance).

Another good way to cut back on overnighters is by hopping off en route to or from Yangon and stopping for a night at appealing towns such as Taunggyi (p290), Pinyinmana (p289), Meiktila (p287) or Pyay (p283). These places can be reached by pick-up or local bus, which operate during the day.

superstition says that when you're on a journey you shouldn't ask anyone 'How much longer?', or 'Brother, when will we arrive?', as this is only tempting fate.

Buses of all types do break down sometimes. Older buses often stop to hose down a hot engine. Some roads – one-lane, mangled deals (read: *very rough*) – don't help matters, and tyre punctures occur too.

GOVERNMENT BUS

Formerly, many buses were operated by the government's Road Transport Enterprise (RTE). Now essentially only buses between Yangon and Monywa, and Yangon and Kyaukpadaung, are RTE. These are more geared towards transporting cargo. There's no clear sign to indicate which vehicles belong to the RTE, but it's very unlikely you'll be on one.

Costs

Unlike for train, plane and most boat tickets, you can pay kyat for all bus fares. But, similarly, foreigners will pay more than locals. Generally minibuses, local 32-seaters, express buses with no air con, and air-con luxury jobbies charge roughly the same on overlapping routes. Sample foreigner fares and trip times:

From	To	Price	Duration
Bagan	Taunggyi	K6000	10hrs
Mandalay	Bagan	K4200	8hrs
Mandalay	Hsipaw	K2300	5hrs
Mandalay	Taunggyi	K4500	10-12hrs
Pyay	Taunggok	K2500-K4000	8hrs
Yangon	Bagan	K6500	14-15hrs
Yangon	Bago (Pegu)	K500-K1000	2hrs
Yangon	Chaungtha	K5000	6-7hrs
Yangon	Kyaiktiyo	K2500	4½hrs
Yangon	Mandalay	K6000	12-15hrs
Yangon	Taunggyi	K6000	20hrs
Yangon	Pyay	K1550	6hrs
Yangon	Thandwe	K4500	17-18hrs

Reservations

From November to February, it's necessary to book buses that ply some key routes a couple of days in advance, notably to/from Bagan or Inle Lake, where options are few. Seat reservations are made for all buses. Ask to see the bus ahead of time to choose the seat you'd like.

ROAD RULES: TO THE RIGHT!

All Myanmar traffic goes on the right-hand side of the road. This wasn't always so. In an effort to distance itself from the British colonial period, the military government instigated an overnight-switch from the left to the right in 1970. By far, most cars either date from before 1970, or are low-cost Japanese models, so steering wheels are perilously found on the right-hand side – this becomes particularly dicey when a driver blindly zooms to the left to pass a car! If you're in the passenger seat, help them look for oncoming traffic.

Restricted Roads

Foreigners are permitted to buy bus tickets of any class, using kyat, to any destination within or near the main Yangon–Bagan–Mandalay–Taunggyi quadrangle. We also found that buses were easily boarded in most other places in the country, except for areas of restricted travel towards the Thai border. See the map on p359 for roads that are closed to travel.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Many travellers hire a car and an accompanying driver. To drive one yourself is possible, but permission must be arranged via the government-run MTT and Road Transport Administration Department, and you must be accompanied by a local at all times.

Business travellers and expats have to apply to and register with the Road Transport Administration Department and have an International Driving Licence. These visitors are not bound by the restriction to have a Myanmar national in the car at all times. Anyway, we see our foreign friends driving alone.

Driving conditions are poor but often better than on many roads in Vietnam, Cambodia or Laos. Of the 24,000km of roads in Myanmar, about half are paved; the remainder are graded gravel, unimproved dirt or simple vehicle tracks.

Hiring a Car & Driver

Hiring a car and driver is an increasingly popular way to get around the country; it's also favoured as an easier, time-saving

BEWARE JUNK CARS

We hear reports of some travellers having to abandon travelling in a 'junk car'. The wisest thing to do before you hire a car is to ask at a guesthouse or hotel for reliable drivers, and also ask a travel agent or two. Be sure to meet the driver and see the car before making a decision to hire.

way of making a day trip. It's quite easy to hire a reasonably new, air-con car with a driver for around US\$100 a day; older cars without air con cost about half that. For longer-term trips you can negotiate lower daily rates.

Prices include fuel and up to 12 hours of driving per day, and you won't have to cover the driver's own expenses. The cost will usually go up only a few US dollars per extra person in the car or van.

Keep in mind that it can get quite dusty, particularly around Bagan, if you don't have air con.

There are no car-rental agencies per se, but most travel agencies in Yangon, Mandalay or Bagan – as well as guesthouses and hotels elsewhere – can arrange cars and drivers. In most cases you will be asked to sign a simple contract and pay a good-faith deposit. Note that you'll pay more for your hired car if you arrange the deal through touts, such as trishaw drivers and money-changers.

Among the most popular and reliable rental cars in the country are second-hand, reconditioned Toyota hatchbacks imported from Japan and called Super-roofs. Myanmar assembles its own Mazda jeeps – MJJs – using 85% local parts. Though mostly a government monopoly, these jeeps make decent off-road vehicles. The old US-made, WWII-era Willys Jeeps that once characterised outback Myanmar travel are becoming few and far between.

Prices for new cars have risen with recent inflation: from about US\$3000 in 1996 to US\$20,000 in 2004.

Petrol is rationed (four gallons per week) to vehicle owners. If you need more than this you'll have to purchase petrol from black-market outlets run from makeshift stands everywhere. Prices rise and fall, but black-market petrol is usually twice as

expensive (about K2000 per gallon at the time of research). When Myanmar vehicle owners make an upcountry 'road trip' (the Burmese-English term for any driving out of Yangon), they have to buy fuel on the black market or carry along numerous jerry cans of petrol.

Another small cost to consider when travelling by car is the customary K25 or K50 'toll' collected upon entering many towns and villages throughout Myanmar – a legacy of the tributes paid to warlord states in centuries past. Many drivers are adept at handing these to the toll collectors while barely slowing down.

Motorcycle

Motorbikes were once restricted for foreigners, but it's now possible to rent one, though few locals advertise this. Ask around. In Mandalay, for example, it's about K8000 per day to rent a motorbike; it's a couple of thousand kyat less in towns such as Myitkyina. Unlike while cycling, you are supposedly required to wear a helmet while riding a motorbike. If one's not available, you can buy one (pretty cheaply made) for K2000 and up.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

One extra reason to avoid hitching in Myanmar is that local drivers may not know which areas are off limits to foreigners and may unwittingly transport them into such areas. In such cases the driver will probably be punished.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Larger towns in Myanmar offer a variety of city buses (*ka*), bicycle rickshaws or trishaws (*saiq-ka*, for sidecar), horse carts (*myint hlei*), ox carts, vintage taxis (*taxi*), more modern little three-wheelers somewhat akin to Thai *tuk-tuks* (*thoun kein*, meaning 'three wheels'), tiny four-wheeled 'blue taxi' Mazdas (*lei kein*, meaning 'four wheels') and modern Japanese pick-up

trucks (*lain ka*, meaning 'line car'; see Pick-Up Trucks, below).

Small towns rely heavily on horse carts and trishaws as the main mode of local transport. However, in the five largest cities (Yangon, Mandalay, Patheingyi, Mawlamyine and Taunggyi) public buses take regular routes along the main avenues for a fixed per-person rate, usually K5 to K25.

Standard rates for taxis, trishaws and horse carts are sometimes 'boosted' for foreigners. A little bargaining may be in order. Generally a ride from the bus station to a central hotel – often a distance of 2km or more – is K1000. Rides around the centre can be arranged for K200 or K300. Ask around locally to find out what the going fares are. The supply of drivers and vehicles often exceeds demand, so it's usually not hard to bargain the fare down towards the levels the locals pay.

PICK-UP TRUCKS

Japanese-made pick-up trucks feature three rows of bench seats in the covered back. Most pick-ups connect short-distance destinations, making many stops along the way to pick up people or cargo. They are often packed (yet somehow never 'full' according to the driver). Pick-ups trace some useful or necessary routes, such as from Mandalay to Amarapura, from Myingyan to Meiktila and from Pinyinmana to Taunggyi. Unlike buses, they go regularly during the day.

Fares are not necessarily cheaper than those charged for local bus trips of the same length, and prices often double after dark. You can, however, pay 25% to 50% extra for a seat up the front. It's often worth the extra expense, if don't want to do scrunched duty. Sometimes you may share your spot with a monk riding for free; usually you get exactly what you pay for ('the whole front'), unlike in some other parts of Southeast Asia.

Pick-ups often start from the bus station (in some towns they linger under a big banyan tree in the centre) and then, unlike many buses, make rounds through the central streets to snare more passengers.

TOURS

Many high-end hotels offer expensive day tours. If you want to have your trip planned

out, you can still do it and keep your money in the private sector. See p26 for tips on creating your own package trip. Some restricted areas can only be visited on a tour; see p106 for details. For details of bicycle tours, see p361.

TRAIN

There are as many opinions of Myanmar's oft-maligned train service as there are people riding it. For some a train ride on narrow-gauge tracks is like going by horse, with the old carriages rocking back and forth and bouncing everyone lucky enough to have a seat on the hard chairs; others dig it, as some routes get to areas not reached by road. One local said, 'It's not as bad as some people say, not as good as you hope'. What's known for sure is that train trips along the same routes as buses mean extra travel time.

As most trains are run by the government, many travellers stick with private buses. But see below for details of some privately run services.

Long-distance trains have dining cars accessible to passengers in 1st, upper and sleeper class. The food isn't bad – fried rice and noodles. Attendants can also take your order and bring food to your seat. Trains stop pretty often too, with vendors on platforms offering all sorts of snacks. Toilet/bathrooms are basic; there are also sinks to wash hands and brush teeth. Attendants sometimes hire out bamboo mats to spread on the floor in aisles or under seats if you can't sleep upright. North of Mandalay it can get cold at night, so bring a jacket and/or a blanket.

To guarantee a seat on most trains with upper and sleeper cars, book three days or more in advance. At smaller stations, agents may get confused by the fact that you want a ticket from them and sell you a ride at the local price – the difference can be paying K250 instead of K4000!

Major train routes tend to require payment in US dollars or FEC.

Private Railways

Although most trains are operated by the government-owned Myanmar Railways, a few private enterprises have come into existence as well. Between Yangon and Mandalay, the private Dagon Mann (DM) runs

express trains that are more pleasant than the state-run express trains. These trains stop at Thazi. See departure times in the table, p368.

Two private companies, Malihka Mandalay and Mehka Mandalay, operate trains along the Mandalay–Myitkyina line. On this route the only alternative is the very slow and uncomfortable government train. For information on reserving a seat on a privately run train, see p368.

Myanmar Railways

Myanmar maintains 4684km of 1m-gauge railway track – much of which is now open to foreign tourists – and 550 train stations.

The 647km-long trip from Yangon to Mandalay is the only train trip most visitors take – though there are plenty of other routes for the more adventurous. Other train journeys worth considering are the Mandalay (or Pinyin U Lwin) train to Lashio (or Hsipaw), which takes in hilly terrain the roads miss, and the Yangon to Mawlamyine route.

On the Yangon to Mandalay route there are daily and nightly reserved carriages on express trains, where you can be sure of getting a seat. One way to tell whether an approaching train is express or local is to check the engine colour: express engines are generally painted yellow; local ones blue.

The express trains are far superior to the general run of Myanmar trains. Other trains are late, almost by rule – taking one 12-hour train trip that ends up running as much as 15 hours late is enough for most travellers. The Mandalay to Myitkyina route, though scheduled to take around 24 hours, often takes up to 40 hours. In 1995 this train derailed, killing 120 people, and in 2001 a bridge collapsed, killing an equal number. Even on the far more travelled Yangon–Mandalay route, delays are common.

Apart from the straightforward Yangon–Bago–Pinyinmana–Thazi–Mandalay route, you can also take the branch line from Pinyinmana to Kyaukpadaung (about 50km south of Bagan) or the branch from Thazi to Shwen-yaung (about 11km north of Inle Lake). From Yangon lines also run north-west to Pyay, with a branch to Patheingyi

from Bago there's a branch southeast to Kyaiktiyo (the jumping-off point for the Golden Rock; see p149) and on to Mottawa, a short ferry ride from Mawlamyine.

An express line now runs between Bagan/Nyaung U and Mandalay (though this was built with forced labour in the mid-1990s). At Mandalay there are three branch lines: one running slightly northwest across the Ava Bridge and up to Ye-U, one directly north to Myitkyina in Kachin State and one northeast through Pinyin U Lwin to Lashio in the northern part of Shan State.

Note also that Myanmar trains are classified by a number and the suffix Up for northbound trains or Down for southbound trains. Train numbers are not always used when purchasing tickets.

Classes

Express trains offer two classes of passage, upper class and ordinary class, while many trains also offer sleepers. The main differences between ordinary and upper are that the seats recline and can be reserved in the latter, while ordinary class features hard upright seats that can't be reserved. Some trains also offer another class of service called 1st class, which is a step down from upper in comfort.

The No 15 Up/No 16 Down train between Yangon and Mandalay is a 'special express' that uses relatively new Chinese equipment. The upper-class Chinese cars contain 30 wide seats in rows of three; other express trains may use older South Korean cars that also seat three across but contain 40 seats (so there's less room).

The No 15 Up/No 16 Down and the No 17 Up/No 18 Down trains also have sleeping cars. These are sometimes occupied by Myanmar VIPs or foreign tour groups. Some sleeping cars contain five cabins, each with four berths, a fan, a light and a small table with a washbasin underneath. Older sleeping cars are divided into two sections, each with four berths and a toilet and shower room.

Foreigners aren't permitted to ride in ordinary class on the Yangon to Mandalay line.

Costs

Following are sample fares and scheduled times as quoted in Yangon.

YANGON TO MANDALAY TRAINS

The main trains of interest to travellers are listed below

Yangon to Mandalay via Thazi

Train	departure (Yangon)	arrival (Thazi)	arrival (Mandalay)	fare (1st class) (Thazi)	fare (Mandalay)	fare (sleeper)*
11 Up	6am	5.52pm	9.10pm	US\$26	US\$30	n/a
17 Up (Dagon-Mann)	3.15pm	2.35am	5.20am	na	US\$45	US\$48-50
15 Up (Special Express)	5pm	5.15am	8am	na	US\$35	n/a
5 Up	6.30pm	6.17am	9.40am	US\$26	US\$30	US\$33
3 Up	7.30pm	8.37am	noon	US\$26	US\$30	US\$33

Mandalay to Yangon via Thazi

Train	departure (Mandalay)	arrival (Thazi)	arrival (Yangon)	fare (1st class) (Thazi)	fare (Yangon)	fare (sleeper)*
18 Down (Dagon-Mann)	3.15pm	6.15pm	6.20am	na	US\$45	US\$48-50
16 Down	4.15pm	7.15pm	7.15am	US\$15	US\$35	n/a
6 Down	5.15pm	8.15pm	8.25am	US\$15	US\$30	US\$33
4 Down	6.15pm	9.13pm	10.40am	US\$15	US\$30	US\$33

* Note that fares for a sleeper to/from Thazi are the same as those to Mandalay or Yangon.

Reservations

For bookings on the private Yangon–Mandalay or Mandalay–Myitkyina train services, hook up with travel agents; see p89 for Yangon and p229 for Mandalay.

For government-run services along the Yangon–Mandalay line, all foreigners are supposed to purchase tickets from the MTT or from the **Advance Booking Office** (Bogyoke Aung San Rd; ☎ 6am-10am & 1-4pm), directly opposite the Sakura Tower. MTT sets aside seats for foreigners, which means that they often have seats when the booking office or station window says that the train is full. Contrary to rumour, we found the fares to be exactly the same at both places, though prices differ according to which express train you take, even along the same line. A day's notice is usually enough to book a seat.

If you want to try your luck at getting a coveted sleeper, you'll need at least a couple of days' notice – longer during the high

season (November to March), when berths are booked weeks in advance. If you hold a seat on a train pulling a sleeper car, you can try to upgrade to a berth after you board. If any berths are available due to last-minute cancellations, you should be able to move from seat to berth by paying the additional fare directly to the conductor.

To buy tickets at other train stations you can use the same ticket windows as the locals. For common tourist destinations – Bago, Pyin U Lwin, Kyaiktiyo – a US dollar/FEC fare is usually collected. Going to other points via nonexpress trains, you may be able to pay in kyat – but consider yourself lucky if you can.

If you're having trouble buying a ticket or making yourself understood at a train station, try seeking out the stationmaster – the person at the station who is most likely to speak English and most inclined to help you get a seat.

Health

Dr Trish Batchelor

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Health issues and the quality of medical facilities vary enormously depending on where and how you travel in Myanmar. Many of the major cities are now very well developed, although travel to rural areas can expose you to a variety of health risks and inadequate medical care.

Travellers tend to worry about contracting infectious diseases when in the tropics, but infections are a rare cause of serious illness or death in travellers. Pre-existing medical conditions such as heart disease, and accidental injury (especially traffic accidents), account for most life-threatening problems. Becoming ill in some way, however, is relatively common. Fortunately, most common illnesses can either be prevented with some common-sense behaviour or be treated easily with a well-stocked traveller's medical kit.

The following advice is a general guide only and does not replace the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

BEFORE YOU GO

Pack medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your

medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity. If you have a heart condition, bring a copy of your ECG taken just prior to travelling.

If you take any regular medication bring double your needs in case of loss or theft.

INSURANCE

Even if you are fit and healthy, don't travel without health insurance – accidents do happen. Declare any existing medical conditions you have – the insurance company *will* check if your problem is pre-existing and will not cover you if it is undeclared. You may require extra cover for adventure activities such as rock climbing. If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider getting extra insurance. If you're uninsured, emergency evacuation is expensive – bills of over US\$100,000 are not uncommon.

Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. (In many countries doctors will expect payment in cash.) Some policies offer lower and higher medical-expense options; the higher ones are chiefly for countries that have extremely high medical costs, such as the USA. You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having

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to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home country, where an immediate assessment of your problem is made.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information; they stock all available vaccines and will be able to give specific recommendations for you and your trip. The doctors will take into account factors such as past vaccination history, the length of your trip, activities you may be undertaking and underlying medical conditions, such as pregnancy.

Most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Recommended items for a personal medical kit:

- Antifungal cream, eg Clotrimazole
- Antibacterial cream, eg Muciprocin
- Antibiotic for possible skin infections, eg Amoxicillin/Clavulanate or Cephalexin
- Antibiotics for diarrhoea, such as Norfloxacin or Ciprofloxacin; for bacterial

diarrhoea, such as Azithromycin; and for giardiasis or amoebic dysentery, such as Tinidazole

- Antihistamine – there are many options, eg Cetrizine for daytime and Promethazine for night
- Antiseptic, eg Betadine
- Antispasmodic for stomach cramps, eg Buscopa
- Contraceptive method
- Decongestant, eg Pseudoephedrine
- DEET-based insect repellent
- Diarrhoea treatment – consider an oral rehydration solution (eg Gastrolyte), diarrhoea 'stopper' (eg Loperamide) and anti-nausea medication (eg Prochlorperazine)
- First-aid items such as scissors, Elastoplasts, bandages, gauze, thermometer (but not mercury), sterile needles and syringes, safety pins, and tweezers
- Ibuprofen or another anti-inflammatory
- Indigestion tablets, such as Quick Eze or Mylanta
- Iodine tablets (unless you are pregnant or have a thyroid problem) to purify water
- Laxative, eg Coloxyl
- Migraine medicine – sufferer should take their personal medicine
- Paracetamol
- Permethrin to impregnate clothing and mosquito nets
- Steroid cream for allergic/itchy rashes, eg 1% to 2% hydrocortisone
- Sunscreen and hat
- Throat lozenges
- Thrush (vaginal yeast infection) treatment, eg Clotrimazole pessaries or Diflucan tablet
- Ural or an equivalent if prone to urine infections

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel-health advice on the Internet. For more information, **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. The **World Health Organization** (WHO; www.who.int/ith/) publishes a fine book, *International Travel & Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost. Another website of interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel-health recommendations for every country and is updated daily. The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC; www.cdc.gov) website also has good general information.

HEALTH ADVISORIES

It's usually a good idea to consult your government's travel-health website before departure, if one is available:

Australia (www.dfat.gov.au/travel/)

Canada (www.travelhealth.gc.ca)

New Zealand (www.mfat.govt.nz/travel)

UK (www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/)

USA (www.cdc.gov/travel/)

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel – Asia & India* is a handy pocket size and is packed with useful information including pretrip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information, and what to do if you get sick on the road. Other recommended references include *Traveller's Health*, by Dr Richard Dawood, and *Travelling Well*, by Dr Deborah Mills – check out the website (www.travellingwell.com.au).

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and difficulty in breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag

REQUIRED & RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The only vaccine required by international regulations is yellow fever. Proof of vaccination will only be required if you have visited a country in the yellow-fever zone within the six days prior to entering Myanmar. If you are travelling to Myanmar from Africa or South America you should check to see if you require proof of vaccination.

The World Health Organization recommends the following vaccinations for all travellers to Myanmar:

Adult diphtheria and tetanus Single booster recommended if none in the previous 10 years. Side effects include sore arm and fever.

Hepatitis A Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year; a booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years' protection. Mild side effects such as headache and sore arm occur in 5% to 10% of people.

Hepatitis B Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination with Hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon, usually headache and sore arm. Lifetime protection occurs in 95% of people.

Measles, mumps and rubella Two doses of MMR required unless you have had the diseases. Occasionally a rash and flu-like illness can develop a week after receiving the vaccine. Many young adults require a booster.

Polio In 2002 no countries in Southeast Asia reported cases of polio. Only one booster required as an adult for lifetime protection. Inactivated polio vaccine is safe during pregnancy.

Typhoid Recommended unless your trip is less than a week and only to developed cities. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available; however, the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. Sore arm and fever may occur.

Varicella If you haven't had chickenpox, discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

These immunisations are recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month) or those at special risk, for example due to spending a lot of time in rural areas:

Japanese B Encephalitis Three injections in all. Booster recommended after two years. Sore arm and headache are the most common side effects. Rarely, an allergic reaction comprising hives and swelling can occur up to 10 days after any of the three doses.

Meningitis A single injection. There are two types of vaccination: the quadrivalent vaccine gives two to three years' protection; meningitis group C vaccine gives around 10 years' protection. Recommended for long-term backpackers aged under 25.

Rabies Three injections in all. A booster after one year will then provide 10 years' protection. Side effects are rare – occasionally headache and sore arm.

Tuberculosis A complex issue. Adult long-term travellers are usually recommended to have a TB skin test before and after travel, rather than vaccination. Only one vaccine given in a lifetime.

try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert or Bonine) are usually a traveller's first choice for treating motion sickness. The main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN MYANMAR

AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE & COSTS

Local medical care is dismal, and local hospitals should only be used out of desperation. Contact your embassy for advice, as staff will usually direct you to the best alternatives. Be aware that getting Western-style health care may not come cheap.

Self-treatment may be appropriate if your problem is minor (eg traveller's diarrhoea), you are carrying the appropriate medication and you cannot attend a recommended clinic in Yangon or Mandalay. If you think you may have a serious disease, especially malaria, do not waste time – travel to the nearest quality facility to receive attention. It is always better to be assessed by a doctor than to rely on self-treatment.

Buying medication over the counter is not recommended in Myanmar, as fake medications and poorly stored or out-of-date drugs are common.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES Cutaneous Larva Migrants

This disease is caused by dog hookworm. The rash starts as a small lump, then slowly spreads in a linear fashion. It is intensely itchy, especially at night. It is easily treated with medications and should not be cut out or frozen.

Dengue

This mosquito-borne disease is becoming increasingly problematic throughout Myanmar. As there is no vaccine available it can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites. The mosquito that carries dengue bites day and night, so use insect-avoidance

measures at all times. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache and body ache (dengue was previously known as 'break-bone fever'). Some people develop a rash and experience diarrhoea. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol – do not take aspirin, as it increases the likelihood of haemorrhaging. See a doctor to be diagnosed and monitored.

Filariasis

A mosquito-borne disease that is very common in the local population, yet very rare in travellers. Mosquito-avoidance measures are the best way to prevent this disease.

Hepatitis A

This food- and waterborne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A; you just need to allow time for the liver to heal. All travellers to Myanmar should be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B

The only sexually transmitted disease that can be prevented by vaccination, hepatitis B is spread by body fluids, including sexual contact. In some parts of this region up to 20% of the population are carriers of hepatitis B, and usually are unaware of this. The long-term consequences can include liver cancer and cirrhosis.

Hepatitis E

Hepatitis E is transmitted through contaminated food and water and has similar symptoms to hepatitis A, but is far less common. It is a severe problem in pregnant women and can result in the death of both mother and baby. There is currently no vaccine, and prevention is by following safe eating and drinking guidelines.

HIV

Myanmar is among the list of countries in Asia with the highest rate of HIV infection – and the problem is increasing. Heterosexual sex is now the main method of transmission.

Influenza

Present year round in the tropics, influenza (flu) symptoms include high fever, muscle

aches, runny nose, cough and sore throat. It can be very severe in people over the age of 65 or in those with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease or diabetes – vaccination is recommended for these individuals. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol.

Japanese B Encephalitis

While this is a rare disease in travellers, at least 50,000 locals are infected each year. This viral disease is transmitted by mosquitoes. Most cases occur in rural areas, and vaccination is recommended for travellers spending more than one month outside cities. There is no treatment, and a third of infected people will die while another third will suffer permanent brain damage.

Malaria

For such a serious and potentially deadly disease, there is an enormous amount of misinformation concerning malaria and malaria medication. You must get expert advice as to whether the destinations you are going to will put you at risk. For most rural areas, however, the risk of contracting the disease far outweighs the risk of any tablet side effects. Remember that malaria can be fatal. Before you travel, seek medical advice on the right medication and dosage for you.

Malaria is caused by a parasite transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. The most important symptom of malaria is fever, but general symptoms such as headache, diarrhoea, cough or chills may also occur. Diagnosis can only be made by taking a blood sample.

Two strategies should be combined to prevent malaria – mosquito avoidance and antimalarial medications. Most people who catch malaria are taking inadequate or no antimalarial medication.

Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites by taking these steps:

- Use an insect repellent containing DEET on exposed skin. Wash this off at night, as long as you are sleeping under a mosquito net. Natural repellents such as citronella can be effective but must be applied more frequently than products containing DEET.
- Sleep under a mosquito net impregnated with Permethrin

- Choose accommodation with screens and fans (if not air-con)
- Impregnate clothing with Permethrin in high-risk areas
- Wear long sleeves and trousers in light colours
- Use mosquito coils
- Spray your room with insect repellent before going out for your evening meal

Some available medications:

Artesunate Derivatives of Artesunate are not suitable as a preventive medication. They are useful treatments under medical supervision.

Chloroquine and Paludrine The effectiveness of this combination is now limited in most of Southeast Asia. Common side effects include nausea (40% of people) and mouth ulcers. Generally not recommended.

Doxycycline This daily tablet is a broad-spectrum antibiotic that has the added benefit of helping to prevent a variety of tropical diseases, including leptospirosis, tick-borne disease, typhus and melioidosis. The potential side effects include photosensitivity (a tendency to sunburn), thrush in women, indigestion, heartburn, nausea and interference with the contraceptive pill. More serious side effects include ulceration of the oesophagus – you can help prevent this by taking your tablet with a meal and a large glass of water, and never lying down within half an hour of taking it. Must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

Lariam (Mefloquine) Lariam has received much bad press, some of it justified, some not. This weekly tablet suits many people. Serious side effects are rare but include depression, anxiety, psychosis and having fits. Anyone with a history of depression, anxiety, other psychological disorder, or epilepsy should not take Lariam. It is considered safe in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. It is around 90% effective in most parts of Southeast Asia. Tablets must be taken for four weeks after leaving the risk area.

Malarone This new drug is a combination of Atovaquone and Proguanil. Side effects are uncommon and mild, most commonly nausea and headache. It is the best tablet for scuba divers and for those on short trips to high-risk areas. It must be taken for one week after leaving the risk area.

A final option is to take no preventive medication but to have a supply of emergency medication should you develop the symptoms of malaria. This is less than ideal, and you'll need to get to a good medical facility within 24 hours of developing a fever. If you choose this option the most effective and safest treatment is Malarone (four tablets once daily for three days). Other options

include Mefloquine and quinine, but the side effects of these drugs at treatment doses make them less desirable. Fansidar is no longer recommended.

Measles

This highly contagious bacterial infection is spread by coughing and sneezing. Most people born before 1966 are immune, as they had the disease in childhood. Measles starts with a high fever and rash and can be complicated by pneumonia and brain disease. There is no specific treatment.

Rabies

This uniformly fatal disease is spread by the bite or lick of an infected animal – most commonly a dog or monkey. You should seek medical advice immediately after any animal bite and commence postexposure treatment. Having pretravel vaccination means the postbite treatment is greatly simplified. If an animal bites you, gently wash the wound with soap and water, and apply iodine-based antiseptic. If you are not pre-vaccinated you will need to receive rabies immunoglobulin as soon as possible.

STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases most common in Myanmar include herpes, warts, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. People carrying these diseases often have no signs of infection. Condoms will prevent gonorrhoea and chlamydia but not warts or herpes. If after a sexual encounter you develop any rash, lumps, discharge or pain when passing urine, seek immediate medical attention. If sexually active during your travels, have an STD check on your return home.

Strongyloides

This parasite, also transmitted by skin contact with soil, is common but rarely affects travellers. It is characterised by an unusual skin rash called *larva currens* – a linear rash on the trunk that comes and goes. Most people don't have other symptoms until their immune system becomes severely suppressed, when the parasite can cause a massive infection. It can be treated with medications.

Tuberculosis

While rare in travellers, medical and aid workers and long-term travellers who have

significant contact with the local population should take precautions. Vaccination is usually only given to children under the age of five, but pre- and post-travel TB testing is recommended for adults at risk. The main symptoms are fever, cough, weight loss, night sweats and tiredness.

Typhoid

This serious bacterial infection is spread via food and water. It gives a high and slowly progressive fever and a headache, and may be accompanied by a dry cough and stomach pain. It is diagnosed by blood tests and treated with antibiotics. Vaccination is recommended for all travellers spending more than a week in Myanmar and other parts of Southeast Asia. Be aware that vaccination is not 100% effective, so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink.

Typhus

Murine typhus is spread by the bite of a flea, whereas scrub typhus is spread via a mite. These diseases are rare in travellers. Symptoms include fever, muscle pains and a rash. You can avoid these diseases by following general insect-avoidance measures. Doxycycline will also prevent them.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Traveller's diarrhoea is the most common problem affecting travellers – between 30% and 50% of people will suffer from it within two weeks of starting their trip. In over 80% of cases, traveller's diarrhoea is caused by a bacterium (there are numerous potential culprits), and therefore responds promptly to treatment with antibiotics. Treatment with antibiotics will depend on your situation – how sick you are, how quickly you need to get better, where you are etc.

Diarrhoea is defined as the passage of more than three watery bowel movements within a 24-hour period, plus at least one other symptom such as nausea, vomiting, fever, cramps or feeling generally unwell.

Treatment consists of staying well hydrated; rehydration solutions such as Gastrolyte are the best for this. Antibiotics such as Norfloxacin, Ciprofloxacin or Azithromycin will kill the bacteria quickly.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper' and doesn't get to the cause of the problem. It can be helpful, for example if you have to go on

a long bus ride. Don't take Loperamide if you have a fever, or blood in your stools. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

Amoebic Dysentery

Amoebic dysentery is very rare in travellers but is often misdiagnosed by poor-quality labs in Southeast Asia. Symptoms are similar to bacterial diarrhoea, ie fever, bloody diarrhoea and generally feeling unwell. You should always seek reliable medical care if you have blood in your diarrhoea. Treatment involves two drugs: Tinidazole or Metronidazole to kill the parasite in your gut and then a second drug to kill the cysts. If left untreated complications such as liver or gut abscesses can occur.

Giardiasis

Giardia lamblia is a parasite that is relatively common in travellers. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. 'Eggy' burps are often attributed solely to giardiasis, but work in Nepal has shown that they are not specific to this infection. The parasite will eventually go away if left untreated, but this can take months. The treatment of choice is Tinidazole, with Metronidazole being a second-line option.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Air Pollution

Air pollution, particularly vehicle pollution, is an increasing problem. If you have severe respiratory problems speak with your doctor before travelling to any heavily polluted urban centres. This pollution also causes minor respiratory problems such as sinusitis, dry throat and irritated eyes. If troubled by the pollution, leave the city for a few days and get some fresh air.

Diving

Divers and surfers should seek specialised advice before they travel to ensure their medical kit contains treatment for coral cuts and tropical ear infections, as well as the standard problems. Divers should ensure their insurance covers them for decompression illness – get specialised dive insurance through an organisation such as **Divers Alert Network** (DAN; www.danseap.org). Have a dive medical before you leave your home

country – there are certain medical conditions that are incompatible with diving, and economic considerations may override health considerations for some dive operators that operate in Myanmar.

Food

Eating in restaurants is the biggest risk factor for contracting traveller's diarrhoea. Ways to avoid it include eating only freshly cooked food and avoiding shellfish and food that has been sitting around in buffets. Peel all fruit, cook vegetables and soak salads in iodine water for at least 20 minutes. Eat in busy restaurants with a high turnover of customers.

Heatstroke

Many parts of Myanmar are hot and humid throughout the year. For most people it takes at least two weeks to adapt to the hot climate. Swelling of the feet and ankles is common, as are muscle cramps caused by excessive sweating. Prevent these by avoiding dehydration and excessive activity in the heat. Take it easy when you first arrive. Don't eat salt tablets (they aggravate the gut), but drinking rehydration solution or eating salty food helps. Treat cramps by stopping activity, resting, rehydrating with double-strength rehydration solution and gently stretching.

Dehydration is the main contributor to heat exhaustion. Symptoms can include feeling weak, headache, irritability, nausea or

DRINKING WATER

- Never drink tap water
- Bottled water is generally safe – check the seal is intact at purchase
- Avoid ice
- Avoid fresh juices – they may have been watered down
- Boiling water is the most efficient method of purifying it
- The best chemical purifier is iodine; it should not be used by pregnant women or those with thyroid problems
- Water filters should also filter out viruses; ensure your filter has a chemical barrier such as iodine and a small pore size, eg less than four microns

vomiting, sweaty skin, a fast, weak pulse and a normal or slightly elevated body temperature. Treatment involves getting the person out of the heat and/or sun, fanning them and applying cool, wet cloths to their skin, laying them flat with their legs raised, and rehydrating them with water containing ¼ teaspoon of salt per litre. Recovery is usually rapid, and it is common to feel weak for some days afterwards.

Heatstroke is a serious medical emergency. Symptoms come on suddenly and include weakness, nausea, a hot, dry body with a body temperature of over 41°C, dizziness, confusion, loss of coordination, fits and eventually collapse and loss of consciousness. Seek medical help and commence cooling by getting the person out of the heat, removing their clothes, fanning them and applying cool, wet cloths or ice to their body, especially to the groin and armpits.

Prickly heat is a common skin rash in the tropics, caused by sweat being trapped under the skin. The result is an itchy rash of tiny lumps. Treat by moving out of the heat and into an air-con area for a few hours and by having cool showers. Creams and ointments clog the skin, so they should be avoided. Locally bought prickly-heat powder can be helpful.

Tropical fatigue is common in long-term expats based in the tropics. It's rarely due to disease and is caused by the climate, inadequate mental rest, excessive alcohol intake and the demands of daily work in a different culture.

Insect Bites & Stings

Bedbugs don't carry disease, but their bites are very itchy. They live in the cracks of furniture and walls and then migrate to the bed at night to feed on you. You can treat the itch with an antihistamine.

Lice inhabit various parts of your body but most commonly your head and pubic area. Transmission is via close contact with an infected person. Lice can be difficult to treat, and you may need numerous applications of an antilice shampoo such as Permethrin. Pubic lice are usually contracted from sexual contact.

Ticks are contracted after walking in rural areas. Ticks are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in the armpits.

If you have had a tick bite and experience symptoms such as a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, fever or muscle aches you should see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents tickborne diseases.

Leeches are found in humid rainforest areas. They do not transmit any disease, but their bites are often intensely itchy for weeks afterwards and can easily become infected. Apply an iodine-based antiseptic to any leech bite to help prevent infection.

Bee and wasp stings mainly cause problems for people who are allergic to them. Anyone with a serious bee or wasp allergy should carry an injection of adrenaline (eg an Epipen) for emergency treatment. For others pain is the main problem – apply ice to the sting and take painkillers.

Most jellyfish in Southeast Asian waters are not dangerous, just irritating. First aid for jellyfish stings involves pouring vinegar onto the affected area to neutralise the poison. Do not rub sand or water onto the stings. Take painkillers, and anyone who feels ill in any way after being stung should seek medical advice. Take local advice if there are dangerous jellyfish around and keep out of the water.

Parasites

Numerous parasites are common in local populations; however, most of these are rare in travellers. The two rules to follow if you wish to avoid parasitic infections are to wear shoes and to avoid eating raw food, especially fish, pork and vegetables. A number of parasites are transmitted via the skin by walking barefoot; these include strongyloides, hookworm and cutaneous *Larva migrans*.

Skin Problems

Fungal rashes are common in humid climates. There are two common fungal rashes that affect travellers. The first occurs in moist areas that get less air such as the groin, the armpits and between the toes. It starts as a red patch that slowly spreads and is usually itchy. Treatment involves keeping the skin dry, avoiding chafing and using an antifungal cream such as Clotrimazole or Lamisil. *Tinea versicolor* is also common – this fungus causes small, light-coloured patches, most commonly on the back, chest and shoulders. Consult a doctor.

Cuts and scratches easily become infected in humid climates. Take meticulous care of any cuts and scratches to prevent complications such as abscesses. Immediately wash all wounds in clean water and apply antiseptic. If you develop signs of infection (increasing pain and redness) see a doctor. Divers and surfers should be particularly careful with coral cuts as they easily become infected.

Snakes

Myanmar is home to many species of both poisonous and harmless snakes. Assume all snakes are poisonous and never try to catch one. Always wear boots and long pants if walking in an area that may have snakes. First aid in the event of a snakebite involves pressure immobilisation with an elastic bandage firmly wrapped around the affected limb, starting at the bite site and working up towards the chest. The bandage should not be so tight that the circulation is cut off, and the fingers or toes should be kept free so the circulation can be checked. Immobilise the limb with a splint and carry the victim to medical attention. Do not use tourniquets or try to suck the venom out. Antivenom is available for most species.

Sunburn

Even on a cloudy day sunburn can occur rapidly. Always use a strong sunscreen (at least factor 30), making sure to reapply after a swim, and always wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses outdoors. Avoid lying in the sun during the hottest part of the day (10am to 2pm). If you become sunburnt stay out of the sun until you have recovered, apply cool compresses and take painkillers for the discomfort. A 1% hydrocortisone cream applied twice daily is also helpful.

TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

The main point to keep in mind is that children get dehydrated very quickly, so they will need to take liquids on a regular basis. This becomes more critical if they are suffering from diarrhoea.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Pregnant women should receive specialised advice before travelling. The ideal time to travel is during the second trimester (be-

tween 16 and 28 weeks), when the risk of pregnancy-related problems is at its lowest and pregnant women generally feel at their best. During the first trimester there is a risk of miscarriage and in the third trimester complications such as premature labour and high blood pressure are possible. It's wise to travel with a companion. Always carry a list of quality medical facilities available at your destination and ensure that you continue your standard antenatal care at these facilities. Avoid rural travel in areas with poor transportation and medical facilities. Most of all, ensure that your travel insurance covers all pregnancy-related possibilities, including premature labour.

Malaria is a high-risk disease in pregnancy. WHO recommends that pregnant women do *not* travel to areas with Chloroquine-resistant malaria. None of the more effective antimalarial drugs are completely safe in pregnancy.

Traveller's diarrhoea can quickly lead to dehydration and result in inadequate blood flow to the placenta. Many of the drugs used to treat various diarrhoea bugs are not recommended in pregnancy. Azithromycin is considered safe.

In Yangon and Mandalay, supplies of sanitary products are readily available. Birth-control options may be limited, so bring adequate supplies of your own form of contraception. Heat, humidity and antibiotics can all contribute to thrush. Treatment is with antifungal creams and pessaries such as Clotrimazole. A practical alternative is a single tablet of Fluconazole (Diflucan). Urinary tract infections can be precipitated by dehydration or long bus journeys without toilet stops; bring suitable antibiotics.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Throughout Myanmar traditional medical systems are widely practised. There is a big difference between these traditional healing systems and 'folk' medicine. Folk remedies should be avoided, as they often involve rather dubious procedures with potential complications. In comparison, traditional healing systems such as traditional Chinese medicine are well respected, and aspects of them are being increasingly used by Western medical practitioners.

All traditional Asian medical systems identify a vital life force, and see blockage

or imbalance as causing disease. Techniques such as herbal medicines, massage, and acupuncture are utilised to bring this vital force back into balance or to maintain balance. These therapies are best used for treating chronic disease such as chronic fatigue, arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome and some chronic skin conditions. Traditional

medicines should be avoided for treating serious acute infections such as malaria.

Be aware that 'natural' doesn't always mean 'safe', and there can be drug interactions between herbal medicines and Western medicines. If you are using both systems ensure that you inform both practitioners what the other has prescribed.

Language

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Myanmar's official language is Burmese, the language of the Bamar majority. Speakers of Burmese and related dialects comprise nearly 80% of the population. Making up another 10% of the population are speakers of Tai languages, which include the Shan, Khün, Tai Lü and even a little-known group of Lao living near Payathonzu – descendants of refugees from Lao-Siamese wars in the 19th century. Linguists estimate that there are 107 languages spoken within Myanmar.

Travellers will find basic English widely spoken in urban areas and around popular tourist sites such as Bagan, but venturing further afield will require at least some basic Burmese. Learning a few words of the language will make your travel in Bamar-majority areas much more enjoyable and rewarding. Travellers who have spent some time in northern Thailand or Laos and learned some of the respective languages will be pleasantly surprised to find that many of these words are understood in Shan State as well.

PRONUNCIATION

Mastering Burmese pronunciation is a dizzying proposition for the average traveller. While there are elements that don't exist in English, with a little practice it's not as daunting as it at first seems.

Vowels

Burmese has many vowel sounds, which occur in open, nasalised and stopped forms. Nasalisation is produced by pronouncing vowels so that the air is released through the nose, rather than the mouth; English speakers can approximate this by putting a weak 'n' at the end of such a syllable. In this guide the nasalisation is indicated by **n** after the vowel, eg *ein* (house).

Non-nasalised

i	as in 'police'
e	as in 'they'
eh	as the first 'e' in 'elephant'
a	as in 'father'
aw	as the British pronounce 'law'
o	as in 'go'
u	as in 'chute'

Nasalised

in	as in 'sin'
ein	as in 'vein'
an	as in 'fun'
oun	as in 'bone'
un	as in German <i>Bund</i>
ain	as in German <i>mein</i>
aun	as in 'brown'

Stopped

iq	as in 'sit'
eiq	as in 'late'
eq	as in 'bet'
aq	as in 'mat'
ouq	as in 'boat'
uq	as in 'foot'
aiq	as in the English 'might'
auq	as in 'out'

Consonants

Consonants only occur at the beginning of a syllable; there are no consonants that occur after the vowel. The consonants **b, d, j, g, m, n, ng, s, sh, h, z, w, l** and **y** are pronounced as in English. The 'w' sound can occur on its own, or in combination with other consonants. Pronouncing the combination **ng** at the beginning of a syllable can be tricky for Westerners; try saying 'hang on', then leave off the 'ha-' to get an idea of the sound. The following consonants and combinations may cause confusion:

th	– as in 'thin'
dh	– as the 'th' in 'their'
ny	– similar to the sound at the beginning of the British 'new'

hm, hn, hny, hng, hl – made with a puff of air just before the nasal or l sound
ng – as the ‘ng’ in ‘hang’

Aspirated Consonants

The aspirated sounds are made with an audible puff of air after the consonant; in English, the letters ‘p’, ‘t’ and ‘k’ are aspirated when they occur at the beginning of a word, eg ‘pit’, ‘tab’ and ‘kit’.

The unaspirated c and aspirated c’ are similar to the ‘ch’ in ‘church’. Remember that sh as in ‘ship’, s as in ‘sip’ and the aspirated s’ are three different sounds.

TONES

Burmese tones seem very tricky, but are essentially a matter of relative stress between adjoining syllables. There are three tones, plus two other possibilities.

Creaky High Tone Don’t worry about the funny name! This is made with the voice tense, producing a high-pitched and relatively short, creaky sound.

Plain High Tone The pitch of the voice starts quite high, then falls for a fairly long time, similar to the pronunciation of words such as ‘squeal’, ‘car’ and ‘way’.

Low Tone The voice is relaxed and stays at a low pitch for a fairly long time, without rising or falling in pitch.

Stopped Syllable This is a very short and high-pitched syllable, cut off at the end by a sharp catch in the voice (a glottal stop); it’s similar to the ‘non-sound’ in the middle of the exclamation, ‘oh-oh’, or the Cockney pronunciation of ‘t’ in a word like ‘bottle’.

Reduced (Weak) Syllable This is a shortened syllable, usually the first of a two-syllable word, which is said without stress, like the ‘a’ in ‘ago’ in English.

TRANSLITERATION

The system used in this language guide is just one of many ways that Burmese script can be rendered into the Roman alphabet.

This process is known as ‘transliteration’. In Burmese writing, the sounds c, c’, j are represented by the letters for k, k’, g plus y or r, so anglicised forms of Burmese often represent them as ky, gy and so on.

Various combinations of letters may be used to represent the same vowel sound: e and eh are both often transliterated as ‘ay’; ain may be represented as ‘aing’, auq as ‘auk’ and so on.

There is no ‘r’ in Burmese but the sound appears in some foreign words such as re-di-yo (radio). Sometimes it’s substituted with a y. Similarly there is no ‘v’ or ‘w’ in Burmese; loan words containing these consonants often use p’ and b respectively.

In this guide, dots have been used to separate syllables (with the exception of the reduced syllable ã) to make it easier to determine the divisions between syllables. However, you’ll notice that native speakers don’t speak with such clear division between words or syllables.

ACCOMMODATION

Is there a ... near here?

... di-nà-hma shí-dhàlá?

... ဒီနားမှာရှိသလား။

Table with 2 columns: English terms (hotel, guesthouse) and Burmese terms (ho-teh, tèh-k’o-gàn) with their respective pronunciations.

Can foreigners stay here?

nain-ngan-gyà-thà dí-hma tèh-ló yá-dhàlá?

နိုင်ငံခြားသား ဒီမှာတည်းလိုချင်သလား။

May I see the room?

ák’àn c’-bayá-ze?

အခန်း ကြည့်ပါရခေ

Is breakfast included in the price?

ák’àn-k’á-dèh-hma máneg-sa pa-dhàlá?

အခန်းခထဲမှာ မနက်တ ဝါသလား။

Can I pay in kyat?

caq-néh pè-ló yá-là?

ကျပ်နဲ့ပေးလိုချင်သလား။

I will stay for two nights.

hnáyeg tèh-meh
နှစ်ရက်တည်းမယ်။

How much is ...?

... beh-lauq-lèh?

... ဘယ်လောက်လဲ။

Table listing room types and prices: one night (táyeg), two nights (hnáyeg), a single room (táyauq-k’an), a double room (hnáyauq-k’an).

This room is good.

dí ák’àn kaùn-deh ဒီအခန်း ကောင်းတယ်။

clean သန့်တယ်

dirty ညစ်ပတ်တယ်

fan (electric) ပန်ကာ

noisy ဆူညံတယ်

pillow ခေါင်းအုံး

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Hello. (literally, ‘It’s a blessing’)

min-gála-ba မင်္ဂလာပါ။

How are you? (Are you well?)

K’ámýa (m)/shin (f) ne-kaùn-yèh-là?

ခင်ဗျား/ရှင် နေကောင်းရဲ့လား။

I’m well.

ne-kaùn-ba-deh နေကောင်းပါတယ်။

Have you eaten?

t’ámin sà-pi-bi-là? ထမင်းစားပြီပြီလား။

I’ve eaten.

sà-pi-ba-bi စားပြီပြီ။

Where are you going?

beh thwà-màlò-lèh? ဘယ်သွားမလို့လဲ။

To this, a general, non-specific reply is di-nà-lè-bèh, which means literally, ‘just around here’.

I’m going back to my hotel.

ho-teh-go pyan-táw-meh

ဟိုတယ်ကို ပြန်တော့မယ်။

I’m leaving now. (Goodbye)

thwà-ba-òun-meh
သွားပါအုံးမယ်။

A smile is often enough to express thanks in Myanmar, but it will still always be appreciated if you say ‘thank you’ in Burmese.

Thank you.

cè-zù-bèh ကျေးဇူးပဲ။

Thank you very much.

cè-zù tin-ba-deh ကျေးဇူးတင်ပါတယ်။

It’s nothing. (You’re welcome)

keiq-sá máshí-ba-bù ကိစ္စ မရှိပါဘူး။

What’s your name?

K’ámýa (m)/shin (f) na-meh beh-lo K’aw-dhàlèh?

ခင်ဗျား/ရှင် နာမည် ဘယ်လို ခေါ်သလဲ။

My name is ...

cánáw (m)/cámá (f) ... ló K’aw-ba-deh

ကျွန်/ကျွန်မ ... လို့ ခေါ်ပါတယ်။

I’m glad to meet you.

K’ámýa (m)/shin (f) neh twé-yá-da wùn-tha-ba-deh

ခင်ဗျား/ရှင်နဲ့ တွေ့တော့ ဝမ်းသာပါတယ်။

Yes.

houq-kéh ဟုတ်ကဲ့။

No. (for questions containing nouns)

màhouq-pa-bù မဟုတ်ပါဘူး။

DIRECTIONS

Is this the way to ...?

dí-làn ... thwà-dèh-làn-là?

ဒီလမ်း ... သွားတဲ့လမ်းလား။

How do I get to ...?

... ko beh-lo thwà-yá-dhàlèh?

... ကို ဘယ်လိုသွားရသလဲ။

Can I walk there?

làn-shauq-yin yá-màlá?

လမ်းလျှောက်ရင် ရမလား။

Is it nearby?

dí-nà-hma-là? ဒီနားမှာလား။

Is it far?

wè-dhàlá? ဝေးသလား။

left

beh-beq ဘယ်ဘက်

right

nya-beq ညာဘက်

straight (ahead)

tèh-dèh တည့်တည့်

very far away

theiq wè-dèh သိပ်ဝေးတယ်။

LANGUAGE

LANGUAGE

not so far away	
<i>theiq mǎwè-bù</i>	သိပ်မဝေးဘူး။
north	
<i>myauq-p'eq</i>	မြောက်ဘက်
south	
<i>taun-beq</i>	တောင်ဘက်
east	
<i>ǎshé-beq</i>	အရှေ့ဘက်
west	
<i>ǎnauq-p'eq</i>	အနောက်ဘက်

SIGNS	
အဝင်	Entrance
အထွက်	Exit
ဝင်ခွင့်မရှိ	No Entry
တယ်လီဖုန်း	Telephone
ဆေးလိပ် မသောက်ရ	No Smoking
အမျိုးသမီးများ မဝင်ရ	Women Forbidden
ဓါတ်ပုံ မရိုက်ရ	No Photographs
တာ:မြစ်နယ်မြေ	Prohibited Area
အိမ်သာ/ရေအိမ်	Toilets
မ	Women
ကျား	Men

What ... is this?

da ba ... lèh?

ဒါ ဘာ ... လဲ။

town	
<i>myó</i>	မြို့
street	
<i>làn</i>	လမ်း
bus	
<i>baq-sǎkà</i>	ဘတ်စကား

In the Country

beach	<i>kàn-gye</i>	ကမ်းခြေ
countryside	<i>tàw</i>	တော
field (irrigated)	<i>leh-gwìn</i>	လယ်ကွင်း
hill	<i>taun/koùn</i>	တောင်/ကုန်း
island	<i>cùn</i>	ကျွန်း
lake	<i>ain</i>	အိုင်
lake (small, artificial)	<i>kan</i>	ကန်
map	<i>mye-boun</i>	မြေပုံ
river	<i>myiq</i>	မြစ်
sea	<i>pin-leh</i>	ပင်လယ်

EMERGENCIES

Help!	
<i>keh-ba!</i>	ကယ်ပါ။
I'm ill.	
<i>ne-mǎkàun-bù</i>	နေမကောင်းဘူး။
I'm lost.	
<i>làn pyauq-ne-deh</i>	လမ်းပျောက်နေတယ်။
Thief!	
<i>thǎk'ò!</i>	သူနိုး။
I've been robbed.	
<i>ǎk'ò-K'an-yá-deh</i>	အနိုးခံရတယ်။
Go away!	
<i>thwà-zàn!</i>	သွားစမ်း။
Call a doctor!	
<i>s'ǎya-wun-go k'aw-pè-ba!</i>	
ဆရာဝန်ကို ခေါ်ပေးပါ။	
Call an ambulance!	
<i>lu-na-din-gà k'aw-pè-ba!</i>	
လူနာတင်ကားခေါ်ပေးပါ။	

track/trail	<i>làn-jaùn</i>	လမ်းကြောင်း
village	<i>ywa</i>	ရွာ
waterfall	<i>ye-dǎgun</i>	ရေတံခွန်

HEALTH

Where is the ...?

... beh-hma-lèh?

... ဘယ်မှာလဲ။

chemist/pharmacy	
<i>s'è-zain</i>	ဆေးဆိုင်
doctor	
<i>s'ǎya-wun</i>	ဆရာဝန်
hospital	
<i>s'è-youn</i>	ဆေးရုံ

Please call a doctor.

s'ǎya-wun kaw-pè-ba
ဆရာဝန် ခေါ်ပေးပါ။

I'm allergic to penicillin.

cǎnaw (m)/cǎmá (f) pǎnǎsǎlin-néh mǎtéh-bù
ကျွန်တော်/ကျွန်မ ပင်နီစလင်နဲ့ မတည့်ဘူး။

I'm pregnant.

baiq ò-ne-deh/ko-wun shí-deh
မိုက်ကြီးနေတယ်/ကိုယ်ဝန်ရှိတယ်။

It hurts here.

dí-hma na-deh
ဒီမှာ နာတယ်။

I vomit often.

K'ǎná-k'ǎná an-deh
ခဏခဏ အန်တယ်။

I feel faint.

mù-lèh-deh
မူးလဲတယ်။

asthma

(pàn-na-)yin-caq ပန်းနာရင်ကျပ်

have diarrhoea

wùn-shàw-deh/ wùn-thwà-ne-deh ဝမ်းလျှောက်တယ်/
ဝမ်းသွားနေတယ်

have a fever

p'yá-deh ဖျားတယ်

have a headache

gǎun kaiq-ne-deh ခေါင်းကိုက်နေတယ်

have a stomachache

baiq na-deh မိုက်နာတယ်

aspirin

eq-sǎpǎrin အက်စပရင်

bandage (for sprain)

paq-tì ပတ်တီး

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Do you understand?

ná-leh-dhǎlǎ? နားလည်သလား။

I understand.

ná-leh-ba-deh နားလည်ပါတယ်။

I don't understand.

ná-máleh-ba-bù နားမလည်ပါဘူး။

Please repeat that.

pyan-pyáw-ba-òun ပြန်ပြောပါအုံး။

I can't speak Burmese.

bǎma-zǎgà lo mǎpyáw-daq-bù
ဗမာ စကား မပြောတတ်ဘူး။

I speak English.

ìn-gǎleiq-zǎgà lo pyàw-daq-teh
အင်္ဂလိပ်စကား ပြောတတ်တယ်။

Can you speak English?

K'ǎmyá (m)/shin (f) ìn-gǎleiq-zǎgà lo pyàw-daq-thǎlǎ?
ခင်ဗျား/ရှင် အင်္ဂလိပ်စကား ပြောတတ်သလား။

What do you call this in Burmese?

da bǎma-lo beh-lo k'aw-dhǎlèh?
ဒါ ဗမာလို ဘယ်လိုခေါ်သလဲ။

NUMBERS

1	၀	<i>tiq/tǎ</i>
2	၂	<i>hniq/hnǎ</i>
3	၃	<i>thòun</i>
4	၄	<i>lè</i>
5	၅	<i>ngá</i>
6	၆	<i>c'auq</i>
7	၇	<i>k'ù-hniq/K'ù-hnǎ</i>
8	၀	<i>shiq</i>

9	၉	<i>kò</i>
10	၁၀	<i>(tǎ)'s'eh</i>
11	၁၁	<i>s'eh-tiq</i>
12	၁၂	<i>s'eh-hniq</i>
20	၂၀	<i>hnǎs'eh</i>
35	၃၅	<i>thòun-zéh-ngá</i>
100	၁၀၀	<i>tǎya</i>
1000	၁၀၀၀	<i>(tǎ)'t'áun</i>
10,000	၁၀၀၀၀	<i>(tǎ)thàun</i>
100,000	၁၀၀၀၀၀	<i>(tǎ)thèin</i>
1,000,000	၁၀၀၀၀၀၀	<i>(tǎ)thàn</i>

(One hundred thousand can often also be called one *lakh*.)

SHOPPING & SERVICES

Where is the ...?

... beh-hma-lèh?

... ဘယ်မှာလဲ။

bank	
<i>ban-daiq</i>	ဘဏ်တိုက်
bookshop	
<i>sa-ouq-s'ain</i>	စာအုပ်ဆိုင်
chemist/pharmacy	
<i>s'è-zain</i>	ဆေးဆိုင်
market	
<i>zè</i>	ဈေး
museum	
<i>pyá-daiq</i>	ပြတိုက်
post office	
<i>sa-daiq</i>	စာတိုက်
shop	
<i>s'ain</i>	ဆိုင်

I'd like to make a call.

p'òun-s'eq-c'in-deh ဝုံးဆက်ချင်တယ်။

Can I send a fax?

fax pó-ló yá-dhǎlǎ? ဖက်စ်ပို့လို့ ရသလား။

I want to change ...

... lèh-jin-ba-deh

... လဲချင်ပါတယ်။

dollars	
<i>daw-la</i>	ဒေါ်လာ
pounds	
<i>paun</i>	ပေါင်
foreign currency	
<i>náin-ngan-gyá ngwe</i>	နိုင်ငံခြားငွေ
money	
<i>paiq-s'an</i>	ပိုက်ဆံ
travellers cheques	
<i>K'ǎyi-c'eq-leq-hmaq</i>	ခရီးချက်လက်မှတ်

How many kyat to a dollar?

tādawla beh-hnācaq-lèh?
တစ်ဒေါ်လာ ဘယ်နှစ်ကျပ်လဲ။

Please give me smaller change.

ākywe lèh-pè-ba
အကြွေးလဲပေးပါ

Where can I buy ...?

... beh-hma weh-yá-mālèh?
... ဘယ်မှာဝယ်ရမလဲ။

Do you have ... ?

... shí-là
... ရှိလား။

How much is ...?

... beh-lauq-lèh?
... ဘယ်လောက်လဲ။

- matches**
mì-jíq မီးခြစ်
- shampoo**
gāun-shaw-ye ခေါင်းလျှော်ရည်
- soap**
s'āq-pya ဆပ်ပြာ
- toothbrush**
dhābuq-tan သွားပွတ်တံ
- toothpaste**
thwá-taiq-s'è သွားတိုက်ခေး
- toilet paper**
ein-dha-thouñ-seq-ku အိမ်သာသုံးစက္ကူ

Do you have a cheaper one?

da-t'eq zè po-pàw-da shí-dhālà?
ဒါထက် ဈေးပိုပေါတာ ရှိသလား။

OK (literally, 'good')
kāun-ba-bi ကောင်းပါပြီ။

expensive
zè-ì-deh ဈေးကြီးတယ်

cheap
zè-pàw-deh ဈေးပေါတယ်

TIME & DATES

What time is it?
beh-āc'ēin shí-bi-lèh? ဘယ်အချိန်ရှိပြီလဲ။

At what time?
beh-āc'ēin-hma-lèh? ဘယ်အချိန်မှာလဲ။

7am
māneq K'ú-hnāna-yi မနက် ၇နာရီ

1pm
né-leh tāna-yi နေ့လည် တစ်နာရီ

4.30pm
nyá-ne lè-na-yi-gwèh ညနေ လေးနာရီခွဲ

10.15pm
nyá s'eh-na-yi s'éh-ngà-māniq ညဆယ်နာရီဆယ်ငါးမိနစ်

hour
na-yi နာရီ

minute
māniq မိနစ်

morning (6am to noon)
māneq မနက်

midday (noon to 3pm)
né-leh နေ့လည်

afternoon/evening (3pm to 7pm)
nyá-ne ညနေ

night (7pm to 6am)
nyá ည

today
dí-né ဒီနေ့

tomorrow
māneq-p'yan မနက်ဖြန်

day after tomorrow
dhābeq-k'a သတက်ခါ

next week
nauq āpaq နောက် အပတ်

yesterday
māné-gá မနေ့က

Sunday
tānìn-gānwe-né တနင်္ဂနွေနေ့

Monday
tānìn-la-né တနင်္လာနေ့

Tuesday
in-ga-né အင်္ဂါနေ့

Wednesday
bouq-dāhù-né ဗုဒ္ဓဟူးနေ့

Thursday
ca-dhābādè-né ကြာသပတေးနေ့

Friday
thauq-ca-né သောကြာနေ့

Saturday
sāne-né စနေနေ့

TRANSPORT

Where is the ...?
... beh-hma-lèh? ... ဘယ်မှာလဲ။

airport
le-zeiq လေဆိပ်

railway carriage
mi-yāt'ā-dwèh မီးရထားတွဲ

train station
bu-da-youn ဘူတာရုံ

bus station
baq-sākà-geiq ဘတ်စကားရိတ်

riverboat jetty
thìn-bàw-zeiq သင်္ဘောဆိပ်

When will the ... leave?
... beh-āc'ēin t'weq-mālèh?
... ဘယ်အချိန်ထွက်မလဲ။

bus
baq-sākà ဘတ်စကား

express train
āmyan-yāt'ā အမြန်ရထား

local train
law-keh-yāt'ā လော်ကယ်ရထား

plane
le-yin-byan လေယာဉ်ယုံ

riverboat
thìn-bàw သင်္ဘော

train
mì-yāt'ā မီးရထား

I'd like ...
cānaw (m)/cāmá (f) ... lo-jin-ba-deh
ကျွန်တော်/ကျွန်မ ... လိုချင်ပါတယ်။

one ticket
leq-hmaq-dāzaun လက်မှတ်တစ်စောင်

two tickets
leq-hmaq hnāsaun လက်မှတ်နှစ်စောင်

Where does this bus go?
dí baq-sākà beh-go thwá-dhālà?
ဒီဘတ်စကား ဘယ်ကိုသွားသလဲ။

Where should I get off?
beh-hma s'in-yá-mālèh?
ဘယ်မှာဆင်းရမလဲ။

Can I get there by ...?
... néh thwà-ló yá-mālà?
... နဲ့ သွားလိုရမလား။

Please go slowly.
pyè-pyè thwà-ba

ဖြည်းဖြည်းသွားပါ။

Please wait for me.
cānaw (m)/cāmá (f) go saún-ne-ba
ကျွန်တော်/ကျွန်မကိုစောင့်နေပါ။

Stop here.
dí-hma yaq-pa

ဒီမှာ ရပ်ပါ။

What time does the boat leave?
thìn-bàw beh-āc'ēin t'weq-mālèh?
သင်္ဘော ဘယ်အချိန်ထွက်မလဲ။

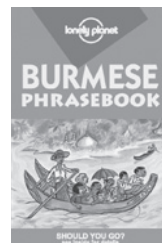
Can I get on board now?
āk'ú teq-ló yá-dhālà?
အခု တက်လိုရသလား။

bicycle
seq-bein စက်ဘီး

4WD/'jeep'
jiq-kà ရုပ်ကား

motorcycle
mo-ta s'ain-keh မော်တော်ဆိုင်ကယ်

taxi
dāngà-kà အငါးကား



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Burmese Phrasebook

Glossary

See p81 for some useful words and phrases dealing with food and dining. See the Language chapter (p379) for other useful words and phrases.

ABBREVIATIONS

AM – Air Mandalay
BCP – Burmese Communist Party
FEC – Foreign Exchange Certificate
IWT – Inland Water Transport
KIA – Kachin Independence Army
KNLA – Karen National Liberation Army
KNU – Karen National Union
MA – Myanma Airways
MAI – Myanmar Airways International
MFSL – Myanma Five Star Line
MHT – Ministry of Hotels & Tourism
MNLF – Mon National Liberation Front
MTT – Myanmar Travels & Tours
NLD – National League for Democracy
NMSP – New Mon State Party
Slorc – State Law & Order Restoration Council
SPDC – State Peace & Development Council
SSA – Shan State Army
UWSA – United Wa State Army
YA – Yangon Airways

WORDS

acheiq longyi – *longyi* woven with intricate patterns and worn on ceremonial occasions
a-le – opium weights
a-nyeint pwe – traditional variety of *pwe*

bama hsan-jin – Burmeseness; also *myanma hsan-jin*
Bamar – Burman ethnic group
bedin-saya – astrologer
betel – the nut of the areca palm, which is chewed as a mild intoxicant throughout Asia
Bodhi Tree – the sacred banyan tree under which the Buddha gained enlightenment; also ‘bo tree’
Brahman – pertaining to Brahma or to early Hindu religion (not to be confused with ‘brahmin’, a Hindu caste)
Buddha footprints – large, flat, stylised sculptures that represent the Buddha’s feet, distinguished by 108 identifying marks; footprint shrines mark places where the Buddha himself is reputed to have walked

cantonment – the part of a colonial town occupied by the military, a carry-over from the British days
chaung – (*gyaung*) stream or canal; often only seasonal

cheroots – Myanmar cigars; ranging from slim to massive, but very mild as they contain only a small amount of tobacco mixed with other leaves, roots and herbs
Chindits – the ‘behind enemy lines’ Allied forces who harried the Japanese during WWII
chinlon – extremely popular Myanmar sport in which a circle of air to six players attempts to keep a rattan ball in the air with any part of the body except the arms and hands
chinthé – half-lion, half-dragon guardian deity

dah – long-bladed knife, part of the traditional dress of the Shan and several hill tribes
deva – Pali-Sanskrit word for celestial beings
dhamma – Pali word for the Buddhist teachings; called *dharma* in Sanskrit
dobat – rural musical instrument; a small, two-faced drum worn around the neck

eingyi – traditional long-sleeved shirt worn by Myanmar men

flat – covered pontoon used to carry cargo on the river; often up to 30m long
furlong – obsolete British unit of distance still used in Myanmar; one-eighth of a mile

gaiq – yard (measurement)
gaung baung – formal, turbanlike hat made of silk over a wicker framework, for men
gu – cave temple
gyo-daing – ‘planetary post’, a small shrine near the base of a *zedi* containing a Buddha image to which worshippers make offerings according to the day of the week they were born; there are usually eight posts, one for each day of the Myanmar week (Wednesday is divided into two days)

haw – Shan word for ‘palace’, a reference to the large mansions used by the hereditary Shan *sao pha*
hgnet – swallow-tailed boat
hintha – mythical, swanlike bird; *hamsa* in Pali-Sanskrit
hka – stream or river in Kachin State
hneh – a wind instrument like an oboe; part of the Myanmar orchestra
hpongyi – Buddhist monk
hpongyi-byan – cremation ceremony for an important monk
hpongyikyaung – monastery; see also *kyaung*
hsaing – traditional musical ensemble
hsaing waing – circle of drums used in a Myanmar orchestra
hsinbyudaw – royal white elephant

hsingaug – head elephant man, above an *u-zi*
htan – (*tan*) sugar palm
hti – umbrellalike decorated pinnacle of a stupa
htwa – half a *taung*

in – lake; eg Inle means little lake

Jataka – stories of the Buddha’s past lives, a common theme for temple paintings and reliefs

kalaga – embroidered tapestries
kamma – Pali word for the law of cause and effect; called *karma* in Sanskrit
kammahtan – meditation; a *kammahtan kyaung* is a meditation monastery
kammawa – lacquered scriptures
kan – (*gan*) beach; can also mean a tank or reservoir
karaweik – (Pali: *karavika*) a mythical bird with a beautiful song; also the royal barge on Inle Lake
keinnyai – (Pali: *kinnari*) a mythical creature that is human from the waist up, bird from the waist down; the female is called *keinnyaya* (Pali: *kinnara*)

kon – (*gon*) hill
kunya – betel-nut chew
kutho – merit, what you acquire through doing good; from the Pali *kusala*
kyaik – Mon word for *paya*
kyauk – rock
kyaung – (*gyaung*) Myanmar Buddhist monastery; pronounced *chow*
kye waing – circle of gongs used in a Myanmar orchestra
kyi – (*gyi*) big; eg Taunggyi means big mountain
kyun – (*gyun*) island

làn – road or street
lei-myet-hna – four-sided Buddha sculpture
lin gwín – cymbals in a Myanmar orchestra
Lokanat – Avalokitesvara, a Mahayana Bodhisattva (Buddha-to-be) and guardian spirit of the world
longyi – the Myanmar unisex sarong-style lower garment, sensible wear in a tropical climate; unlike men in most other Southeast Asian countries, few Myanmar men have taken to Western trousers

Mahayana – literally, Great Vehicle; the school of Buddhism that thrived in north Asian countries like Japan and China, and also enjoyed popularity for a time in ancient Southeast Asian countries; also called the Northern School of Buddhism
makara – mythical sea serpent
Manuthiha – a half-lion/half-human mythical creature; visible around Shwedagon Paya
mara – the tempter, the Buddhist equivalent of Satan
maya ngeh – ‘lesser wife’, a man’s second wife
mi-gyaung – crocodile lute

mudra – hand position; used to describe the various hand positions used by Buddha images, eg *abhaya mudra* (the gesture of fearlessness)
Myanma let-hwei – Myanmar kickboxing
myit – river
myo – town; hence Mawmyo (after Colonel May), Allammyo (Major Allen) or even Bernardmyo
myothit – ‘new town’, usually a planned new suburb built since the 1960s

naga – multiheaded dragon-serpent from mythology, often seen sheltering or protecting the Buddha
nat – spirit being with the power to either protect or harm humans
nat-gadaw – spirit medium (literally ‘spirit bride’), embraces a wide variety of *nat*
nat pwe – dance performance designed to entice a *nat* to possess a *nat-gadaw*
ngwe – silver
nibbana – nirvana or enlightenment, the cessation of suffering, the end of rebirth; the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice

o-zi – a long-bodied, goblet-shaped, one-faced drum used for accompanying folk music in the country

pagoda – generic English term for *zedi* or stupas as well as temples; see also *paya*
pahso – *longyi* for men
pahto – Burmese word for temple, shrine or other religious structure with a hollow interior
Pali – language in which original Buddhist texts were recorded; the ‘Latin’ of Theravada Buddhism
pa-lwe – bamboo flute
paq-ma – Myanmar bass drum
parabaik – folding Buddhist palm-leaf manuscripts
parinibbana – literally, final *nibbana*; the Buddha’s passing away
pattala – bamboo xylophone used in the Myanmar orchestra
paya – a generic Burmese term meaning holy one; applied to Buddha figures, *zedi* and other religious monuments
pe-sa – palm-leaf manuscripts
pin – (*bin*) banyan tree
pi ze – traditional tattooing, believed to make the wearer invulnerable to sword or gun
pwe – generic Burmese word for festival, feast, celebration or ceremony; also refers to public performances of song and dance in Myanmar, often all-night (and all-day) affairs
pyatthat – wooden, multiroofed pavilion, usually turretlke on palace walls, as at Mandalay Palace
Pyithu Hluttaw – Peoples’ Congress or parliament, now defunct

ro-ro – ‘roll on, roll off’, a ferry that carries vehicles; see also *zed craft*

Sanskrit – ancient Indian language and source of many words in the Burmese vocabulary, particularly those having to do with religion, art and government

sao pha – ‘sky lord’, the hereditary chieftains of the Shan people

saung gauq – 13-stringed harp

sawbwa – Burmese corruption of the Shan word *sao pha* or ‘sky lord’, the hereditary chieftains of the Shan people

saya – a teacher or shaman

sayadaw – ‘master teacher’, usually the chief abbot of a Buddhist monastery

shinpyu – ceremonies conducted when young boys from seven to 20 years old enter a monastery for a short period of time, required of every young Buddhist male; girls have their ears pierced in a similar ceremony

shwe – golden

sikhara – Indian-style, corncoblike temple finial, found on many temples in the Bagan area

sima – see *thein*

soon – alms food offered to monks

stupa – see *zedi*

ṭ’āmin zain – (*htamin zain*) rice shop

Tatmadaw – Myanmar’s armed forces

taung, daung – mountain, eg Taunggyi means ‘big mountain’; it can also mean a half-yard (measurement)

taw – (*daw*) a common suffix, meaning sacred, holy or royal; it can also mean forest or plantation

tazaung – shrine building, usually found around *zedi*

thabeiq – monk’s food bowl; also a traditional element of stupa architecture

thanakha – yellow sandalwoodlike paste, worn by many Myanmar women on their faces as a combination of skin conditioner, sunblock and make-up

The Thirty – the ‘30 comrades’ of Bogyoke Aung San who joined the Japanese during WWII and eventually led Burma (Myanmar) to independence

thein – ordination hall; called *sima* in Pali

Theravada – literally, the Word of the Elders; the school of Buddhism that has thrived in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar and Thailand; also called Southern Buddhism and Hinayana

thilashin – nun

thoun bein – motorised three-wheeled passenger vehicles

Tripitaka – the ‘three baskets’; the classic Buddhist scriptures consisting of the Vinaya (monastic discipline),

the Sutta (discourses of the Buddha) and Abhidhamma (Buddhist philosophy)

twin – (*dwin*) well, hole or mine

twin-zar – (literally, well-eater) owners and workers of small oil wells in the Barong Islands, near Sittwe

u-min – (*ohr-min*) cave, usually artificial and part of a temple

u-zi – elephant handler or *mahout*

vihara – Pali-Sanskrit word for sanctuary or chapel for Buddha images

viss – Myanmar unit of weight, equal to 1.6kg

votive tablet – inscribed offering tablet, usually with images of the Buddha

wa – mouth or river or lake; Inwa means ‘mouth of the lake’

wa leg-hkouq – bamboo clapper, part of the Myanmar orchestra

yagwin – small cymbals

Yama pwe – Myanmar classical dancing based on Indian epic the Ramayana

ye – water, liquid

yediya – the superstitious belief that fate can be averted by carrying out certain, sometimes contradictory, activities

yodaya zat – Ayuthaya theatre, the style of theatre brought into Myanmar with Thai captives after the fall of Ayuthaya in 1767

yoma – mountain range

youq-the pwe – Myanmar marionette theatre

ywa – village; a common suffix in place names such as Monywa

zat pwe – Myanmar classical dance-drama based on Jataka stories

zawgyi – an alchemist who has successfully achieved immortality through the ingestion of special compounds made from base metals

zayat – an open-sided shelter or resthouse associated with a *zedi*

zed craft – large vehicle ferry

zedi – stupa, a traditional Buddhist religious monument consisting of a solid hemispherical or gently tapering cylindrical cone, and topped with a variety of metal and jewel finials; *zedi* are often said to contain Buddha relics

zei – (*zay* or *zè*) market

zeigyo – central market

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