

# Temples of Bagan

Imagine all the medieval cathedrals of Europe sitting on Manhattan island – and then some – and you start to get a sense of the ambition of the Bagan kings, who built as many as 4400 temples over a 230-year period on this riverside plain. Neglect, looting, earthquakes, erosion and bat dung have done their part to undermine its majesty, but Bagan (Pagan) still stands strong. Seeing it – for a couple of days or for a full 28-day visa's worth – can make a trip. And you'll only be skimming the surface.

This section gives some background to Bagan's birth, and information on some of the highlights. For details of information, additional sights, accommodation, eating and transport options, see p264. Sites discussed in this chapter are shown on the map on p267.

## HISTORY

The extraordinary religious fervour that resulted in this unique collection of buildings lasted two-and-a-half centuries. Although human habitation at Bagan dates back almost to the beginning of the Christian era, Bagan only entered its golden period with the conquest of Thaton in AD 1057. Just over 200 years later Bagan declined, and in 1287 was overrun by the Mongols of Kublai Khan. But what fantastic effort happened in those years! Since the Mongol invasion, the sites have been deserted and barely touched over the centuries.

Bagari Kings built almost 20 temples a year in the area over a period of 230 years.

## Bagan: the Prequel

Originally, this bend in the Ayeyarwady (Irrawaddy) River was occupied by a stable and thriving Pyu city-state, perhaps allied with Beikthano and Thayekhittaya (Sri Ksetra) to the south as well as Hanlin to the northeast. Excavations along the ruined city walls indicate that by 850 the city had reached complex proportions. The name Bagan may in fact derive from Pyugan, a name first written down by the Annameese of present-day Vietnam in the mid-11th century as Pukam. In post-18th-century Burmese parlance the name became Bagan, which was corrupted as Pagan by the British.

### READING UP ON BAGAN

Some of the following are available from vendors at some major temples, such as Ananda (p300), and usually at the Ever Sky Information Service in Nyaung U (p269) or Old Bagan hotel stores.

- *Glimpses of Glorious Bagan* is a 60-page paperback with (dated) colour photos and details of most of the key temples (including some not covered in this section). It's pretty thorough, and you can pick it up around Bagan for a few thousand kyat.
- *Pagan: Art & Architecture of Old Burma*, by Paul Strachan, is a more comprehensive, well-researched art history of Bagan, in which everything from artefacts to buildings is divided into the three stylistic periods. Vendors sell it for US\$20 to US\$25.
- *Inventary of Monuments at Bagan*, by Pierre Pichard, is a massive seven-volume treatise on the archaeology of Bagan, which provides schematic diagrams of many of the temples. Pichard is an archaeologist from the École Française d'Extrême Orient (EFEO), who worked with the Unesco effort in the early 1990s. At over US\$160 per volume, this is for serious enthusiasts only.

## Glory Days

Bagan's prime began with the Bamar King Anawrahta's ascent to the throne in 1044. At this time, Myanmar was in a period of transition from Hindu and Mahayana Buddhist beliefs to the Theravada Buddhist beliefs that have since been characteristic of Myanmar. Manuha, the Mon king of Thaton, sent a monk to convert Anawrahta; the latter met with such success that Anawrahta asked Manuha to give him a number of sacred texts and important relics. Manuha, uncertain of the depths of Anawrahta's beliefs, refused the request. Anawrahta's reply to this snub was straightforward – he marched his army south, conquered Thaton and carted everything worth carrying to Bagan – including 32 sets of the Tripitaka (the classic Buddhist scriptures), the city's monks and scholars and, for good measure, King Manuha himself.

Immediately Anawrahta set about a great programme of building, and some of the greatest Bagan edifices date from his reign. Among the better known monuments he constructed are the beautiful Shwezigon (Shwezigon Paya), considered a prototype for all later Burmese stupas; the Pitaka Taik (Scripture Library), built to house the Pitaka (scriptures) carried back from Thaton by 30 elephants; and the elegant and distinctive Shwesandaw Paya, built immediately after the conquest of Thaton. Thus began what the Burmese call the First Burmese Empire, which became a major centre for Theravada Buddhism and a pilgrimage point for Buddhists throughout Southeast Asia.

King Anawrahta's successors, particularly Kyanzittha, Alaungsithu and Narapatisithu, continued scratching this phenomenal building itch, although the construction work must have been nonstop throughout the period of Bagan's glory. Pali inscriptions of the time called the city Arimaddanapura (City of the Enemy Crusher) and Tambadipa (Copper Land).

## Decline

Historians disagree on what exactly happened to cause Bagan's apparently rapid decline at the end of the 13th century. The popular Burmese view is that millions of Mongols sent by Kublai Khan swept over the city, ransacking and looting. A more thoughtful view holds that the threat of invasion from China threw the last powerful ruler of Bagan into a panic; after a great number of temples were torn down to build fortifications, the city was abandoned, in which case the Mongols merely took over an already deserted city.

Evidence suggests Bagan may have continued as an important religious and cultural centre into the 14th century, after which its decay can be blamed on the three-way struggle between the Shan, Mon and

After Bamar King Anawrahta conquered the Mon kingdom of Thaton, he had 30,000 Mon prisoners of war brought back to Bagan.

Marco Polo described the towers of Bagan in his famous 1298 chronicle as being 'covered with gold a good finger in thickness...one of the finest sights in the world'.

## BAGAN PERIODS

Most temples that you'll come across during your exploration of Bagan are divided into these three periods:

**Early period** (c 850–1120) This period was influenced by Mon and late Pyu architecture, as seen in Pyay (p283), and is characterised by perforated windows and dimly lit interiors.

**Middle period** (c 1100–70) Temples became bigger during this period and were better lit by broader windows, with more of an eye to vertical proportions than horizontal lines.

**Late period** (c 1170–1300) The late period saw more intricate pyramidal spires or adorning tile work added to the buildings, with an increase of Indian influence, and (some say) a seeping in of Mahayana Buddhist influence.

## BAGAN'S KINGS

The kings who reigned over Bagan during its golden period and their major buildings:

Anawrahta	1044-77	Shwesandaw Paya
Sawlu	1077-84	
Kyanzittha (aka Sawlu)	1084-1113	Ananda Pahto, Shwezigon Paya
Alaungsithu	1113-67	Thatbyinnyu, Shwegugyi
Narathu	1167-70	Dhammayangyi Pahto
Narathheinkha	1170-73	
Narapatisithu	1174-1211	Sulamani Pahto, Dhammayazika Paya
Nantaungmya (aka Htilominlo)	1211-34	Gawdawpalin Pahto, Mahabodhi Paya
Kyaswa	1234-50	
Uzana	1250-55	
Narathihapati	1255-87	Mingalazedi, Payathonzu

Bamar for supremacy over northern Myanmar. Whatever happened, from the 14th to 18th centuries Bagan was considered a spooky region, riddled with bandits and *nat* (guardian spirits). The Burmese only began moving back in some numbers after the British established a presence in the area.

It's hard to imagine Bagan as it once was because, like other Burmese royal cities, only the major religious buildings were made of permanent materials. The kings' palaces were all constructed of wood, and even most *kyaung* (monasteries) were partly or wholly wooden. So what remains is just a frail shadow of Bagan at its peak.

## 1975 Earthquake

In 1975 Bagan was shaken by a powerful earthquake, registering 6.5 on the Richter scale. Contrary to initial fears, this 1000-year-old site was not totally ruined. Many of the more important temples were badly damaged, but major reconstruction started almost immediately.

Since renovation of these important religious monuments has been an ongoing project for many centuries, the old skills have not been lost and many monuments were rebuilt using traditional means. Unesco's recent restoration projects now support dozens of local artisans and, although you certainly won't see any modern construction equipment

Bagan scholar Paul Strachan argues in *Pagan: Art and Architecture of Old Burma* that the city was never abandoned at all.

## BAGAN VOCABULARY

A few terms used frequently to describe Bagan sites or features:

**gu** – cave temple

**hti** – umbrella-like decorated pinnacle atop stupa

**Jataka** – stories of Buddha's past lives

**kyaung** – monastery

**pahto** – temple or shrine, with hollow interior (some with one entrance to a windowless vault; others with four entrances and images around central cube)

**paya** – means 'holy one'; refers to pagodas, stupas, *zedi* or other Buddhist monuments, including statues

**shwe-** – prefix meaning 'gold'

**sikhara** – Indian-style, corncob-like temple finial

**stupa** – *zedi*; solid hemispherical or cylindrical cone

**thein** – ordination hall

**what country you come from?** – standard greeting

**zedi** – stupa; solid hemispherical or cylindrical cone

in Bagan, modern techniques are being employed as well. For example, Unesco engineers are reinforcing some of the monuments by inserting iron beams in the masonry to preserve the structural integrity in case of an earthquake.

As for the hundreds of lesser monuments, anything that was likely to fall off in an earthquake would have fallen off centuries ago. While it was quite evident which of the major temples were repaired, Bagan has never looked like a huge building site. Some of the restoration, such as the repairs to the Gawdawpalin Pahto, took until the early 1980s to complete. Other repairs continue.

### Recent History

The village that grew up in the middle of the walled area of 'Old Bagan' during the 1970s was moved to the middle of a peanut field several kilometres away just before the May 1990 elections. Old Bagan residents were only given about a week's notice by the government to move and rebuild in the new location, known as New Bagan (Bagan Myothit).

The latest eyebrow-raising move was the start of the construction of an observation tower and upscale hotel (just southeast of Nyaung U) that breaks the building code the government implemented. Though construction was on hold at research time, it is scheduled to dwarf all temples. The same Yangon entrepreneur responsible was also building a reconstruction of the palace within the walls of Old Bagan. Equally unsettling as the tower is the recently built, and way out of place, 19th-century-style home of the huge Archaeological Museum (p273) in Old Bagan.

### HOW BIG IS BAGAN?

Bagan's big, but no-one really knows how many temples were built. Supposedly, by the end of the 13th century the official count of sites was 4446. By 1901 surveys found 2157 monuments still standing and identifiable. A 1978 count – a few years after the disastrous earthquake – found 2230, a figure which doesn't include brick mounds, which would make the total 4000.

The catch is that the number of temples keeps growing. With so many Buddhists looking to snare a little 'merit' to ensure an upgrade in the next life, rich Yangon residents (including many government officials) build new stupas; apparently 300 new ones have gone up around Bagan in the first few years of this century. This leads many to shake their heads as they look upon new, obviously modern temples staining one of the world's most impressive ancient cities, but many others enjoy seeing Bagan still breathing new air.

#### WATCH THAT BAG!

Every year many tourists, trying to hurry past others, inevitably scrape their backpack or oversized camera bag against already-crumbling but priceless murals. Be sure not to add to the problem; it's generally safe to leave your backpack outside.

The Department of Archaeology has closed off upper terraces of some of the more popular temples, including Ananda and Sulamani, while outside investors have donated the money to cover murals with clear glass. In the mid 1990s, Unesco worked with the government to preserve Bagan, though – apparently – frustration with government interference drove them out in 1996.

Of the US\$10 fee collected from visitors to Bagan, apparently only half goes to the Department of Archaeology, which seems sincere in its efforts to preserve the sites.

Myanmar authorities were so thorough erasing all traces of the village that existed in Old Bagan that it's now hard to tell that a village ever existed here.

## OLD BAGAN

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This roughly counterclockwise circuit takes in temples within the old city walls. From the Archaeological Museum (p273) or some Old Bagan hotels, you could loop through these sites on foot, if desired, in a 2km loop.

### GAWDAWPALIN PAHTO

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Just north of the Archaeological Museum, on the road between Nyaung U and New Bagan, Gawdawpalin is one of the largest and most imposing Bagan temples – at 60m, you can't miss it. Built during the reign of Narapatisithu and finished under Nantaungmya's, it's considered the crowning achievement of the Late period. Its name means 'Platform to which Homage is Paid'. The most recent homage was its heavy-duty reconstruction following terrific damage sustained in the 1975 earthquake (it stands near that quake's epicentre).

Inside, past a fair share of vendors, is a quite modern, active altar (tile floors, donation boxes); along the four walls are 10 Buddha images and some barely visible murals. Stairs ascending through the walls to the top terrace are closed to visitors.

### MIMALAUNG KYAUNG

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A nice set of *chinthe* (half lion/half dragon mythical beasts) guards the stairway leading up this small, square monastery platform, constructed in 1174 by Narapatisithu. It's about 200m south of Gawdawpalin, on the other side of the road. In front of the monastery is a brick-and-stucco Tripitaka library next to a large acacia tree. Atop the steps, a tiered roof (with a newer gold-capped *hti*, an umbrellalike decorated pinnacle) contains a large sitting Buddha. Archaeologists discovered an intricately carved 6cm votive tablet here that contained 78 sculpted figures.

### PAHTOTHAMYA

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On the dirt road 150m east towards the dominating Thatbyinnyu, the Pahtothamya (or Thamy Pahto) was probably built during the reign of Kyanzitha around the turn of the 12th century, although it is popularly held to be one of five temples built by the little known king Taungthugyi (aka Sawrahan; 931–64). The interior of this single-storey building is dimly lit, typical of the early type of Pyu-influenced temples, with their small, perforated stone windows. In its prominent vertical superstructure and reconstructed lotus-bud *sikhara* (cornicoblake temple finial), however, the monument is clearly beginning to move forward from the Early period.

Often kids with a torch will point out the super painting remnants along the interior passages, perhaps the earliest surviving murals in Bagan. Steps lead up to a roomy viewing platform.

### NATHLAUNG KYAUNG

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Between Pahtothamya and Thatbyinnyu, this is the only Hindu temple remaining in Bagan. The exterior of the stubby temple remains much damaged from the 1975 earthquake. Only the main hall and superstructure stand.

During the 1890's two enterprising Germans removed plaques, statues and murals from Bagan. You can see many of these at the Berlin Völkerkunde Museum or the Hamburg Ethnographical Museum.

A sign dates it to the early 11th century. It's also said to have been built in 931 by Taungthugyi; if true, this was about a century before the southern school of Buddhism came to Bagan, following the conquest of Thaton.

The temple is dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu. Gupta-style reliefs of the 10 Avatars were placed around the outside wall; seven of these survive.

The central square of brick supports the dome and crumbled *sikhara*, and once contained freestanding figures of Vishnu, as well as Vishnu reliefs on each of the four sides. The statues were stolen by a German oil engineer in the 1890s, but the badly damaged brick-and-stucco reliefs can still be seen.

This temple's name means 'Shrine Confining Nat', a reference to a purported time when King Anawrahta is said to have confiscated all non-Buddhist religious images – both indigenous Burmese *nat* and Hindu *devas* (celestial beings) – and placed them in this shrine as part of an effort to establish 'pure' Theravada Buddhism. The king eventually gave in to the cult and standardised the current roster of principal Burmese *nat* by placing 37 chosen images at Shwezigon Paya. The veracity of this account has never been confirmed, but most Bagan residents – in fact virtually all Burmese – accept it as fact.

## THATBYINNYU PAHTO

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Named for 'omniscience', Bagan's highest temple (about 150m east of Nathlaung and 200m south of Shwegugyi) is built of two white-coloured boxy storeys, each with three diminishing terraces rimmed with spires and leading up to a gold-tipped *sikhara*, 63m up. Its monumental size and verticality make it a classic example of Bagan's Middle period – and neatly provide a chronological link between two nearby big cats, the Early-period Ananda and Late-period Gawdawpalin. Built in 1144 by Alaungsithu, its terraces are encircled by indentations for 539 Jataka. Plaques were never added, leading some scholars to surmise that the monument was never consecrated.

Visitors are barred from climbing Thatbyinnyu's inner passages to the top terrace, which is supposedly an amazing network of passageways. Most of the temple's inside walls are whitewashed, but there are some original murals near the west entrance.

The temple is located near the southeastern corner of the old city wall. A couple of hundred metres south, you can see a fragment of the wall on either side of the road, where you can climb up on the brick for a view.

## SHWEGUGYI

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Built by Alaungsithu in 1131, this smaller but elegant *pahto* (temple or shrine), 200m north of Thatbyinnyu, is an example of the Middle period, a transition in architectural style from the dark and cloistered to the airy and light. Its name means 'Great Golden Cave', and its corncob *sikhara* is a scaled-down version of the one at Ananda (p300), while its reach marks a move towards verticality.

Inside you'll find fine stucco carvings, a teak Buddha and stone slabs (in Pali) that retell its history, including that it took just seven months to build. Missing from the scripts are details of its builder's demise – Alaungsithu's son brought his sick father here in 1163 to smother him to death.

The small 'tally zedi' (stupa) just northeast of the temple was built using one brick for every 10,000 used in constructing the main temple.

## PITAKA TAIK

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Following the sacking of Thaton, King Anawrahta carted off some 30 elephant-loads of Buddhist scriptures and built this library (just north-east of Shwegugyi) to house them in 1058. The square design follows the basic Early Bagan *gu* (cave temple) plan, perfect for the preservation of light-sensitive palm-leaf scriptures. The old library is notable for the perforated stone windows, each carved from single stone slabs, and the plaster carvings on the roof, which are in imitation of Burmese woodcarvings.

## PALACE SITES

At research time, construction of Anawrahta's palace replica was underway on the north side of the road to Nyaung U, a couple of hundred metres northeast of Shwegugyi. It's likely to be open during your visit (possibly for an extra fee, as a Yangon entrepreneur is footing the bill). Just east, on the other side of the road, is the original site of Anawrahta's palace, currently closed off by barbed wire and under excavation by the Department of Archaeology.

## THARABA GATE

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The former eastern entrance to the walled city is 100m east of the original palace site. The still-impressive Tharaba Gate (aka Sarabha Gate) squeezes the road to Nyaung U. The ruins are the best preserved remains of the 9th-century wall, and the only gate still standing. Traces of old stucco can still be seen on the gateway.

The gate is guarded by highly revered brother and sister *nat*, the male (Lord Handsome) on the right, the female (Lady Golden Face) on the left. In their human histories, the siblings died in a fire, so worshippers offer the images flowers and water, rather than candles or incense.

Just east, the road passes over the one-time wall-surrounding moat. (There are several restaurants 200m east.)

## MAHABODHI PAYA

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Unlike any other Bagan temple, this monument, located on the north side of the main road 350m west of the gate, is modelled after the famous Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya, India, which commemorates the spot where the Buddha attained enlightenment. Built during the reign of Nantaungmya in 1215, the spire is richly coated in niches enclosing seated Buddha figures, rising from a square block. The stairway to the top is closed to visitors.

Inside is a modern makeover – with tile floor and carpet. The ruined buildings just north feature some original glazed painting fragments.

## BUPAYA

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Right on the bank of the Ayeyarwady (reached from the Nyaung U road, about 200m east of the Mahabodhi Paya), this cylindrical Pyu-style stupa is said to date further back than any Bagan temple. Locals claim it dates to the 3rd century; most likely it was erected around the same time as the city walls (around 850). It's named for *bu* (gourd). What's seen now – a gold stupa above a row of crenulated terraces leading down to the water – is a complete reconstruction, however; the 1975 earthquake demolished

The Mahabodhi Paya features an unusual pyramidal spire.

### THE SUN'S FALLING! THE SUN'S FALLING!

Each dusk at Bagan can see a great sunset chase, with scurrying tourists carrying cameras up pagoda stairways to watch the Bagan sprawl turn all shades of tangerine, lavender and rust. Many leave once the sun dips behind the mountains, though colours only start their show at that point. By all means do witness the scene, from different spots, short and tall. Some temples teem with tourists, while hundreds of lesser-known ones (including dozens and dozens of good choices not in this section) stand empty.

Yeah, but what's 'the best' place to witness sunsets and sunrises? Well, Dhammayangyi Pahto (p303) is the long-standing favourite at dusk; east-facing Mingalazedi (p304) at dawn. Near Bagan's belly, Buledi (p302) is a newcomer 'alternative' favourite, while another belly-spot, Pyathada Paya (p304), has a sprawling viewing deck, sometimes empty.

Some Bagan repeat-visitors insist it's all a myth – that it's as good to watch from an unnamed, two-storey temple as at Dhammayangyi. You decide.

the original. If you want to sit on the benches facing the water, please don't prop up your feet on the wall, as some travellers do.

Off the road to the southeast is the Pebinkyauing Paya, a 12th-century pagoda built in a unique Sinhalese style.

## NORTH PLAIN

The bulk of Bagan temples are out 'there' – in the vast, ruin-filled plains between Nyaung U, Old Bagan and New Bagan. This broad area – skinny on a map – runs between the Old Bagan walls and Nyaung U, and (mostly) between the two roads that connect the two. Sightings are ordered (more or less) west to east.

### ANANDA PAHTO

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If you see only a temple or two – and darn you for limiting yourself – make it to Ananda, one of the finest, largest, best-preserved and most revered of all Bagan temples. The terraced temple, with a corncob golden *hti* towering 52m high, features four more gilded spires at the ends of a raised square platform. You'll see it shimmering from all over the plain.

It's roughly 450m east of Thatbyinnyu, 500m north of Shwesandaw and 1km northwest of Dhammayangyi Pahto. Most visitors access it – often through the sea of vendors – from the northern side.

Thought to have been built between 1090 and 1105 by King Kyanzitha, this perfectly proportioned temple heralds the stylistic end of the Early Bagan period and the beginning of the Middle period. In 1990, on its 900th anniversary, the temple spires were gilded. The remainder of the temple exterior is whitewashed from time to time.

The central square measures 53m along each side. Upper floors are closed to visitors. The entranceways make the structure a perfect Greek cross; each entrance is crowned with a stupa finial. The base and the terraces are decorated with 554 glazed tiles showing Jataka scenes, thought to be derived from Mon texts. Huge carved teak doors separate interior halls from cross passages on all four sides.

Facing outward from the centre of the cube are four 9.5m standing Buddha statues. Only the Bagan-style images facing north and south are original; both display the *dhammachakka mudra* (a hand position symbolising the Buddha teaching his first sermon). The other two images are

replacements for figures destroyed by fire in the 1600s. All four have bodies of solid teak, though guides may claim the southern image is made of a bronze alloy. Guides like to point out that if you stand by the donation box in front of the original southern Buddha, his face looks sad, while from a distance he tends to look mirthful.

The western and eastern standing Buddha images are done in the later Konbaung, or Mandalay, style. If looked at from the right angle, the two lions at the eastern side resemble an ogre. A small, nutlike sphere held between the thumb and middle finger of the east-facing image is said to resemble a herbal pill, and may represent the Buddha offering *dhamma* (Buddhist teachings) as a cure for suffering. Both arms hang at the image's sides with hands outstretched, a *mudra* (hand position) unknown to traditional Buddhist sculpture outside this temple.

The west-facing Buddha features the *abhaya mudra* (the hands outstretched, in the gesture of no fear). At its feet sit two life-sized lacquer statues, said to represent King Kyanzitha and Shin Arahan, the Mon monk who initiated the king into Theravada Buddhism. Inside the western portico are two Buddha footprint symbols on pedestals.

The British built a brick museum nearby in 1904, now used as a storage facility. Around it stand a few ordination markers, inscribed stellae and Buddha images.

### ANANDA OK KYAUNG

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Just west of Ananda's northern entry, this small *vihara* (sanctuary or chapel) features some detailed 18th-century murals bursting with bright red and green, showing details of everyday life from the Bagan period. In the southeast corner, you can see Portuguese traders engaged in trade. Built in 1137, the temple's name means 'Ananda Brick Monastery'. Usually the door is unlocked; ask at Ananda Pahto for the 'keymaster' if not.

### UPALI THEIN

ဥပါလိဿိမ်

Just north of the Bagan-Nyaung U Rd, almost midway to Nyaung U, this mid-13th century ordination hall, houses some brightly painted frescoes depicting big scenes on the walls and ceilings from the late 17th or early 18th century. Sadly many pieces crumbled in the 1975 earthquake. The building, named for a well-known monk from the 13th century, is often locked to protect the art. The roof tilements imitate Burmese wooden architecture, and a small centre spire rises from the rooftop.

### HTILOMINLO PAHTO

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Across the road from Upali Thein, this 46m-high temple was built by King Nantaungmya in 1218. Nantaungmya erected the temple on this

#### THE 'KEYMASTER'

During peak season, from October to April, many of the lesser temples have attendants hanging about to unlock the doors and maybe sell a postcard or two. Some do not, and the 'keymaster' needs to be tracked down. It's usually not hard. Often someone with a ring full of keys lurks in the area. Ask any vendor and you're likely to get the missing keys within a few minutes. A little bit of 'tea money' is appreciated.

On the full moon of Pyatho (December/January), a huge *paya pwe* (paya festival) attracts thousands to Ananda. Up to 1000 monks chant day and night during the three days of the festival.

Like many *paya* around Bagan, the Ananda Pahto took a huge hit from the 1975 earthquake, but has been totally restored.

### TOP FIVE MURALS

Much of Bagan is also famous for the fabulous murals that are found on the walls inside. These are our favourites.

**Upali Thein** (p301) Brightly painted frescoes from the late 17th or early 18th century.

**Nandamannya** (p309) Vaguely Chinese or Tibetan-looking murals.

**Payathonzu** (p308) Similar to the murals at Nandamannya.

**Ananda Ok Kyaung** (p301) Paintings depict everyday scenes from the Bagan period.

**Abeyadana** (p306) Has figures of Bodhisattvas and Hindu deities.

spot because it was here that he was chosen (by a leaning umbrella), from among five brothers, to be the crown prince.

It's probably most impressive from outside. Its terraced design, similar to Sulamani Pahto (p304), is based on a 42m-square base. Have a walk-around to take in the fragments of the original fine plaster carvings, glazed sandstone decorations and nicely carved reliefs on the doorways. Inside are four Buddhas on the lower and upper floors, though the stairways are closed. Traces of old murals are also still visible. There are plenty of vendors here.

### BULEDI

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Free from tourists and postcard vendors not long ago, this temple – with steep stairs leading to a narrow terrace around the stupa – has become something of an alternative sunset spot. It's about 600m south of the Htilominlo, across Anawrahta Rd. It's also known as 'Temple 394'.

### GUBYAUKNGE

ဂူပြောက်ဝယ်

Off Anawrahta Rd, about 1.5km east of Htilominlo, this Early Bagan-period temple has some excellent stucco carvings on the outside walls (particularly on the north side) and some original paintings visible inside.

### WETKYI-IN-GUBYAUKGYI

ဝက်ကြီးအင်းဂူပြောက်ကြီး

Just west of Nyaung U, and about 100m or so east of Gubyaukngge, this off-the-main-circuit, detailed 13th-century temple has an Indian-style spire, like the Mahabodhi Paya in Old Bagan. It is interesting for the fine frescoes of scenes from the Jataka, but unfortunately, in 1899 a German collector came by and surreptitiously removed many of the panels on which the frescoes were painted. Those that remain in the entry are in great shape. Steps inside lead to four Buddha images and you can see Hindu figures engraved on the spire.

## CENTRAL PLAIN

In this vast plain (roughly south of Anawrahta Rd between New Bagan and Nyaung U), it's possible to stumble into village life and goat herds just 2km from the paved roads. Some corners, unsurprisingly, are well away from the normal package-tour stops, while a few are must-sees for all. Some temples are locked, but a 'keymaster' should be in the area; ask around. This list

features a handful of well-worthy sites running west to east (towards the clearly visible Bagan Tower construction site, near Nyaung U).

### SHWESANDAW PAYA

ရွှေသံတော်တုရာ

Bagan's most famous 'sunset pagoda', the Shwesandaw is the graceful white pyramid-style pagoda with steps leading past five terraces to the circular stupa top; it's located roughly midway between Thatbyinnyu and Dhammayangyi. Its roomy top terrace teems with camera-toting travelers before sunset and offers a deserving full 360-degree look of Bagan. If you go during the day, you're likely to be alone.

Following his conquest of Thaton in 1057, King Anawrahta built this at the centre of his newly empowered kingdom. The terraces once bore terracotta plaques showing scenes from the Jataka, but traces of these, and of other sculptures, were covered by rather heavy-handed renovations. The now-gilded *zedi* bell rises from two octagonal bases, which top the five square terraces. This was the first monument at Bagan to feature stairways leading from the square-bottom terraces to the round base of the stupa itself. This stupa supposedly enshrines a Buddha hair relic, brought back from Thaton. Only the south entrance doesn't have handrails leading up the steep steps.

The *hti*, which was toppled by the earthquake, can still be seen lying on the south side of the paya compound. A new one was fitted soon after the quake.

About 150m north stands Lawkahteikpan Pahto – a small but interesting Middle-period *gu* containing excellent frescoes and inscriptions in both Burmese and Mon. It's usually locked – ask at Shwesandaw for the keymaster.

### DHAMMAYANGYI PAHTO

ဓမ္မရံကြီးပုထိုး

Visible from all parts of Bagan, this massive walled 12th-century temple (about 500m southeast of Shwesandaw) has a similar plan to Ananda; with projecting porticoes and receding terraces, though its *sikhara* is reduced to a stub nowadays. It is generally thought that it was commissioned by Narathu (who was assassinated in 1170), though some have attributed the building to the earlier reign of Alaungsithu.

Like Ananda, there are two encircling ambulatories, but the inner one is closed off, intentionally filled by brick rubble centuries ago. No-one is sure why, but many believe it was 'payback' to the ruthless king who mandated the mortarless brickwork fit together so tightly that even a pin couldn't pass between any two bricks. Walking around the outer ambulatory, under ceilings so high up you can only hear the squeaks of bats circling in the dark, you can see some intact stucco reliefs and paintings, suggesting the work had been completed. The mystery goes on.

Three out of the four Buddha sanctums were also filled with bricks. The remaining western shrine features two original side-by-side images of Gautama and Maitreya, the historical and future Buddhas (it's the only Bagan site with two side-by-side Buddhas). Perhaps someday, when Myanmar's archaeological department, or Unesco or some other party, clears out all the brick rubble, one of the great architectural mysteries of Bagan will be solved.

The top terraces are closed to visitors, though there are some nooks that some vendors lead visitors to (slightly illegally).

Much of the mural work at Bagan is thought to be similar to how the interiors of Buddhist temples in northeastern India must have appeared before their destruction at the hands of Muslim invaders.

The Shwesandaw Paya, along with Mingalazedi Paya, now offers the highest accessible points within the Bagan archaeological zone.

The Dhammayangyi Pahto is generally ascribed to Narathu (who was assassinated by foreign agents – some debate whether from Sri Lanka or India), much to the delight, apparently, of the slaves working on this monster.

## SULAMANI PAHTO

စူဠာမင်္ဂါပုထိုး

About 1km east of Dhammayangyi, this broad two-storey temple is one of Bagan's most attractive, with lush grounds (and a fair share of vendors) behind the surrounding walls. It's a prime example of later, more sophisticated temple styles, with better internal lighting. This temple, known as the Crowning Jewel, was constructed around 1181 by Narapatisithu. Combining the horizontal planes of the Early period with the vertical lines of the Middle, the receding terraces create a pyramid effect. The brickwork throughout is considered some of the best in Bagan. The gilded *sikhara* is a reconstruction; the original was destroyed in the 1975 earthquake. Stupas stand at the corners of each terrace, and a high wall, fitted with elaborate gateways at each cardinal point, encloses the entire complex. The interior face of the wall was once lined with 100 monastic cells, a feature unique among Bagan's ancient monasteries.

Carved stucco on mouldings, pediments and pilasters represents some of Bagan's finest ornamental work and is in fairly good condition. Glazed plaques around the base and terraces are also still visible.

Buddha images face the four directions from the ground floor; the image at the main eastern entrance sits in a recess built into the wall. The interior passage around the base is painted with quite big frescoes from the Konbaung period, and there are traces of earlier frescoes. The stairways to the top are closed.

A walled enclosure in the north of the compound contains the remains of Sulamani Kyaung. A water tank in the compound is thought to be the only original Bagan reservoir still in use by local residents.

## THABEIK HMAUK

သပိတ်မှောက်

Facing Sulamani from 150m east, this *sikhara*-topped temple looks like a smaller version of Sulamani, but is (for the time being) blissfully free of visitors or vendors. Much of its interiors were damaged by the 1975 earthquake, but there are multiple stairways up to a wrap-around meditation chamber with little light (and a few bats). There are two outside terraces, reached by narrow stairs, with superb views.

## PYATHADA PAYA

ပြည့်သင်္ခါးဘုရား

About 750m southeast of Sulamani, reached by dirt roads that sometimes get obscured in goat fields, this impressive pagoda is a superb sunset-viewing spot, with a giant open terrace – Bagan's largest – atop the steps, and another small deck further up. Many days, visitors have it to themselves; on others a lone group may be here.

## MYINKABA AREA

မြင်းတပ်

The sites north and south of Myinkaba village are all just off the main road and easy to access. These are listed in order from north to south.

## MINGALAZEDI

မင်္ဂလာဇေတီ

Close to the riverbank, towards Myinkaba from the Thiripyitsaya Sakura Hotel, Mingalazedi Paya (Blessing Stupa; aka 'Sunrise Pagoda') is a hot

spot for sunrise (and sunset too): it faces the full Bagan plain to the east. It's noted also for its enormous bell-like dome, reached by steep stairs up three receding terraces, and for the beautiful glazed Jataka tiles around each terrace. Although many Jataka have been damaged or stolen, there are still 561 of the 1061 originals left. The smaller square building in the *zedi* grounds is one of the few Tripitaka libraries made of brick.

The Mingalazedi is the very last of the large Late-period monuments. It was built from 1268 to 1274 by Narathihapati, who tempted fate (the story goes) by overlooking a prophecy that Bagan would fall if the pagoda was ever finished. Ten years after it was, Mongols invaded – and Bagan's prominence fell.

## GUBYAUKGYI

ဂူပြောက်ကြီး

Situated just to the left of the road as you enter Myinkaba, Gubyaukgyi (Great Painted Cave Temple) sees a lot of visitors (and vendors) during peak season for its well-preserved, richly coloured paintings inside. These are thought to date from the temple's original construction in 1113, when Kyanzitha's son Rajakumar built it following his father's death. In Indian style, the monument consists of a large vestibule attached to a smaller antechamber. The fine stuccowork on its exterior walls is in particularly good condition.

Perforated, Pyu-style windows means you'll need a powerful torch to see the ceiling paintings clearly. If it's locked off-season, ask in the village for the keymaster.

Next to the monument stands the gilded Myazedi (Emerald Stupa). A four-sided pillar in a cage between the two monuments bears an inscription consecrating Gubyaukgyi and written in four languages – Pyu, Mon, Old Burmese and Pali. Its linguistic and historical significance is great, since it establishes the Pyu as an important cultural influence in early Bagan and relates the chronology of the Bagan kings.

## MANUHA PAYA

မန္တလာဘုရား

In Myinkaba village, about 500m south of Gubyaukgyi, stands this active (and rather modern-looking) pagoda, named after the Mon king from Thaton, who was held captive here by King Anawrahta.

In the front of the building are three seated Buddhas; in the back is a huge reclining Buddha. All seem too large for their enclosures – supposedly representing the stress and discomfort the king had to endure. However, these features are not unique in Bagan.

It should be pointed out that conquerors of the 11th century weren't in the habit of sparing the lives of leaders – even for a captive life. Aung San Suu Kyi, in fact, described the 'sympathetic account of Manuha [as] one of the most admirable parts of Burmese history...unstinting respect for a noble enemy'.

It is said that only the reclining Buddha, in the act of entering *parinibbana* (final passing away), has a smile on its face, showing that for Manuha, only death was a release from his suffering. But if you climb to the top of this paya via the stairs in the back (ask for keys if it's locked), you can then see the face of the sitting Buddha through a window – from up here you'll realise that the gigantic face, so grim from below, has an equally gigantic smile.

An outdoor corner of the temple compound is dedicated to Mt Popa's presiding *nat*, Mae Wanna and her sons Min Lay and Min Gyi. Devotees

As fine as Paul Strachan's work is (see p293), one flaw of his book was to ask why the reclining Buddha next to Shwesandaw Paya couldn't have been left lying on its left side rather than the right. To have done this, though, would have violated classical Buddhist iconography.

The Mingalazedi Paya represents the final flowering of Bagan's architectural outburst.

Legend says that Manuha, the captured Mon king, built the Bagan temple that bears his name in 1059, and the design represents his displeasure with captivity.

of Manuha Paya celebrate a large *paya pwe* on the full moon of Tabauang (February/March).

## NAN PAYA

နန်းတုရာ:

Just south of the Manuha Paya by dirt road, this shrine is said to have been used as Manuha's prison, although there is little evidence supporting the legend. In this story the shrine was originally Hindu, and captors thought using it as a prison would be easier than converting it to a Buddhist temple. It's worth visiting for its interior masonry work – sandstone block facings over a brick core, certainly some of Bagan's finest detailed sculpture. Perforated stone windows are typical of earlier Bagan architecture – in fact it was probably Bagan's first *gu*-style shrine.

In the central sanctuary the four stone pillars have finely carved sandstone bas-relief figures of three-faced Brahma. The creator deity is holding lotus flowers, thought to be offerings to a freestanding Buddha image once situated in the shrine's centre, a theory that dispels the idea that this was ever a Hindu shrine. The sides of the pillars feature ogrelike *kala-ate* heads with open mouths streaming with flowers. Legend goes that Shiva employed such creatures to protect temples, but they proved too ferocious; so Shiva tricked them into eating their bodies, then fed them flowers to keep their minds off snacking on worshippers. In the centre of the four pillars is an altar, on which once stood a standing Buddha or (some locals believe) a Hindu god.

Ask at Manuha if the temple is locked.

## ABEYADANA PAHTO

အဝါယ်ရတနာပုထိုး:

About 400m south of the Manuha, this 11th-century temple with a Sinhalese-style stupa was supposedly built by Kyanzittha's Bengali wife Abeyadana, who waited for him here as he hid for his life from his predecessor King Sawlu. It's famed for its original frescoes, which were cleaned in recent years by Unesco staff. With a torch, you can make out many figures that Abeyadana, believed to be a Mahayanist, would likely have asked for: Bodhisattvas such as Avalokitesvara, and Hindu deities (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva and Indra).

The inner shrine contains a large, brick, seated Buddha (partly restored); surrounding walls are lined with niches, most now empty. Inside the front wall are many Jataka scenes.

Ask at the caretaker's house to the south if it's locked.

## NAGAYON

နဂါးဂုံ

Slightly south of Abeyadana and across the road, this elegant and well-preserved temple was built by Kyanzittha. The main Buddha image is twice life size and shelters under the hood of a huge *naga* (dragon serpent). This reflects the legend that Kyanzittha built the temple on the spot where he was sheltered while fleeing from his angry brother and predecessor Sawlu – an activity he had to indulge in on more than one occasion.

The outer, dark corridor has many niches with images of the earlier Buddhas. Paintings also decorate the corridor walls. The central shrine has two smaller standing Buddhas as well as the large one. Unfortunately the walls have been whitewashed, obscuring any traces of possible murals.

The temple itself – with corncob *sikhara*, which some believe to be the Ananda prototype – can be climbed via tight stairs.

Usually a keymaster is around to unlock the door.

## SOMINGYI KYAUNG

စိုးမင်းကြီးကျောင်း:

Named after the lady who supposedly sponsored its construction, this typical Late Bagan brick monastery (about 200m south of Nagayon) is thought to have been built in 1204. A *zedi* to the north and *gu* to the south are also ascribed to Somyingyi. Many brick monasteries in Bagan were single-block structures; Somyingyi is unique in that it has monastic cells clustered around a courtyard.

## NEW BAGAN AREA

ပုဂံမြို့သစ်

Sights are a little scarcer heading south of New Bagan (Bagan Nyothit), towards the outskirts of the Bagan area.

### SEINNYET NYIMA PAYA & SEINNYET AMA PAHTO

စိမ်းညက်ညီမ နှင့် စိမ်းညက်အမပုထိုး:

This stupa and shrine stand side by side (about 250m north of New Bagan) and are traditionally assigned to Queen Seinnyet in the 11th century, although the architecture clearly points to a period two centuries later. The *zedi* rests on three terraces and is topped by a beautiful stylised umbrella.

### LAWKANANDA PAYA

လောကနန္ဒာတုရာ:

At the height of Bagan's power, boats from the Mon region, Rakhaing (Arakan) and even Sri Lanka would anchor by this riverside pagoda (about 250m southeast of the New Bagan crossroads – a sign in Burmese points the way) with its distinctive elongated cylindrical dome. It was built in 1059 by Anawrahta. It is still used as an everyday place of worship and is thought to house an important Buddha tooth replica. There are lots of benches for wide-open views of the Ayeyarwady, but it's sometimes hard to enjoy hassle-free.

### ASHE (EAST) & ANAUK (WEST) PETLEIK PAYA

အရှေ့ နှင့် အနောက် ပက်လိပ်တုရာ:

Just inland to the northeast from Lawkananda Kyaung are the excavated remains of these twin 11th-century *paya*. Found in 1905, the lower parts of the pagodas are ho-hum from the outside but feature hundreds of terracotta Jataka lining the vaulted corridors (particularly impressive in Anauk Petleik Paya). A keymaster usually appears to unlock the door and turn on the fluorescent lights.

### SITTANA PAYA

About 1km further south, this large, 13th-century bell-shaped stupa is New Bagan's most impressive structure. Built by Htilominlo, it's set on four square terraces, each fronted by a standing Buddha image in brick and stucco. A rather rickety stairway leads up the stupa's southern side, where you can circle the structure on the terraces. At the southwestern corner is a chamber; you can climb up the wall and then down into the

Recent research suggests that the Nan Paya was constructed by Manuha's grandnephew in the late 11th century.

If you climb up the staircase of the Sittana Paya you will spot Mt Popa to the southeast.



interior, but have a torch handy. Usually somebody is around to show you the spot.

## SOUTH PLAIN

This rural area, along Bagan's southern reaches, follows the main road between New Bagan and the Nyaung U airport. It passes Pwasaw and Minnanthu villages on the way. Other than a few places, such as Payathonzu, most sights see few tourists. Many horse-cart drivers will take in the cluster of sights north of Minnanthu and go via dirt paths towards Central Plain sights, such as Sulamani Pahto (p304). Views west from some temples here rival any of Bagan's in terms of scope of the site.

The following sites are listed in order from west to east.

### DHAMMAYAZIKA PAYA

ဓမ္မရာဇိကဘုရား

About 3.5km east of the New Bagan crossroads, and standing north of the main road, this pentagonal *zedi* is similar to the Shwezigon (opposite) but with a more unusual design. Set in the south-central end of Bagan, it also has lovely views from its highest terrace.

Now set among lush garden grounds with a gilded bell, the Dhammayazika dates from 1196. Apparently the stupa is haunted by the general who started its construction (before being finished by Narapatisithu); it's said the general has appeared in many photos taken at the site, including one of recent government officials!

An outer wall has five gateways. Up top, five small temples, each containing a Buddha image, encircle the terraces; some of them bear interior murals added during the Konbaung era.

It's possible, with perseverance, to cycle the thrilling dirt roads here from Dhammayangyi Pahto, 2km north.

### LEIMYETHNA PAHTO

လေးမျက်နှာဘုရား

Built in 1222, this east-facing, whitewashed temple near Minnanthu village (about 3km east of Dhammayazika on the north side of the road) stands on a raised platform and has interior walls decorated with well-preserved frescoes. It is topped by a gilded Indian-style spire like that on Ananda. The jarlike structures out front were pillars of a building toppled by the 1975 earthquake.

### TAYOK PYE PAYA

တဂုတ်ပြေးဘုရား

A couple of hundred metres north of Leimythna by dirt road, this spired temple gets attention for the views from its upper reaches.

### PAYATHONZU

ဘုရားသုံးဆူ

Across the main road from Tayok, this complex of three interconnected shrines (the name means Three Stupas) is a highlight for visitors who want to see 13th-century murals close up. It was abandoned shortly before its construction was complete – possibly due to the invasion of Kublai Khan. Dating to the late 13th century, each square cubicle is topped by a fat *sikhara*; a similar structure appears only at Salay (p279). The design is remarkably similar to Khmer Buddhist ruins in Thailand.

Questions such as 'You want to buy painting?' may disturb your study of the 800-year-old paintings at Payathonzu.

You enter the middle shrine. To the right (south) are whitewashed walls, but some Pali writing is still visible. The other two shrines (particularly the northernmost one) are home to lovely, vaguely Chinese- or Tibetan-looking, mural paintings that contain Bodhisattva figures. Whether these indicate possible Mahayana or Tantric influence is a hotly debated issue among art historians.

The three-shrine design hints at links with the Hindu Trimurti (triad) of Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma, a triumvirate also associated with Tantric Buddhism. One might just as easily say it represents the Triple Gems of Buddhism (Buddha, *dhamma* and *sangha*), except that such a design is uncommon in Asian Buddhist archaeology, although it does appear in the Hindu shrines of India and Nepal.

During peak season the doors will be unlocked.

### THAMBULA PAHTO

သမ္ဘူလပုထိုး

This square temple, just north of Payathonzu, is decorated with faded Jataka frescoes and was built in 1255 by Thambula, the wife of King Uzana. Its doors were kept locked at research time, but you can see a boat race along the eastern wall if looking in from the southern entrance.

### NANDAMANNYA PAHTO

နန္ဒာမညာ

Dating from the mid-13th century, this small, single-chambered temple has very fine frescoes and a ruined, seated Buddha image. It's about 200m north of Thambula; a sign leads down a short dirt road. (It's the one to the right.)

Nandamannya earns its reputation by its mural of the 'Temptation of Mara', in which nubile young females (vainly) attempt to distract the Buddha from the meditation session that led to his enlightenment. The undressed nature of the depicted females shocked French epigraphist Charles Duroiselle, who wrote in 1916 that they were 'so vulgarly erotic and revolting that they can neither be reproduced or described'. Times change: the topless ladies can be seen, particularly on the back left wall.

The murals' similarity with those at Payathonzu has led some art historians to suggest they were painted by the same hand.

Just behind the temple is the Kyat Kan Kyaung, a working underground monastery dating from the 11th century. Mats on the tunnel floors are used for meditation. Apparently a monk died during meditation in recent years and was left for days – everyone thought he was still meditating.

## NYAUNG U AREA

ညောင်ဦး

The main site in this area is the superb Shwezigon Paya.

### SHWEZIGON PAYA

ရွှေစည်းခုံဘုရား

At the west end of Nyaung U, this beautiful *zedi* was started by Anawrahta but not completed until the reign of Kyanzitha. The latter is thought to have built his palace nearby. Supposedly, the Shwezigon was built to enshrine one of the four replicas of the Buddha tooth in Kandy, Sri Lanka, and to mark the northern edge of the city. The other three

The design of the bell-shaped Shwezigon Paya became a virtual proto type for all stupas in Myanmar.

tooth replicas went to Lawkananda (p307), a smaller stupa to the south; to Tan Kyi, a stupa on the western bank of the Ayeyarwady; and to Tuyan Taung, a stupa on the summit of a hill 32km to the east.

The stupa's graceful bell shape became a prototype for virtually all later stupas over Myanmar. The gilded *zedi* – lit up impressively at dusk – sits on three rising terraces. Enamelled plaques in panels around the base of the *zedi* illustrate scenes from the Jataka. At the cardinal points, facing the terrace stairways, are four shrines, each of which houses a 4m-high bronze standing Buddha. Gupta-inspired and cast in 1102, these figures are Bagan's largest surviving bronze Buddhas. Their left hands exhibit the *vitarka* (exposition) *mudra* while the right hands are held palms outwards, fingers straight up, portraying the gesture of *abhaya* (no fear).

A 10cm circular indentation in a stone slab, before the eastern steps up, was filled with water to allow former Burmese monarchs to look at the reflection of the *hti* without tipping their heads backwards (which might have caused them to lose their crowns). For a few kyat visitors can view the bejewelled *hti* through a telescope reserved for that purpose. Surrounding the *zedi* are clusters of *zayat* (rest houses) and shrines, some of them old, others more modern, though none of them is original.

In addition to ranking as one of the oldest stupas in Bagan, Shwezigon is known as the site where the 37 pre-Buddhist *nat* were first officially endorsed by the Bamar monarchy. To the southeast of the platform, a yellow compound called '37 Nats' (in English) features figures of the 37 *nat*. Ask around if the compound is locked. At one end stands an original stone figure of Thagyamin, king of the *nat* and a direct appropriation of the Hindu god Indra. This is the oldest known freestanding Thagyamin figure in Myanmar.

## KYANZITTHA UMIN

ကျန်စိတ်သားဥမင်

Although officially credited to Kyanzittha, this cave temple may actually date back to Anawrahta. Built into a cliff face 250m southwest of Shwezigon, the long, dimly lit corridors are decorated with frescoes, some of which are thought to have been painted by Bagan's Tartar invaders during the period of the Mongol occupation after 1287. An attendant usually will greet you with a torch to borrow and keys to unlock the doors. It's *very* quiet in there, and you can actually see the 800-year-old brush strokes.

## NORTH OF NYAUNG U

From the Nyaung U jetty, you can negotiate a fun boat trip to see three temples just off the Ayeyarwady riverbank. A kilometre north, you can find the 13th-century Thetkyamuni, with a few murals inside (hard to make out) and tight, dark steps leading up to a small terrace up top. On the hill nearby is the same-era Kondawgyi Pahto, with better preserved murals and views from the surrounding platform.

Another kilometre or so north is the 11th- and 12th-century Kyauk Gu Ohnmin cave temple, built in the side of a ravine. The inside tunnels lead about 50m to blocked-off rubble; some locals say the tunnel was intended to go 18km. You can climb on top of the temple from the new steps to the right.

These sights are accessible, with more difficulty, by road. A boat trip takes about two or three hours, and your driver will show you the temples. It costs about K3000 or K4000 for three or four people.

The 12th-century original *nat* (spirit) figures of the Shwezigon were spirited away by a collector and are now reportedly somewhere in Italy.

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